

Streetscape in historic towns – the theory and the implementation.

Leicester 4 - 5 July

On Wednesday afternoon delegates enjoyed a tour of the City prior to a Reception held at the New Walk Museum & Art Gallery, hosted by the **Leader of Leicester City Council, Cllr Ross Wilmott**, who welcomed delegates and explained how the Gallery was able to exhibit Lord Attenborough's collection of Picasso Ceramics, which delegates were then able to see. This was followed by supper at San Carlos, a local restaurant.



Delegates at the Leicester conference

On Thursday morning **Ian Poole, Vice Chair of EHTF**, opened the conference by defining streetscape and the context within which the Forum had worked on the topic for several years. It was vital, he said, to identify and share examples of good practice and to understand how it might be achieved.

He introduced **Michael Loveday, Chief Executive of HEART** who talked about the economic value of investing in the public realm. He looked at the variety of functions of the public realm and the impact on the users of the quality of their surroundings, including length of stay and level of spend. Detailed studies had been carried out in cities across Europe, in Ghent, Odense, Lincoln and Trondheim, which supported the value of a spatial strategy. Some of the statistics relating to retail areas in Norwich – 300% increase in footfall and 40% increase in turnover – were very convincing. He emphasised the need for a palette of measures from which those appropriate to a given place could be taken, as well as ongoing management to maintain the standards.

Sarah Gaventa, Director of CABA Space, explained the role of CABA Space in promoting and supporting better quality design in both green and grey spaces. She considered that we should be 'risk aware' but not 'risk averse', as it was often the things that we put in the street, far from offering the solutions, that are the causes of the problems. "Paved with Gold" advocates a common sense approach which is now supported by research and echoed in the Dept for Transport guidance ("Manual for Streets")

which supersedes DB32. Brodies notes would be published in the near future to help make this guidance more accessible, and she hoped that the principles would be applied more widely in town centres and highways. EHTF and CABA Space would be working together to disseminate this and the good practice case studies which help to demonstrate these principles. The design of street furniture was a particular topic of concern which she hoped to address in the future.



Often street furniture is the cause of the problem

Tom Franklin, Chief Executive of Living Streets, explained that the organisation had moved from a campaigning to a more proactive mode of operation, but still working towards more people-friendly streets. The economists, he said, now agree that working with local people gave better results and making walking a more acceptable mode of moving around a city or town has a variety of benefits. He advocated the use of 'street audits' carried out with local people who bring local knowledge and a range of solutions to the exercise. He offered lists of benefits, a check list and the outcomes which might be expected, as well as how to use the information for additional benefits.



'Street audits' can bring local knowledge and offer a range of solutions

David Orr, explained the work being done by **Mouchel Parkman** with **English Heritage** to enhance the streetscape and to make it more relevant to the community, the place and the buildings. He looked back at EHTF publications as well as 'Paving the Way', 'Streets for All' and others which have led eventually to the 'Manual for Streets'. Through the HELM project (Historic Environment: Local Management) regeneration and design had been promoted by English Heritage and further guidance will be published in the autumn focusing on the finer detail – eg: lighting on buildings, traffic calming, signage and street clutter, with case studies to illustrate good practice. In conclusion he suggested that we need to be pragmatic but not to 'take no for an answer', although it is important to know enough about the key regulations and where to go for the right kind of help. Actions should not be lead by a safety audit alone, there are many other considerations and appropriate solutions can be achieved through open negotiations.



An enhanced streetscape can make it more relevant to the community, the place and the buildings

Clive Fletcher, Historic Areas Advisor for English Heritage East Midlands, looked at the problems of severance and the negative impact of roads on communities, which was recognised as long ago as the 1970s. This has been addressed recently in Lincoln by examining the historic townscape and its topography. Through a process of 'Enquiry by Design' with the Prince's Foundation and EMDA, the Local Authority is working to achieve a solution, with a detailed and long term vision for the whole city. This process ensures stakeholders and professionals develop ideas in partnership and that the main interest groups are represented, with a full range of professional disciplines available for assistance and advice. This results in a shared vision, with wide ownership, which will be used, rather than a document that is left on the shelf.



Busy roads can have negative impacts on communities

During the coffee break a gallery of images of good and bad practice, sent by EHTF Members and others, provided an opportunity for delegates to choose what they believed to be good examples.

Four short case studies followed to illustrate some of the elements which contribute to the streetscape:

- Art & lighting in Weston super Mare, North Somerset
- Small scale improvement schemes in historic towns in the High Peak area
- The strategic approach in Newark
- A holistic 'vision' in Derby

Mark Luck, of North Somerset Council, said that a public realm masterplan provided a vision for enhancing key public routes and spaces and the local authority would deliver 11 public realm schemes in five years. He emphasised that in order to enhance local distinctiveness the positive qualities of the town needed to be identified and reinforced. This approach also involved defining priority routes. Detailed design issues were also addressed, establishing quality standards and material specifications to reinforce local distinctiveness and provide cohesion; and to ensure they are sustainable and maintainable. A signage strategy offers a hierarchy of signs which reinforces the legibility of the town for all users and a lighting strategy helps to create an attractive, safe environment in which the evening economy can also thrive. Finally, the integration of public art adds to local identity and the attractiveness of the place. Mark showed the details of three of the schemes currently underway in Weston super Mare: Big Lamp Corner, Knightstone Island and the pedestrian signage.



The integration of public art adds to local identity

Paul Armstrong, of High Peak Borough Council, highlighted the ten small schemes that had been undertaken to bring local public spaces, which had been neglected, up to standard. These varied from a small area which had taken only a few thousand pounds to clean up and replant, taking only days to complete, to some larger schemes, but all of which had local significance and impacted on local users and visitors. He said that they were all simple projects but were well designed using high quality materials and addressing the needs of residents and business – which is key to public satisfaction. The problems were tackled in partnership and combined the 'cleaner, safer, greener' agenda with that of conservation.



All public realm improvements - large or small - offer a positive impact to users

Kathy Wimble, of Newark and Sherwood District Council, said that the 1993 strategy had been key to establishing clear objectives which everyone could sign up to. Key areas had been identified with an appropriate approach for improvement agreed for each. She explained the detail for these, stressing the quality of materials and attention to detail as well as some of the lessons learned during the process. The schemes have resulted in increased usage and the attraction of further funding, although the problem of delivery vehicles remains difficult to solve. She added that she looked forward to the decriminalisation of parking and getting rid of some yellow lines!



High quality materials and attention to detail are vital during restoration

Nick Corbett, of Derby Cityscape, said that the regeneration company had been set up in 2003 and produced two key documents to raise the quality of design in the city. This approach provided certainty for investors and offered insight into the character of the people and the place. The City had turned its back on the river during post industrial times but the 'serial vision' approach reconnected the streets, squares and fine buildings of the City, as well as connecting it back with the river. The masterplan outputs list offered a huge agenda which meant a massive impact on the city in terms of building sites and disruption. The use of the hoardings, however, offered an opportunity to communicate and to present the vision in a co-ordinated way, and by featuring real people and involving all stakeholders there were few complaints. The co-ordinated pallet of materials and street furniture helps to unify the city and offers an appropriate setting for the historic buildings. Public consultation and positive media

coverage, with local politicians on-side, provides a clear message to investors, which in turn boosts confidence.



Hoardings offer a way to communicate with local residents

The Leicester case study was presented by **Deborah Rose of the City Council, Marie Burns of Burns and Nice and Alastair Leighton of Gillespies**, who were working together to deliver the Leicester City Centre Public Realm Strategy.

Deborah explained that the objectives for the whole City were established with the formation of the Urban Regeneration Company. A full appraisal of the City, which concluded that it was underperforming, led to the identification of character areas and a robust strategy. This would increase its economic performance and provide what people want and what they would stay for. Several urban regeneration projects had been undertaken and Marie went on to discuss each in some detail, emphasising the social and economic benefits of an enhanced public realm. These included improved accessibility, social inclusion, the provision of multi-functional public spaces, improvements to city connections and visual order, consistent high quality design and reinforcement of the city's identity.

The strategy included a public realm framework, with strategies for materials, street furniture, lighting, wayfinding and tree planting.

Alastair said that the 'clutter creep' which has been experienced over the years can be dealt with through a coherent public realm strategy, which also serves as a point of reference for designers as the projects are implemented. He said that it was important to establish guiding principles concerning the hierarchy of streets and places and how they work, as well as how it might work in the future, with key linkages, materials, trees and other elements. Although the strategy should be robust, he said that it should also be capable of being tested and accepting interpretation, reinforcing the collaborative process.



'Clutter creep' can be dealt with through a coherent public realm strategy

Deborah concluded by saying that the strategy could be applied and interpreted in other areas of the City for wider regeneration, and her current project would take forward the waterside area, which would not only offer a place for people to enjoy but also attract investment. The delivery programme, she expected, would lever in private sector investment as it demonstrates the commitment of the local authority and its partners.

Good project management was vital, she said, with passionate people who would deliver the strategy and support the process - which had been a steep learning curve.

The Public Realm Strategy includes strategies for all aspects including Street furniture



After lunch delegates had a choice of guided walking tours of Leicester to explore the enhancement projects underway in the City.

During the afternoon a range of workshops were conducted to explore practical elements of the streetscape; these were facilitated by representatives from private sector companies working in the field.

These were:

- The importance of good lighting within the town environment with Allan Howard from Mouchel Parkman
- 'Intelligent streets' – making surfaces work for you with Roger Beckett & Peter Wear from Woodhouse Projects
- Wayfinding and visitor orientation with Sue Manley from Placemarque
- How to plan, fund and deliver public art programmes with Catherine Thomas from International Art Consultants
- Safe and accessible streets for all with Martina Juvara & Enrique Garcia from Colin Buchanan
- Innovative signage with Tom Bland from 3M

For the final presentation **Colin Davis** asked why so many of our streets were still so shabby after years of campaigning by organisations such as those represented at the conference. The advice is out there, he said, and much of it is now supported by the Department in the 'Manual for Streets'. Several things were vital to make it happen more widely, these included:

- Funding for maintenance as well as capital projects
- Training – in design – for planners, traffic engineers etc
- Cooperation between departments - planners, conservation officers, traffic engineers etc
- The fusion of the science of engineering and the art of design
- Economic regeneration projects must include the outer edges of towns and cities
- Council Leaders and Chief Executives must use their position to bring about an overarching, co-ordinated approach.

Colin was in no doubt that everyone whose work impacts on the streetscape was doing their best, however, it was the lack of co-ordination and shared responsibility that continued to

militate against an improvement in the situation. The example set by Daniel Moyland in Kensington and Chelsea was a demonstration of one person's passion and determination to make something happen.



The fusion of the science of engineering and the art of design

Colin used some of the images from the 'gallery' to highlight the elements which can make a good streetscape and those which can be avoided, without breaking any regulations!

Ian thanked everyone for their contributions to the day, and said that the Forum would be continuing to work on this topic and welcomed the further involvement of delegates.

For copies of the powerpoint presentations please contact the EHTF office.



English Historic Towns Forum
PO Box 22 Bristol BS16 1RZ

Tel: 0117 975 0459 Fax: 0117 975 0460

Email: ehrf@uwe.ac.uk

Web: www.ehrtf.org.uk

