

Annual Conference – Lincoln – 20th – 22nd October 2004

Wednesday 20th October

After a tour of Lincoln led by Green Badge Guides, the Annual General Meeting held in the White Hart Hotel was attended by 25 delegates. During the evening a Civic Reception hosted by **The Right Worshipful, The Mayor of Lincoln, Eddie Strengiel** was held in the Guildhall, and delegates were given a short history lesson illustrated by the City's regalia. The supper which followed at the famous "Brown's Pie Shop" was very welcome after the steep climb back up the hill!

Thursday 21st October

Liveability & the Public Realm – National, Regional & Local Perspectives

The first day of the conference was opened with an introduction by **Sam Howes, Chair of EHTF**, including lessons from the Historic Core Zone Project. He gave a graphic description of the problems – in particular the range of people responsible for the elements which make up the public realm. He listed EHTF's main concerns as:

- The lack of a holistic approach
- Continual erosion of quality
- Misconceived alterations and 'improvements' to spaces and places

The Historic Core Zone Project had demonstrated that:

- Historic streets deserve special treatment
- A great deal can be done within current regulations
- Local distinctiveness is key

In its document "Focus on the Public Realm", EHTF put forward an Agenda for Action and Sam re-iterated some of the issues which would be taken forward in the coming year and those which needed urgently to be addressed. He defined Liveability as improving the quality of our environment, clean and safe public places and "walkability"- which allowed a far greater appreciation of the details of a place.

Sam then introduced **Keith Laidler, Director of Development and Environmental Services for Lincoln City Council**, who gave a brief summary of the current opportunities and challenges facing the City.

Richard Simmons, the newly appointed Chief Executive of CABE offered a list of planning objectives regarding the role of design and an overview of the principles of CABE's work in the Historic Environment.

Derek Latham, in his role with Regeneration East Midlands, explained how the organisation had come about in response to the call for Regional Centres of Excellence in Regeneration following the Rogers Report. He reported on its objectives and progress to date, in particular the research into best practice in urban design.

Mike Loveday, Chief Executive of Norwich Heritage Economic & Regeneration Trust (UK) explained the purpose of HEART and its role in joining together all aspects of heritage work in Norwich and its relationships with Europe. He emphasised the importance of City spaces and explained the economic benefits to be gained from high quality, comfortable public spaces – the longer stay, the higher spend and the likelihood of a return visit.

Professor David Chiddick, Vice Chancellor of the University of Lincoln, described the University in Lincoln as “a catalyst for economic growth and a new public realm in an historic environment”. He outlined the anticipated growth of the University and the impact of this on the City and the surrounding county.

Richard Tuffrey, from High Peak Borough Council gave a short presentation to launch the publication “**Investing in Heritage - financing small town regeneration**” which had resulted from the conference held in Buxton in June. The very concise lessons which could be learned from the Buxton case study would be very useful to other small towns and cities looking for good practice guidance in regeneration.

After lunch, delegates joined seminar groups to explore, through tours and discussion, a variety of issues as illustrated in the City of Lincoln. These were titled:

“What would you do and what lessons can we learn?”

- The economy and regeneration
- Heritage and conservation
- Land use and transport

When delegates reconvened the plenary session was opened by **Professor John Ratcliffe of the Dublin Institute of Technology** who stated that “the sustainable development of successfully competitive towns and cities will demand a transformation in planning policy, corporate responsibility, and civic engagement that favours a more collaborative, integrative and imaginative approach to achieve a preferred urban future”.

During the evening delegates enjoyed a tour of Lincoln Cathedral followed by the Conference Dinner in the beautiful Chapter House of the Cathedral.

Friday 21st October Delivering aspects of the Public Realm

In coming Chair, Ian Poole, gave a resumé of the previous day and summarised the key messages and suggested that we need to find ways to measure the benefits of investment in spaces in order to get it higher up the agenda.

Graeme Tulley, of Donaldsons, explored “Funding through BIDS – the private sector view”. He outlined what they are and their likely impact.

Matt Corrigan, Lincoln City Centre Manager, explained the BIDS process which Lincoln had gone through and the elements to be considered in order to achieve its aims.

Tim Challens, from Nottinghamshire County Council, introduced the equestrian statue as a symbol of the perception of public art in historic places. He challenged these perceptions and maintained that public art should cause the public to pause, to enjoy and to question.

Jason Wood, of Heritage Consultancy Services, presented a case study of Lincoln’s Roman monuments, demonstrating the use of heritage assets in the modern public realm.

Steve Bee, of English Heritage, said that better standards and scrutiny in the public realm were needed as it was not controlled adequately through the current planning controls. English Heritage had been concerned for some years by the damage to the historic environment not necessarily to the buildings and monuments but to their *settings*. Disinvestment and the lack of skills had had a significant impact over a period of time.

Tim Pope, from the ODPM, said that the common concerns of many people relate to graffiti, vandalism, abandoned cars, and anti-social behaviour. Litter, safe parks and clean public spaces are not trivial matters but important to everyone. He talked about better use of resources, more responsive local representatives and using local partnerships to deliver solutions.

After a short discussion, Ian Poole summarized the key points to take forward from the conference:

- spaces are our living rooms - they must change and evolve to meet modern requirements and to reflect the quality of the buildings around them;
- the spaces serve a function – Jan Gehl said that the more comfortable they are the better the social interaction will be;
- investment in the Public Realm does not currently reflect the quality of the buildings which surround them; we need to enrich and take ownership of them;
- the diversity of stakeholders involved in maintenance and responsibility is bound to have a negative effect on delivery;
- the value of investment is currently hidden; we need to find a way to measure and demonstrate the economic, social and environmental benefits of investment; there is no “at risk” register for spaces;

- the subject is receiving more attention but the CABE remit from Government is for only *green* space; the “Streets for All” campaign by English Heritage is welcomed but covers similar ground to the EHTF Historic Core Zones Project carried out five years ago, we must therefore keep up our pressure;
- the BIDS initiative needs careful consideration if it is to succeed in improving investment in the public realm.

Ian said that the publication of the ***EHTF Prospectus*** clearly stated the **Agenda for Action** for the coming year which continued to concentrate on the public realm:

- good practice guidance on many of the important elements would be published.
- we will continue to work with CABE Space and English Heritage as well as other organisations sharing our broad aims
- we will seek ways of demonstrating the worth of investing in the Public Realm to influence decision making and investment bodies
- continue to highlight good practice – demonstrating what can be achieved.

Much of the work of the Forum is dependent on voluntary effort and Ian urged people to get involved in order to bring together best practice to share with colleagues and to give strength to lobbying activities.

Finally, Ian thanked everyone who had worked hard to make the conference an enjoyable one and Lincoln for hosting the event.

After lunch delegates who had not already done so were able to enjoy a guided tour of the City.

Speakers rarely make papers available prior to conferences, however printouts of the powerpoint presentations are available on request from the EHTF office.