



News



Dec 2006

ENGLISH HISTORIC TOWNS FORUM
for prosperity and conservation in historic towns

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Yin and Yang: Growth in Historic Towns in the 21st Century

The EHTF has always been ahead of its time. The Forum promoted the virtues of historic towns as fine places to live and work long before the notion of 'sustainable communities' was a gleam in a ministerial eye. Happily, others have caught up but, in order to maintain and create sustainable communities in the 21st century, we must understand what makes them and where better to look than to our historic towns and cities?

The Annual Conference in Bury St Edmunds explored this in depth.

Historic towns are far more than collections of fine buildings. They combine compactness, adaptability, human scale, cultural richness, local enterprise, harmony between townscape and landscape, a small environmental footprint and the ability to renew themselves. In this they are exemplars of sustainable communities.

At the scale of individual buildings they offer the Vitruvian qualities of firmness, commodity and delight, even if they have more than a few 'X Listed' eyesores that ought to be removed quietly. How can new building compare favourably with this? Perhaps by allowing architecture to grow out of our own culture, avoiding trendiness for the sake of it and, in recognising that modesty is a virtue, by trying to create the 'really good ordinary'.

And it's more than buildings, of course: space and architecture are the yin and yang of good places in many historic towns. This being so, it is sad to reflect that the 20th century has seen the death of the street. Streets need to be reclaimed from traffic and all parts of the public realm



Bury St Edmunds Town Hall

strengthened as places where people come together to reinforce community identity and cohesion.

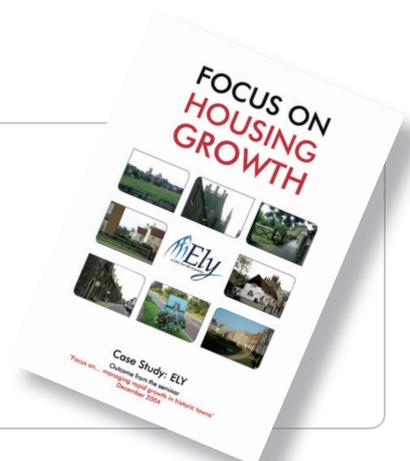
If this suggests that all we need to do is to choose the right bricks and paviors we are mistaken. Governance is critical. How do we manage buildings and spaces and how do we get the community to own and cherish their place? By clear leadership and trusting people to behave well, perhaps. Viability is crucial too: high quality development has to be commercially successful.

These might be the necessary conditions for sustainable communities. Whether they are sufficient only time will tell. Maybe the secret lies in keynote speaker George Ferguson's words: 'Property has its duties as well as its rights.'

Brian Human, Chair EHTF

New EHTF guidance publication launched.

Order online at www.ehtf.org.uk or contact the EHTF office.



New Members Irish Walled Towns Network

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Welcome to the Irish Walled Towns Network

Ian Poole, outgoing Chair, and Chris Winter, Director of EHTF, were invited to attend the Irish Walled Towns Network conference held in Drogheda (nr Dublin) on 9/10 November, at which Ian made a presentation on the work of the Forum. The organisation is quite young and very interested in the work of EHTF.

In order to share practice and maintain contact it was agreed that Reciprocal Membership should be set up between the two organisations and the Forum has been invited to present a paper at the next event, to be held in Youghal, County Cork, next May.

Details of the programme will be available in the near future; see www.heritagecouncil.ie/walled_towns for further details of the IWTN. We look forward to working with our Irish colleagues in the future.

Members' Response

The article on the front page of the October issue of NEWS 'No more signs and lines!' brought responses from several Members, for which EHTF is grateful. This is a topic close to the hearts of many and is an issue which will continue to be explored through the programme of events and projects in 2007.

A project group will be set up for a workshop in the New Year to take this forward and any Members wishing to take part should contact the editor: chris.winter@uwe.ac.uk.

Ludlow wins the Academy of Urbanism 'Great Town' award



Quality Square, Ludlow

At the glittering award ceremony held at The Dorchester in London on 10 November, Mayor of Ludlow, Cllr Graeme Kidd, was presented with 'The Great Town' award and was invited to read the poem especially composed for the occasion by Ian McMillan, which began:

"The most perfect town in England' / Betjeman said, and he should know. / He had an eye and an ear for England;" and continues: "You can wallow at the end of a Ludlow day / In Ludlow sausage and Ludlow cheese / And a pint of a perfect local beer".

Graeme said "It is a great honour for Ludlow and its communities to be selected as the first Great Town by the Academy. I am sure the fact that we are a Slow Town – the first CittaSlow Town in the UK - helped us to win this accolade".

Other winners were:

Edinburgh
European City of the Year
Glasgow Merchant City
Great Neighbourhood
Marylebone High Street
Great Street
Borough Market, London
Great Place

Span Places

Humane spaces, dignity and esteem, cohesion and identity, integrated landscape design. These were just a few of the compliments heaped on Span housing developments during a Symposium held at RIBA on 18 November.

Span Developments flowed from the vision of Eric Lyons, who looked below the surface of architecture and developed a core set of principles to build houses that people liked and could afford. The principles embraced three Ls: layout, landscape and leasehold. The letter has been vital in supporting residents' management structures that have maintained the quality of the estates. It was part of a

complete planning approach that saw the need to fuse together the physical, social and economic aspects of housing.

As a model for modest development, up to 150 dwellings say, it has much to teach us. But can it be applied to the larger numbers dictated by the growth agenda in some historic towns? Yes, if we are prepared to look and learn the lessons. To quote from a new monograph on Lyons and Span: 'The test of good housing is not whether it can be built easily, but whether it can be lived in easily.'

'Eric Lyons and Span', edited by Barbara Simms is available from RIBA, £25.

A Sustainability Model - I

Towns change, some more dramatically and more quickly than others. Each town is unique, a product of the cultural and other qualities of that place. Towns are living things – they are both places, and the sum of the people who live and work there.

If we understand this to be the nature of towns, then our approach to shaping and implementing change needs to promote the quality of life of citizens as the cornerstone of urban development and regeneration. Whether it is a whole town under examination or an individual site, the same thought processes apply – what will be the resultant social, environmental and economic outcomes and will these bring tangible and positive benefits to communities affected?



AGM Report

The Annual General Meeting held in Bury St Edmunds on 18 October agreed to adopt the Business Plan 2007-09 which had been proposed and made available to Members for comments prior to the meeting. It also agreed to the amendments to the Constitution, taking account of these changes.

Of special interest may be the changes put in place to expand the Membership in order to include a greater range of Local Authorities. Many Authorities already show their support for the Forum by attending events and purchasing publications.

In order to extend the network of expertise, but to continue to support smaller historic towns, all Local Authorities will be eligible for Membership but a scale of fees will ensure a fair distribution of the financial load.

In addition, other categories of Membership were invited to propose representatives to join the Executive Committee.

All current Members will receive a letter explaining the implications of these changes and invitations to join the Forum will be sent to many other English Local Authorities.

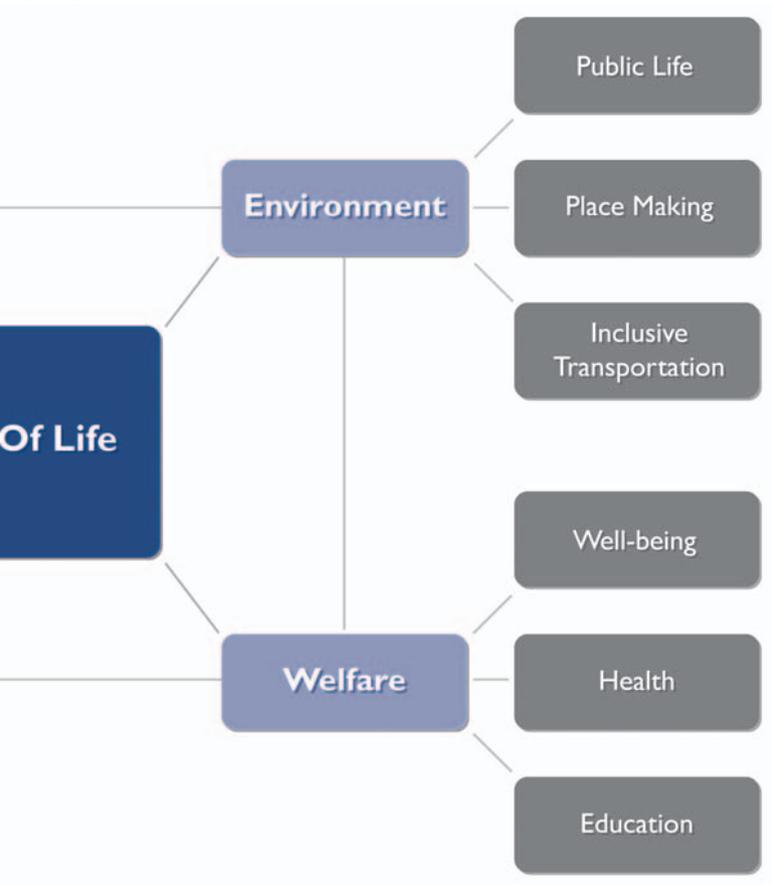
Improving Quality of Life

A sustainable approach to managing change in our historic towns is multi-faceted (as illustrated in the 'Q of L Model' below). It has the Quality of Life agenda at its core. Beyond the dimensions of Culture, Environment, Welfare and Economy the priorities may and will differ depending on specific circumstances.

However the message is a simple one – to establish or maintain a sustainable renaissance of our historic towns we must be prepared to think as 'urbanists', beyond the comfort zone of 'disciplines'

Kevin McGovern,
RPS Planning, Transport & Environment

Quality of Life Model



New Executive Committee

The new Executive Committee is made up of the following:

Chair (for one year) Brian Human
Cambridge City Council

Vice Chair (outgoing Chair) Ian Poole
St Edmundsbury Borough Council

Vice Chair (incoming) Tony Wyatt
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council

Honorary Treasurer Bill Cotton
Swindon Borough Council

Other Members of the Executive

Sharon Cosgrove Oxford City Council
Chris Hargreaves Birmingham City Council
Ian Heggie Stratford-upon-Avon Society & West MASA

Sam Howes Chichester District Council
Dave Jobbins Christchurch Borough Council
David Reed Canterbury City Council
Rob Surl Shropshire County Council
Richard Tuffrey High Peak Borough Council

Co-opted Members

Steve Bee English Heritage
Nick Hayward RPS Planning, Transport & Environment

Michael Loveday Norwich HEART
Brian Smith EAHTR
Prue Smith Projects Consultant

Contact details are available on the website (www.ehtf.org.uk) and all members would be happy to talk to you about national or regional issues.

Out and About

Meeting of HEREC	27 Sep	London
Georgian Group Architectural Awards	2 Oct	Christie's, London
'Your place or mine? Engaging new audiences with heritage'	2 – 3 Nov	Manchester
IWTN Meeting and Annual Dinner	9 – 10 Nov	Drogheda, Ireland
Academy of Urbanism Awards	10 Nov	London
Launch of 'Heritage Counts' 2006	15 Nov	London
7th Annual Bristol Planning Law and Policy Conference	23 Nov	Bristol

2007 programme of projects and events

Full details of the forthcoming programme are currently being developed, this will include:

- A major contribution to CityScape 2007 at Earl's Court2
- Further work on housing growth – the design perspectives
- Conservation Area Management Plans – identification of best practice
- Streetscape guidance – assessing the current guidance, the needs of the Membership and identifying best practice
- Retail development – assessing the current guidance and further needs
- Traffic and transport issues – car parking, park & ride, up-date on the Historic Core Zones, the Transport Innovation Fund and other issues of concern to Members
- A study tour of the Netherlands (tbc)
- 20th Anniversary Celebration Dinner
- Annual Conference – making the most of the value of our industrial heritage

Members interested in becoming involved with any of these projects should contact the Director / Editor, Chris Winter. Chris.Winter@uwe.ac.uk or call 0117 975 0459.

Musing in the High Chair

As I started my year in the Chair I read three things that made me reflect on the work of the Forum.

First, there was an English Heritage media release claiming that 'History and heritage are more popular than ever'; and arguing for a positive approach to 'the very real challenges facing [historic] public buildings as a result of major changes in the way public services are delivered.'

Then there was Iain Sinclair's absorbing new book, London: City of Disappearances. Regretting our 'climate of shoulder shrugging amnesia' he claims: "Heritage replaces memories which should be passed on, anecdotally, affectionately, from generation to generation, by word of mouth".

Finally, the Tourism Alliance newsletter reported that DCMS funding has increased by 61% since 1997, but English Heritage has had only an 11% increase, a decline of around 15% in real terms.

So, heritage is important, our understanding of what it means continually shifts and expands and it remains under resourced (the position in DCMS reflects the experience of far too many at the local level). Which is exactly why the EHTF is so important as a champion for a dynamic, inclusive view of heritage, the body promoting prosperity and sustainability in historic towns.

Brian Human
Chair, EHTF

Cityscape Seminar

As part of the Cityscape 2007 exhibition and conference to be held at Earls Court 2 from 27 February – 1 March, EHTF will be running a seminar on the morning of 1 March entitled:

'Historic towns: maintaining identity and place'

This will include presentations on the Streetscape: from strategy to reality – with the Chichester case study; the Importance of identity and diversity – Tourism in context; a Tale of Two Cities: Conservation Area Appraisals for major historic towns; and Housing Growth - managing expansion: design and planning.

Entry to the seminar and exhibition is free of charge, but requires pre-booking; EHTF Members are entitled to a £50 discount for the conferences which also run for the three days. For full details and booking see www.cityscapeonline.com.

EHTF members will also receive an invitation to the Reception which will take place on the evening of 28 February.

Feature Town : Kingston upon Hull

The Old Town

Over 750 years of urban life have given Hull's Old Town its unique character. Georgian townhouses sit side by side with the canyon like warehouses of the Old Harbour (River Hull), all set within an enduring medieval street pattern. This is a special character quite distinctive from later city developments. It is one of Hull's surprises: our hidden gem.

The Hull Old Town Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) is a grant-giving programme supporting heritage-led regeneration and repairs. The scheme is now in its third year. Over £1 million of grant aid has helped to save two major buildings from collapse; has supported public realm refurbishment combining traditional materials with disabled access requirements and has contributed to the best practice conversion and extension of C19 offices into Hull University's Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation. It has also supported a number of smaller specialist repairs and architectural reinstatements.

A further £1 million is programmed for spend over the next two years. The THI will continue to build on what has been achieved, with completed projects demonstrating the positive role of the historic fabric in creating places where people want to live, work and play.

The Hull Old Town THI is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Yorkshire Forward, and is managed by regeneration organisation Cityventure, on behalf of Hull City Council.

Joanne Byrne, Hull THI Coordinator
Hull Cityventure Ltd



St Burnett House, Hull:
before & after phase I of work.
Phase II is scheduled for 2007

'The Future of Retailing in Historic Towns'



Town Square Shopping Centre
Stratford-upon-Avon

This was the title of the Stratford-upon-Avon Society's annual public lecture on 11 October given by Dr Brian Raggett, Executive Director of C B Richard Ellis, who is leading the CBRE contribution to the World Class Stratford project.

His main message was that Stratford needs better shopping, better restaurants, better transport – and a range of cultural activities apart from Shakespeare if the town is to compete successfully in the 21st century market place and avoid the 'Clone Town Trap', according to Ian Heggie, Chair of the Stratford-upon-Avon Society (and Member of the EHTF Executive Committee).

Dr Raggett continued: "It is important to play to the town's strengths but also maintain diversity and to study retail trends, and to avoid being a clone and to concentrate on local distinctiveness." He suggested that this could mean expanding the farmers' market, as has been done in Stroud, or attracting major organic retailers and internationally recognised restaurants, as in Ludlow. He pointed out that a key trend in retailing was away from covered centres towards schemes with more public space. Research shows that customers prefer shopping in open environments and strong civic leadership was needed to encourage high-value non-retail employment and partnerships which create an atmosphere that would attract and stimulate retailers.

He said that "Customers have to be satisfied, but retailers need to be inspired by what the town has to offer". To achieve this it is necessary to solve transport problems and to focus on 'place making'.

Speaking of Stratford, he said "The places between the shops have to be more attractive and they are not yet. World Class Stratford should change that. It is also necessary to consider the entrances to the town from major car parks – visitors must be encouraged to think this is a different and interesting place".

The points made by Dr Raggett are strongly supported by the Forum through its guidance documents and will continue to be advocated in the coming year with further work on retail development in historic towns.