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ENGLISH HISTORIC TOWNS FORUM
for prosperity and conservation in historic towns

Special edition on Streetscape

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Bristol conference report

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Best value or not?



Stamford - the first Conservation Area 1967

Best Value Performance Indicators are not among the most popular of the tools the Government uses to micro manage local authorities, so the removal of any from the long list is not usually a cause for regret. However, recent changes to BVPI 219 should not be taken lightly.

BVPI 219a, the total number of Conservation Areas in the local authority area, and BVPI 219c, the percentage of Conservation Areas with management proposals, are to be discontinued. This leaves BVPI 219b, the percentage of Conservation Areas with up to date character appraisals, which may be amended.

Few people would argue that they are particularly good indicators of either a local authority's performance in conserving the historic environment or the state of the historic environment itself. Merely to record the number of Conservation Areas seems bizarre – hardly an incentive to designate a large coherent area rather than several fragmented ones. Similarly, having a management plan is no indication that resources are being put into conservation. However cranky they may have been as indicators they did have one advantage: local authorities had to face the fact that they were expected to take their statutory conservation responsibilities seriously.

For this reason, if no other, the retention of BVPI 219b is welcome: local authority members have to recognise that up to date appraisals are considered to be important and this may help to lever out much needed resources to carry out the work of assessment.

But the real conservation value is much greater than this, of course. The original appraisal ensures that the true reason for declaring a Conservation Area is established; and subsequent appraisals help to monitor changes and target action. An increasingly important benefit is the role of up to date appraisals in providing part of the evidence base for conservation policies in Local Development Frameworks. The robustness of these policies is critical because CA appraisals themselves cannot be Local Development Documents.

Sheer conservation creditability does not deliver the resources to carry out the work and it can be especially hard to get commitment to reappraisals. There may be more political mileage in declaring new Conservation Areas than in reviewing old ones – especially where there is a growing appreciation of the grey voter power of the suburbs!

Possible ways round the resource issue will include the development of rapid appraisals, as advocated by English Heritage, and building capacity in the community so that the goodwill and enthusiasm of local people can be harnessed to help carry out surveys and research.

Whatever we may think of Best Value Indicators, the requirement to continue to assess and address changes to historic places is essential if we are to really conserve the townscape that is still in trouble.

Brian Human, Chair, EHTF



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Streets are places too

'Manual for Streets' is a fresh approach. There is no new legislation, but it is now officially recognised that streets are places too. They have a function to facilitate movement, but they are also places where people live.



Saxon church in context 2007

An important existing fact is emphasised. Apart from trunk roads, it is highway authorities, not the Government that set design standards for highways.

There is a common but mistaken belief that official advice in various official manuals concerning designs for traffic have the force of legislation, and that not to comply would expose an authority to risks of safety and liability.

The 'Manual for Streets' clearly states that this is not true. The few cases that have reached court have been dismissed, with the House of Lords

restating the legal situation that drivers must take the road as they find it and are responsible for their own safety and the safety of others. Safety audits are only one of the tests of a good design. They may be overruled if the reasons for a final design decision is recorded in writing.

A street is defined as all the space between the back edges of the pavements, that is the road and pavement or, as highway engineers call them, the carriageway and the footway.

Streets have a dual function, that of place and movement. Place includes local historic and geographic context, community issues and concern for vulnerable people. Movement is the recognition of the

role of a street within the wider system.

The greatest design challenges occur at locations where both place and movement are important, such as high streets, village and local neighbourhood centres and of course historic towns.

This highlights the need for greater cross discipline design skills. EHTF is pleased to support the PRAN public realm design and management course.

For further details visit www.publicrealm.info

Colin Davis, Coordinator
Public Realm Information
and Advice Network

New Members

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Mr Aaron Evans
Managing Director
3 Argyle Street
Pulteney Bridge
Bath, BA1 4BA
Tel: 01225 466234
Web: www.aaronevans.com

Keith Simpson & Associates
Ms Kristina Simpson
145 Lakeview Drive
Airside Business Park
Swords, Co. Dublin
Tel: 01 8904085
Web: www.ksa.ie

EasiPoint Marketing Ltd
Ms Sue Cleugh, Sales Manager
Restoration House
Drumhead Road
Chorley North Industrial Estate
Chorley, PR6 7DG
Tel: 01257 224900
Web: www.easipoint.co.uk

Mr Peter Metcalfe
Retired, Student, Designer
15 Southville Terrace
Lyncombe Vale
Bath, BA2 4LZ

Leicester City Council
Ms Deborah Rose
Development Team Manager
New Walk Centre
Welford Place
Welford Road
Leicester, LE1 6ZG
Tel: 0116 252 7202
Web: www.leicester.gov.uk

International Art Consultants
Ms Catherine Thomas
Principal Art Consultant
The Galleries, 15 Dock Street
London, E1 8JL
Tel: 020 7481 1337
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Is it worth it? - the economic value of investing in the public realm

Despite major advances in recent years, the regeneration of urban public spaces is still regarded in many quarters as a cosmetic exercise, a bit of urban beautification but not really a serious device to be used in the toolkit for regenerating cities and certainly not anything to do with the economy. Until public space regeneration is understood and taken seriously; until it is recognised that there is a connection between whether people feel safe, comfortable, relaxed, entertained and informed and whether they participate in urban life economically, socially and culturally; the cause of walking in urban areas will never be a key political agenda item.

The regeneration of urban spaces can be a key driver, and sometimes **the** key driver, for overall urban regeneration there is evidence from a range of international case studies and specifically ongoing work in the EU North Sea Region to illustrate that spatial regeneration schemes can create significant economic benefits, overcome barriers to social inclusion, combat threats to well being, encourage environmental sustainability and celebrate local distinctiveness by promoting a cultural renaissance. The best means of measuring these benefits can be assessed to develop a transferable set of measures. The paper given at the conference held in Leicester will report the

results of a major research study forming part of the EU Liveable City Programme and research being developed by the Heritage Economic & Regeneration Trust and the Regional Development Agency (EEDA) and will make proposals for a performance indicators toolkit. The paper is expected to conclude that only by demonstrating clearly the economic and other outputs/outcomes of spatial regeneration schemes can we hope to make a real change in the way that the pedestrian environment is viewed politically and culturally.

Michael Loveday
Chief Executive, Heritage Economic
& Regeneration Trust (HEART)

Regeneration in Leicester City Centre

Plans to significantly revamp the centre of Leicester have taken a step forward as new designs from Gillespies are released by Leicester City Council for public consultation. Leicester's retail core is set to be transformed under the exciting £19m proposals which will change the face of the city by 2008.

A similar design and consistent materials are to be carried across all the new spaces whilst tailored detail elements will give each place a unique character and respond to the different usage patterns. Proposals will see changes to the surroundings of the landmark Clock Tower as well as the following major streets: High Street, the East Gates area, Market Place Approach, King Street, Belvoir Street and parts of Granby Street.

The distinctive Clock Tower will be restored as a landmark setting

through the removal of clutter, which is currently marring views of the attractive structure. It is hoped that the emergence of cafés around this key public space will help to create a world class public square at the heart of the city.

The busy thoroughfare of High Street has been reconfigured to better suit pedestrians: traffic has been removed; specially designed seating will be nestled between rows of new trees; and a water feature has been designed for the east end. Shared surfaces will be introduced in the upper section of King Street to replace a junction previously dominated by traffic. The rest of the street will be pedestrianised and existing grey concrete slab paving will be replaced with high quality silver and black granite materials which use a mixture of textures to define pedestrian and vehicular boundaries.

A particularly innovative timber gateway structure has been proposed to mark the location of the medieval city's East Gate. This striking feature will provide an additional landmark by day and at night will become illuminated to build upon the feature lighting delivered as a part of changes to Gallowtree Gate.

Alastair Leighton, Project Manager
and Katrina Naughton,
PR and Marketing, Gillespies LLP



Gateway feature and clock tower

Delivering the vision



Derby Cityscape

There are currently 13 tower cranes dotted across Derby's skyline. The city is undergoing a transformation the like of which it has not seen since the industrial revolution.

Having an approved masterplan and a public realm strategy demonstrates to investors how they might contribute towards the vision for the city and how the investment will be protected. This raises confidence.

The layout of Derby's interconnected streets and squares offers great potential; it is a very compact city centre, ideal for walking, with unfolding views and architectural delights leading onwards through the city. However, it is also fair to say that Derby's public spaces had been looking tired for too long. To meet the expectations of local people and investors the public realm needed a more strategic approach.

A major £100 million public sector investment has been agreed for the public realm in Derby's city centre over the next 10 years, and this forms part of the £2 billion of private and public sector investment in the pipeline to deliver the Derby Cityscape Masterplan. This will be a major contribution towards the renaissance of the city.

A lively public realm offers not only an enjoyable experience but it can also help to develop a sense of citizenship and belonging. The new 'look' for Derby's city centre will include attractive streets, lively squares and beautiful gardens, as well as restored historic buildings and inspiring contemporary architecture. The result should be greater prosperity, participation and social cohesion.

Nick Corbett, Derby Cityscape

Design influences driver behaviour

CABE is focusing more than ever before on the role of good street design in helping to deliver successful places and are making a series of reports and resources available over the summer that shine the light on a range of issues from the process of delivering successful streets, to the economic benefits of well designed streets, to the effect that current obsession with risk has on the quality of our public spaces.

A renaissance in street design is underway placing quality and enjoyment at the heart of these critical public spaces. One important forerunner of this renaissance is 'Manual for Streets' published by the Departments for transport, and communities and local government in March.

The manual recognises that streets, by definition, are multifunctional spaces and should be designed accordingly. It acknowledges that streets have a significant

role to play in the developing and reinforcing of successful placemaking. Significantly it recognises that driver behaviour is influenced as much by the design of the place in three dimensions as by the signs, lines, and geometries of the plan. While the manual has been written for residential and lightly trafficked streets, it clearly states that there is no reason why its principles should not be applied to high streets, secondary retail streets and streets connecting residential areas.

Sarah Gaventa, Director of CABE Space, will be speaking at the EHTF conference in Leicester on 5 July. Her presentation will launch 'This way to better streets', which distills the key principles of successful streets from 10 case studies. Sarah will also present 'Paved with gold' new research which shows a direct link between street quality and property prices.

Louise Duggan, CABE Space



Newcastle market

A strategic approach to town centre improvements in Newark, Nottinghamshire

The historic streets of Newark have undergone considerable change in recent years. Increasing conflict between vehicles and pedestrians needed to be resolved together with the re-design of street surfaces following removal of through traffic, and enhancement of the environment of the historic core. The implementation of a number of linked schemes has improved accessibility for disabled people and has resulted in the repair, in a sensitive way, of street surfaces throughout the town centre.

A variety of different organisations have vested interests, there was a great danger that works could have been carried out in an unco-ordinated and piecemeal fashion with little regard for the historic nature of the town centre. Nottinghamshire County Council, Newark and Sherwood District

Council and Newark Town Council therefore endorsed a strategy to guide alterations and improvement works in the historic core so that they would be carried out to a high standard using quality materials ensuring each project would fit together in a jigsaw fashion.

The Strategy has helped to achieve a high quality floorscape throughout the town, which enhances the setting of the wealth of historic buildings and the character of the Newark Conservation Area. It has helped to create a safe, comfortable and convenient pedestrian environment, which makes provision for all users of the town, and reconciles vehicular/pedestrian conflict in favour of the pedestrian. It provides easy access throughout the town for people with disabilities, whilst making adequate provision for deliveries and provides street

surfaces that are robust enough to withstand the pressures put upon them.

Experience has shown the importance of getting all interested parties 'on side' at an early stage. In this way everyone is committed to developing a coherent and

sustainable strategy using high quality materials that enhance the spaces between the historic buildings.

*Katharine Wimble
Principal Landscape Architect
Newark & Sherwood District Council*



Newark town centre

Musing from the Chair

We are justly proud of our historic towns with their wonderful buildings and spaces, the accumulated heritage and culture of fifty generations. But what is this generation creating for the future to enjoy, what of real quality are we adding to our towns and cities?

I attended a seminar recently that looked critically at a major new development to see what lessons we can learn from it. The discussion was based on a tacit perception that the result did not live up to the expectations: the aspiration to quality rose as planning policy led to master planning and detailed design only to fall in realisation as the cost driven buildings and car dominated spaces took shape.

Of course, each scheme will face its own pressures and with a truly enlightened developer the finished product may exceed expectations. But for the great majority of developments more needs to be done to meet the challenge of quality.

If there was no Damascene revelation of the answers on the day, there was agreement that we must do better by improving processes. The key players need a shared vision and agreed objectives and priorities at the outset. It is also vital to inject financial realism into the process early on to avoid those last minute, quality sapping cuts. Then build continuity into the processes of all parties: in local authorities the urban designer too often hands over to a hard pressed DC case officer; and developers replace renowned master planners and architects with in-house teams. Finally ensure that there is effective monitoring and enforcement - if necessary paid for by the developer through a \$106 agreement!

It was refreshing, though it should not have been a surprise, that one of the keys to making this work was felt to be strong local government with clarity of purpose and the ability to take the long view. Well, maybe not a thousand years, but certainly with an eye to what 2107 will think of how we have treated our towns.



Brian Human
Chair, EHTF

'Conservation and Sustainability in Historic Towns' by Dennis Rodwell, published by Blackwell Publishing 2007

This very readable and generously illustrated book offers a comprehensive background to architectural conservation and the beginnings of urban conservation, taking the reader from the 'elitist interest in key monuments' to 'a broad discipline' including the concept of 'townscape' introduced by Cullen in his 'seminal book' of 1961.

"Conservation and sustainability" he considers "share the same generative basis as the mainstream of modern town planning, namely the forces unleashed by the Industrial Revolution and the associated serious environmental consequences of the loss of equilibrium between the human and natural worlds."

Rodwell explores international

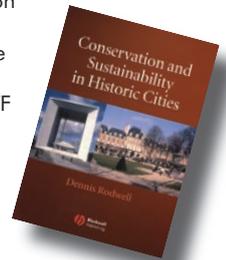
initiatives and directions and the UK position, looking at sustainable cities and urban initiatives, as well as managing World Heritage Cities. He also looks at the management of historic cities across central and Eastern Europe and the Horn of Africa.

On designation, Rodwell cites the challenge posed by EHTF's 1992 publication 'Townscape in Trouble: Conservation Areas – The Case for Change', the concerns of which were echoed in 2000 by 'Power of Place'. He considers that "there are aspects of the established protective system ... that render it barely fit for purpose." And "the cumulative degradation in recent decades in core values - especially local distinctiveness - across the majority

of the United Kingdom's supposedly protected historic areas is very substantial". He goes on to review the policies relating to the historic environment in England.

The concluding chapter states that "The physical and societal attributes of historic cities are inseparable."

For information about book reviews please contact Chris Winter at EHTF



Retail development in historic town and city centres – why? & how?

The conference in Bristol began with a fascinating and enjoyable evening aboard the ss Great Britain, hosted by The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Bristol, Cllr Royston Griffey JP LLB. The next day Brian Human, Chair of EHTF, identified the impacts on historic towns, and the need for an emphasis on design and complementary actions in order to maintain quality and distinctiveness of the place. Chris Smith, representing English Heritage and the Urban Panel, advised an overview in order to avoid the mismatch between the standard mall format and complex places, but building on the strength of the towns' heritage.

Speakers included representatives from Donaldsons, outlining consumer and town centre development trends and Land Securities plc with an update on the Exeter Princesshay retail development. The Bath case study was presented by the local authority and Urban Practitioners, looking at maximising the 'USP' of the retail offer. Looking at retail development in the regeneration of smaller towns Andrew Ogg recommended masterplanning and presented Gravesend as a case study of where this had been achieved.

The Whitefriars retail scheme was revisited to look at whether it had delivered on expectations and if there were lessons that might be learned from it.

Delegates had a guided tour of the redevelopment of the Broadmead area of Bristol followed by presentations in the marketing suite of the Bristol Alliance on the 16th floor of the Castlemead building which gave a 'bird's eye' view of the site. Representatives of Bristol City Council and the Bristol Alliance explained the project and the part it plays in the overall regeneration strategy for the City.

A special visit to the Quakers' Friars site had also been arranged; currently an archaeological site, this building will house a high quality restaurant at the hub of the new public realm.

Copies of the speakers' presentations are available from the EHTF office; also available on a cd; prices on application.



Images from top to bottom:- ss Great Britain, delegates on guided tour of the Broadmead area, aerial shot of Broadmead

New 'Arte Mundit' sensitive surface cleaning technology

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