

March 2007

ENGLISH HISTORIC TOWNS FORUM
for prosperity and conservation in historic towns

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Whither or wither planning?

There are many things about our historic towns and cities that make them examples of sustainability. Today's local authorities cannot take all the credit for this, after all much of what is best about these places is inherited from a more or less distant past. It is arguable though that for fifty years since 1947 planning has played a positive part in creating the quality of life offered by historic towns.

But what of the future? In 2001 the government published 'Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change'. The rest, as they say, is history. But hardly a glorious one: there are few practitioners who believe the new development plan system is an improvement on the old one, quite the contrary in fact. It is a credit to all involved that huge efforts are being made to make it work despite its shortcomings.

Given that criticism, further changes to put things right should be welcomed and there is indeed much in the Barker Review that may be helpful. At the same time there is a sense that the financial and market drivers behind the Review are challenging the principles of planning. In January the Policy Exchange think tank published a report calling for the scrapping of Green Belts, the reintroduction of Simplified Planning Zones and 'fiscal incentives' for councils to allow development.

The challenges of the present system and the turbulence around further change run the risk of undermining planning by demotivating planners and damaging public confidence in the benefits it brings. One of the arguments for planning is that it helps to create certainty and continuity.

That is not how things appear at the moment.



Rochester, Kent - historic towns can be exemplars of sustainable change

It is particularly ironic that we should be in this position now. The Local Government White Paper supports the need to strengthen communities and recognises the crucial role of local government in 'place shaping'. Perhaps even more important the Stern Report sees a critical role for planning in tackling climate change.

Our historic towns and cities can help to lead the way in this by building on their existing strengths – compactness, good environment, flexible economies, community involvement and strong senses of place – to become increasingly powerful exemplars of sustainable development. To help achieve this, planning must be strong, simple and stable if it is to be a proactive and positive force for sustainable change.

Brian Human, Chair EHTF

To join the 20th Anniversary Reception to be held at 5pm at Stand C50 Cityscape 2007 at Earl's Court 2 on 28 February contact the office at ehtf@uwe.ac.uk and register on www.cityscapeonline.org



New Members

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EHTF welcomes a new member of the team

News from Sam, who left us to join her husband in the States, is very positive; she is enjoying her new life but we must move on and I am delighted to say that Caroline Smith has joined the team in the Bristol office to lead on web and design admin.

I am sure you will make Caroline welcome as she starts to get to know the Members during the year.

Transport innovation in historic towns



Cyclists in Shrewsbury

EHTF has campaigned for many years for traffic management which does not compromise local distinctiveness or the historic built environment.

The first conference of 2007 will explore some of the ways in which this might be achieved. In particular, it will look at the Transport Innovation Fund and how three Member Authorities are using this opportunity to address a range of issues.

It will also explore schemes in Ludlow and Oswestry which bear close examination for the lessons that might be learnt about simplicity of design, access, parking, partnership working and innovative approaches to other traffic management issues.

Supported by Shropshire County Council, the event will be held in Shrewsbury on Thursday 29 March, with activities during the evening of Wednesday 28 which include a familiarisation tour and wine tasting and supper at Tanners – the wine merchants established in 1842.

Visit www.ehtf.org.uk for details and online booking.

Irish Walled Towns Network Conference

EHTF has been invited to make a presentation at the 2007 Annual Conference of our latest Reciprocal Member. In an effort to work more closely with colleagues over the borders we have established a good relationship with this all-Ireland organisation, and look forward to participating in the conference.

EHTF Members will be welcome at Youghal, County Cork on 17/19 May, when a range of topics

will be presented – including the Derry Conservation Plan – well worth hearing about!

Representatives of IWTN will be visiting the EHTF stand at Cityscape at the end of February and we look forward to many opportunities to share information.

See www.heritagecouncil.ie/walled_towns/index.html for more details as they become available.

Signs and lines - the next chapter

Readers of the regular NEWS and many Members will be aware of the campaign waged by EHTF since before the initiation of the Historic Core Zone (HCZ) project in 1997/8. EHTF are delighted to say that these efforts, together with those of other organisations with similar aspirations, at last seem to be gaining real ground.

At a workshop convened by EHTF at the end of January, the 'great and the good' in the field came together to share intelligence and were delighted by the work now being taken forward by the Department for Transport (DfT) and Government agencies, like CABE Space.

The 'Manual for Streets' expected to be launched by DfT on 29 March, will replace DB32 as guidance on traffic issues and, following extensive research,



HCZ in Halifax

will espouse some of the traffic calming methods and engineering practices used in the HCZ pilot schemes and already seen in many European towns and cities.

Workshop participants have pledged to continue to work with EHTF on this project and to determine the need for guidance focused especially for practitioners in historic towns. These issues will be explored, and the findings of this group disseminated, at a conference in the summer. Details will be circulated and posted on the website as soon as they are available.

A tale of two cities:



Trinity Lane in Cambridge



Tombland Alley in Norwich

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Cityscape 2007 - EHTF seminar

As part of this year's exhibition and conference to be held at Earl's Court 2 from 27 February to 1 March, EHTF will be running a seminar on the morning of 1 March entitled 'Historic Towns: maintaining identity and place'. These articles, from the presenters, offer an outline of the topics which will be discussed. To attend please register on www.cityscapeonline.com/book. Registration and entry to the seminar is free of charge.

The importance of identity and diversity - tourism in context

Tourism has always played an important role in historic towns. Managed positively, it can be part of a broader driver of change and regeneration. It does not have to be the scapegoat for unwanted change but can contribute positively to the character of an area.

Without careful management, actively promoting tourism could have a detrimental impact on the individuality and distinctiveness of historic towns. What is attractive to visitors itself becomes threatened by the economic imperative to create income and jobs, a view that distinctiveness and attractiveness are qualities to be exploited and a failure to understand the subtleties and acknowledge potential damage.

In the EHTF guidance 'Focus on Tourism', the Forum suggests a number of critical actions to achieve this, which include recognising the uniqueness of the locality; the need to enhance the sense of place; and maintaining local distinctiveness and the environment.

At a time when the environmental implications of cheap flights are being questioned, it is time to ensure that our historic towns and cities have strategies in place to maintain their quality and distinctiveness in a changing visitor market.

The Forum suggests there are three key messages that will ensure this:

- The unique qualities of a place have a worth to community over and above their exploitation value as a tourism commodity
- Conserving and enhancing uniqueness requires an integrated approach from the destination, individual travellers and the tourism industry
- Managing tourism in this way is a necessary, though not by itself sufficient, condition for making tourism more sustainable.

Ian Poole, Planning Policy and Specialist Services Manager
St Edmundsbury Borough Council

conservation area appraisals for major historic towns

The production of Conservation Area Appraisals for large historic towns and cities is the subject of a paper delivered by Dr Jon Burgess at the EHTF seminar at Cityscape 2007. It looks briefly at the guidance given by English Heritage and draws on the examples of appraisals which Jon has undertaken in Cambridge and Norwich.

Historic towns are highly complex organisms and the desire to protect their essential characteristics has led to the designation of large conservation areas which have frequently been extended. As a result, the boundaries generally encompass areas of different character and often varying quality.

The Cambridge and Norwich appraisals seek to deal with these issues in different ways. Cambridge looks at the 'macro' scale in some depth, focusing on the numerous issues which affect the historic core as a whole, before zooming into the micro scale to produce concise appraisals for each street and

space. In Norwich, after defining the importance of the city centre as a whole, the city was subdivided into 13 distinct character areas with detailed appraisals produced for each one.

A key aspect of both appraisals is the way in which relevant information can be extracted quickly from a document with sufficient analytical content to meet current best practice. Ensuring that policies and management guidelines cover the whole historic centre where applicable, but are also capable of being focused to specific areas and key characteristics, is an important aspect of both documents. Readability, high graphic and illustrative content, flexibility and ease of extracting information have therefore helped to ensure that such appraisals should be useful tools for years to come and not just a 'tick in a box' exercise.

Dr Jon Burgess, Director
QuBE Planning Ltd

Designing for housing growth: sustaining historic towns

The pressure for new housing will impact on historical towns and the design of new housing needs to be exemplary and of our time. This study will provide inspiration for those adopting a contemporary approach to residential led development within historic towns.

It is clear that many in the development industry are wrestling with contemporary sustainable design and questions regularly arising during the development planning process include:

- How to capture a town's existing architectural character?
- How to use contemporary architectural design in an historic context?
- How to deal with a modern approach to density in historic towns?
- Are designers reflecting the town's true urban grain or applying standard 'national' design principles?
- How to mitigate the impact of cars?

- Solely housing led development will not provide positive growth in an historic town; how do we plan for varied, adaptable use?
- How to design for resource efficiency in an historic context?
- How can the local community adjust to contemporary design issues that they may not have experienced?
- Who can be called upon to provide advice?

The study explores the design objectives, policy and roles of those involved in the process. Aspirations and potential design solutions to the questions are also illustrated. Whilst historic towns are the focus of this document, many of the issues are common to towns and cities that do not have historic cores.

Details of the project will be covered in the EHTF Seminar at CityScape on 1 March.

Mike Carr
Pegasus Urban Design

Feature Town : Chichester's streetscape

The small city of Chichester on the Sussex coastal strip has a thriving commercial centre far larger than the size of the city's resident population of about 25,000 would be expected to sustain. Major national chains are represented alongside many independent stores and it is this, combined with the many historic and cultural attractions, which keeps the city a vibrant place.

Two of the four principal shopping streets which focus on the City Cross were pedestrianised in 1977 and, whilst they retain much of their original qualities, the materials and furniture are now deteriorating quickly. A comprehensive strategy has therefore been put in place to replace the public realm infrastructure in a phased way over the coming years. The replacement will commence in March with a sample section of new pedestrian precinct alongside new visitor signing, seating, bins and cycle stands.

The background to, and implementation of, this streetscape strategy will be explained in the EHTF Seminar at the Cityscape Conference on 1 March.

Sam Howes, Deputy Chief Executive
Chichester District Council

Musings from the Chair

What is the value of heritage? A flurry of e-mails to the Forum at the end of last year sparked a debate 'about the role of heritage assets accounting practices', with concern as to how capital value and revenue costs are dealt with. I sighed and relegated this to the Wildean view of the cynic, who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

This was wrong, of course. The publication of 'Valuing Our Heritage' (see the website for the EHTF's response) seeks wisely to describe qualitatively and quantitatively the benefits, culturally, socially, environmentally and financially of investment in the historic environment.

This message was reinforced at the Forum's Streetscape Workshop hosted by Buchanans on 23 January. CABE alerted us to a study it has commissioned, 'Are Streets Paved With Gold?', which shows that there are direct financial benefits from quality streetscapes.

The things that we value most about our historic towns cannot be reduced to a financial balance sheet – to misquote Robert Kennedy, "The gross national product...measures everything...except that which makes life worthwhile." But we must not ignore the financial dimension. If this is the language that politicians, the private sector and regional development agencies talk then, if we want resources to conserve our heritage, we have to learn that language too. We do not have to compromise our principles on heritage's intrinsic value; we do have to become more skilful at the game of public policy finance.

Brian Human
Chair, EHTF

Conservation Area Management Plans

At the recent annual review meeting between the University of the West of England and EHTF, one of the main topics was the successful project undertaken in partnership early last year to deliver six regional seminars in Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans in the light of BVPI 219b&c, and the real need that has been identified for more guidance on Management Plans.

It was agreed that we should continue to work together to support our Members and further research will be undertaken to explore good practice and to disseminate this to Members.

If you have Conservation Area Management Plans which you would like to contribute to this project please contact Chris Winter at EHTF on 0117 975 0459 or email chris.winter@uwe.ac.uk

2007 programme of projects and events

- 23 January Streetscape Workshop, London
- 7 February Executive Committee Meeting
- 16 February Retail Workshop, London
- 27/28 Feb – 1 March CityScape 2007 Stand C50 at Earl's Court 2
- 28 Feb 20th Anniversary Reception Stand C50 at Earl's Court 2
- 28/29 March Transport Innovation in Historic Towns - Shrewsbury
- 16 May Executive Committee Meeting
- 17/18 May IWTN Conference, Youghal, Co Cork
- May Conference - Retail development in historic towns (tba)
- 4-8 June Study Tour to Netherlands
- 28 June 20th Anniversary Celebration Dinner, London
- July Conference – Streetscape issues (tba)
- 18 July Executive Committee Meeting
- 17-19 October The Value of the Industrial Heritage, Newcastle
- 31 October Executive Committee Meeting

For details please see www.ehtf.org.uk or call 0117 975 0459

Put your town on the map: Heritage Open Days 2007



Bramley House Library,
Nottingham
© N J Rae

After a record year for visitor figures in 2006 the Civic Trust is hoping to open up even more wonderful buildings for this year's Heritage Open Days (HODs). The annual event takes place between 6-9 September and is England's largest voluntary cultural event attracting over a million visitors. Many EHTF Members may already be involved in organising events or have visited some of the 3,500 buildings which open their doors to the public every year across England.

Groups and property owners can participate in HODs by organising any number or type of events celebrating their local heritage. Property tours, family activities, musical and craft events, historical re-enactments – the list is limitless.

If you haven't participated before, why not join one of the Civic Trust's 'Starter Workshops' in Southampton, Bedford and Stoke-on-Trent! The workshops give an introduction to the programme and a chance to meet staff and existing organisers.

To find out more about attending a workshop or how to get involved in the event, contact the HODs team on 0870 240 5251 or email hods@civictrust.org.uk

The HODs website also contains more information on taking part in HODs and details of the 2007 workshops, visit www.heritageopendays.org

The value of the industrial heritage



There is a growing realisation that the buildings associated with our industrial heritage, as well as the social history embedded in the fabric, are not only vital to the physical local identity but that there is also a 'ghost' identity, which can enrich a place and the experiences of both residents and visitors.

There are now many good examples of successful regeneration projects which have been based on the historic industrial built environment and the EHTF 2007 Annual Conference will explore some of these in the north east and Newcastle in October, demonstrating that what may once have been seen as having a negative impact on the town can proudly be used to its advantage.

Has your town re-discovered its industrial heritage? If you are aware of examples of good practice in this field please let me know as I will be putting the programme together over the next few weeks and looking for case studies – large and small from our Member towns and cities. Email chris.winter@uwe.ac.uk or call 0117 975 0459