

# Catalysts For The Future

**Conservation areas have a crucial role to play in the regeneration of our towns, cities and rural areas – and also for meeting the challenges of climate change.**

Because they are rooted in the past, conservation areas can provide the focus around which community regeneration can take place. It is a common misconception that conservation areas just protect affluent neighbourhoods. In the South-East, for instance, half of all conservation areas are in the top 50 per cent of the region's most deprived areas.

Seaside towns are a particular hotspot and a government priority for action. The recent Sea Change initiative has channelled £45 million into run-down seaside towns. Andy Brown celebrates Margate and its potential for culturally led regeneration through an innovative partnership between the creative arts and heritage sectors.

Will Holborow reflects on the lessons learned from the disposal of entire historic areas on the Ministry of Defence estate, while Simon Baynham demonstrates how enlightened estate management fostered the revitalisation of Marylebone High Street into a national success story.

Case studies of the North-West region and central London by Henry Owen-John and Paddy Pugh demonstrate how even the most challenging areas can be reinvented by vision – vision by the local authority, vision by the developer and vision by English Heritage; the ability to see how redundant or derelict areas can provide the catalyst for the regeneration of entire neighbourhoods such as Ancoats in Liverpool or King's Cross in London.

Reusing our existing building stock makes sound environmental sense too. About 80 per cent of the buildings we will be using in 30 years' time exist today. With the spectre of climate change, and the need to maximise the use of existing resources and the embodied energy they contain, responsible stewardship is essential. We must ensure that buildings are well maintained, reusable and flexible to future needs. Chris Wood explains how simple measures to upgrade our existing houses can be carried out without destroying their character and still deliver major carbon savings. ■

Hastings, East Sussex: the distinctive 'net shops', in which the fishermen dried and maintained their nets, help to give this historic seaside town its own special character. © Andrew Brown

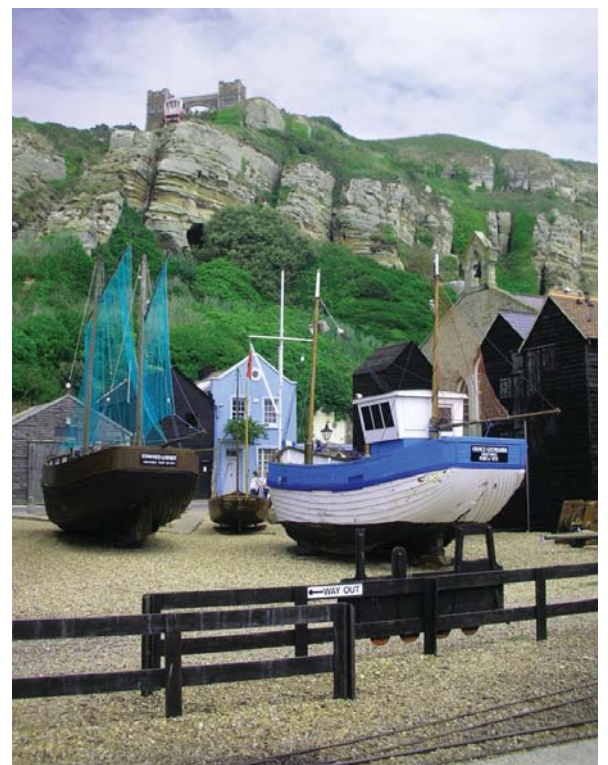
## **A creative future for seaside resorts: Margate, Turner and beyond**

Andy Brown

*Planning and Development Regional Director, English Heritage South-East Region*

England's seaside resorts face a more hopeful future now than for many years. 'Staycationing' (holidaying in one's home country rather than abroad), whether for economic or for environmental reasons, appears to be adding to the increasing market for short-stay holidays at the seaside. The plight of many resorts has been acknowledged through the Communities and Local Government Select Committee Report on coastal towns, and the DCMS funding for coastal resorts through the 'Sea Change' bidding rounds has injected welcome investment.

The rich historic character of several of the South-East's former seaside resorts has been recognised as a vital component of their regeneration. In Hastings, for example, the distinctive 'net shops', in which the fishermen dried and maintained their nets, helps to differentiate Hastings from



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competitors when potential visitors are choosing where to holiday. Ramsgate has established a distinctive identity through its magnificent historic harbour area.

A characterful environment enriches the quality of the holiday-makers' visits. Ryde, on the Isle of Wight, which had the unusual distinction of being a winter resort because of its mild climate, has invested in its heritage of shops and arcades to offer visitors and residents alike an interesting shopping experience. Following on from the exemplary Seafront Development Initiative at Brighton, Worthing's regeneration plans centre on improving its seafront public realm to support and reinvigorate the many historic assets there, including the Dome Cinema (Grade II\*) and pier.

There is often an affinity for former seaside resorts, with their tradition of bohemian lifestyles, among artistic communities. Bungalow Town at Shoreham-by-Sea was popularised after Marie Loftus, 'the Sarah Bernhardt of the Music Halls', set up home there in a converted railway carriage. Her friends had bungalows built, creating a thriving artistic centre, and for a while after the First World War Shoreham Beach was the home of British film-making. Folkestone's Tontine Street, a Victorian development of shops, has become the focus of an artistic community that is successfully diversifying the local economy.

Margate, arguably the original mass-market seaside resort, is on the verge of a breakthrough in the way its heritage of buildings, spaces and associations contribute to its regeneration. Over the next three years, Margate expects to transform itself from the location for the proverbial wet weekend to a destination worthy of its proud past.

Margate's flagship project is the Turner Contemporary Gallery, designed by David Chipperfield Architects, which draws on the town's association with the artist J M W Turner (1775–1851), who was a regular visitor throughout his life. One of the town's best-kept secrets, however, is the remarkable quality of its Old Town. Investment in recent years, thanks in large part to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Townscape Heritage Initiative and EU funding streams, has reversed the post-Second World War under-investment in both buildings and the public realm. As a result, Margate Old Town provides a distinctive character that works in tandem with the modernity offered by the Turner Contemporary Gallery as a 'something old, something new' destination.

Once in Margate itself, the story of the resort is captivating, although currently told rather too



Margate's Old Town – one of this traditional seaside resort's best-kept secrets and a vital key to its regeneration through a combination of culture and heritage.

© Andrew Brown

traditionally in a series of interpretive boards. The fashion for sea-bathing and all the rituals of social life around it are manifest in the buildings and squares. The enigmatic Shell Grotto and the town's ultra-traditional museum are currently accessible to interested visitors, but much of Margate's characterful historic environment, ranging from the fine Maxwell Fry station of 1926 at the western end of the town to the former lido at the eastern end, remains under-exploited.

The inspiration of Turner and the creative programme being delivered as part of the Turner Contemporary Gallery project has already nurtured a creative community in Margate that is taking advantage not only of the legendary light but also the town's affordable accommodation. Public art enlivens the historic streets, and projects such as Artangel's *Margate Exodus*, including the burning of Anthony Gormley's *Waste Man*, have achieved international profile.

The opportunity exists in Margate to bring these three dimensions of regeneration together in a single integrated programme in which art, creativity and heritage combine in a new sustainable business model. With a bespoke Community Development Trust to broker solutions, the richness of character in the Old Town could be sustained by the use of upper floors and ancillary buildings as studio spaces. In return the tenants could be helped to keep on top of routine maintenance through an affordable service on the continental *Monumentenwacht* model. Improvements to the public realm, especially the lighting and signage that is needed in association with the Turner Contemporary Gallery, could enhance the Old

Town too. The potential of the collaboration between the creative and heritage communities to engage residents and visitors in the narrative of Margate is one of the most exciting prospects.

The rebirth of the Dreamland amusement park would compliment perfectly the Turner Contemporary in conserving the distinctive character of the place. In July the HLF awarded a development grant of £384,500 which may allow the flagship Grade II\* listed cinema to become the gateway to the world's first amusement park exclusively of historic rides. Designed by Iles, Leathart and Granger in 1935, the style was used by the Odeon company from 1936 onwards. At the time of writing, a decision is awaited on the application to the Sea Change funding programme for a substantial investment in this project.<sup>7</sup>

English Heritage, Arts Council England and Thanet Council are finalising how to take this innovative programme forward so that the cultural ecology is fit for the opening of the Turner Contemporary Gallery in 2011. If successful, this model of symbiosis between creativity and heritage can be exported to similarly challenging seaside resorts. The benefits of investing in the character of historic seaside resorts will then be seen in the context of the government's vision for Creative Britain as further evidence of the relevance of the historic environment to our future economic prosperity. ■



The redevelopment of Dreamland will reinstate popular seaside creativity and heritage in its true home, at the heart of Margate. © Andrew Brown

## Bringing redundant government sites back to life

Will Holborow

*Head of Government Historic Estates Unit, English Heritage*

The past 30 years have witnessed an unprecedented sale of surplus heritage sites from the central government estate. This process is by no means at an end as there are numerous sites that are still in the process of disposal. This article focuses on former military sites and mental hospitals, which tend to be large in scale, often encompassing extensive groups of buildings that have a distinctive institutional character. It offers an overview of the disposal and regeneration process, and how the various parties involved can work together to achieve a successful outcome.

### Background

Since the early 1980s, changes in defence policy have resulted in the closure of numerous military establishments, including naval bases, barracks, research facilities and RAF airfields. Areas that have been shaped by their military past, such as Aldershot, Chatham, Colchester, Gosport, Plymouth, Portsmouth and Woolwich, have had to adjust to this contraction of the Ministry of Defence estate by planning for new civilian uses. There has been a comparable contraction of the National Health Service historic estate throughout England, with the disposal of older hospitals. The policy of 'Care in the Community' resulted in the closure of almost all the traditional Victorian mental asylums during the 1980s and 1990s. Many former government buildings have a distinctive historic or architectural character and are protected by listing. Some sites have been designated as conservation areas or included in English Heritage's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.

In exceptional cases, the government has used public endowments to support the transfer of nationally important heritage sites to charitable trusts, beginning with Chatham Historic Dockyard and Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust in the 1980s and followed in the 1990s by Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills Trust, the Somerset House Trust, and the Greenwich Foundation for the Royal Naval College. However, the great majority of disposal sites have been sold on the open market for commercial development.

Government policy is to obtain best value from disposals, taking into account public and community benefits as well as the financial return to



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the taxpayer. In exceptional cases, ministers have backed the sale of historic buildings at below full market value where there is an identifiable benefit involved, as in the sale of the Royal Army Medical College on Millbank in London to Chelsea College of Art.

### Protection

Many disposal sites include individually listed buildings or scheduled monuments. A small but significant proportion of sites have some form of area protection as well. For example, of the former 96 hospital sites transferred to English Partnerships (now part of the Homes and Communities Agency) in 2005, 4 were on English Heritage's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens and 5 were protected as conservation areas. Several former military airfields are similarly protected as conservation areas.

### Themes and issues

The viability of converting old government buildings to new uses has been demonstrated by countless examples around the country where historic buildings are the focus of successful new neighbourhoods. For example, in Gosport, Hampshire, there is an extensive mixed-use regeneration area that encompasses the ordnance buildings of Priddy's Hard and the navy victualling buildings of Royal Clarence Yard. Two adjoining groups of barrack buildings (St George Barracks, North and South) have been sympathetically converted to residential use. In some cases, historic buildings have been incorporated in new industrial parks – the former Royal Aircraft Establishment Factory Site at Farnborough being a notable and successful example.

The road to regeneration can be long and difficult. Local planning issues and downturns in the economy can cause considerable delays. Buildings on disposal sites have often been functionally redundant and neglected for years prior to sale; the backlog of repairs can be a deterrent to potential purchasers. Even after disposal, the planning process can take more than a decade to resolve in some cases. For example, Woolwich Arsenal, a 31-hectare (77-acre) site facing the Thames, retains 22 listed buildings and structures ranging in date from 1696 to 1856. In 1997 English Partnerships acquired it from the Ministry of Defence, with a £25 million dowry to fund decontamination and building repairs. The majority of the listed buildings have now been repaired and adapted for new uses, and development is proceeding in accordance with an



agreed master-plan. Almost 2,000 new homes have been created, nearly half of the planned total.

### Lessons learnt

The following issues are crucial to securing a successful outcome in managing the transition of heritage sites from institutional ownership to the public realm.

First, the department involved must ensure that the disposal process is handled efficiently and sensitively, in accordance with official Department for Culture, Media and Sport guidance (DCMS 1999). The aim should be to avoid piecemeal development, which could leave heritage assets isolated, or a protracted period of vacancy, which is likely to result in their decline. The method of sale needs to allow for the assessment of proposals made by

Shoebury Garrison, Essex: the Officers' Terrace and other historic buildings on the site have been sympathetically converted to residential use following years of neglect.

© English Heritage

Chemistry laboratory (foreground) and Grand Store at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich; both now converted to residential use.

© Alan Johnson



Knowle Village, Fareham, Hampshire – the scale and materials of new development (foreground) are respectful of the retained historic buildings of this former mental hospital.  
© Alan Johnson



potential purchasers, to ensure that the heritage assets find sustainable new ownership.

Second, there needs to be clarity and consensus in the planning process. This is usually articulated through a planning brief, master-plan or supplementary planning document. These strategic documents may need to be supported by more detailed studies such as conservation management plans. A good relationship between the department, the local planning authority and stakeholders such as English Heritage is critical. Active engagement of the local community and other interest groups at the right stage will help to give the process greater credibility and robustness.

Third, there has to be a realistic approach to the economics of regeneration by all parties involved. Large sites in disadvantaged areas can pose a particular challenge. The marketing of vacant sites and the pace of regeneration following their sale will be affected by local economic conditions. Property-owning departments can assess the proposals of potential purchasers to make sure they meet agreed planning and conservation objectives, as well as being economically sustainable.

Finally, adaptations to historic buildings and any new development need to be designed with the utmost care. This requires a deep understanding and appreciation of the existing architecture. The setting of historic buildings needs to be protected from encroachment by unsympathetic new development. The treatment of highways, parking areas, private and public open space is equally important. Where mature landscape already exists, this should be conserved and integrated into the new layout. ■

#### REFERENCE

Department for Culture, Media and Sport 1999. *The Disposal of Historic Buildings: Guidance Note for Government Departments and Non-departmental Public Bodies*. London: DCMS

## The revitalisation of Marylebone High Street

Simon Baynham

*Property Director, The Howard de Walden Estate*

Back in 1995 the pedestrian flow in Marylebone High Street was so poor that one influential local commentator said that you could fire a cannonball down the street with no risk of hitting anybody. Since the 1960s, the High Street had gradually lost its way. What had once been a thriving community of independent retailers and artisans went into long and gradual decline throughout the 1970s and 1980s, before finally collapsing in the recession of the early 1990s. By 1995 a third of the shops were either vacant or occupied by temporary charity shops, which were there to reduce the rates liability. It was a pretty desperate situation. It was beginning to look as though a cannonball might be the kindest option, just to put the place out of its misery.

Looking at Marylebone High Street today, that mid-1990s nadir seems a lifetime ago. Business is booming and footfall is currently three times greater than it was 12 years ago. Even the present recession has done little to dent the street's progress. During the last 12 months we have had just one shop available to let and we received 10 offers within a matter of weeks. The Colliers rental survey recently confirmed that Marylebone High Street was one of only four high streets in the UK where rents had advanced over the past year.

The dramatic turnaround of what is now one of London's best-loved high streets was no accident. Instead it came about as the result of a generation change in the management at the Howard de Walden Estate – the area's major landowner. The new management came to the conclusion that revitalising the High Street's retail offering would provide a boost to the whole area and lift the office and residential values of the estate's adjoining properties.

Back in 1995 it was clear to us that to revitalise the street we needed to attract shoppers from outside the immediate area, and we felt that a supermarket could be a major draw. Despite receiving significantly higher offers from Sainsbury's and Tesco, the estate chose Waitrose – a retailer we believed would act as a magnet for residents and workers from further afield. Choosing the right supermarket was the easy part – creating a suitable space within a densely populated conservation area was considerably more difficult. Thankfully both the estate and Westminster City Council were convinced of the importance of this development,



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and despite protracted delays none of the considerable hurdles proved insurmountable. Waitrose opened in 1999.

With the new supermarket set to anchor the middle of the High Street, the estate turned its attention to the north end, where a large derelict tyre depot offered a stark visual representation of the area's decay. The estate agreed to sell a long lease to the Conran Shop for a 2320-square-metre (25,000-square-foot) store: its glamorous presence would help attract other quality retailers to the smaller units in the High Street. Conran opened its rather stylish doors in 1998.

With these two big-name stores in place, we could work on improving the remainder of the High Street. One significant problem was that the estate controlled only 40 per cent of the street's 85 shops and restaurants, so to increase our ability to shape the street we needed to buy up as many long leases as possible. Having heard plenty of empty promises in the past, many of the leaseholders were sceptical about the chances of the High Street ever being regenerated, so were willing to sell for a very sensible price. Our level of control quickly increased to around 70 per cent of the High Street's units.

The next challenge was to improve the quality and variety of the retailers. Removing inappropriate tenants was the hardest part of the renewal project – many had statutory rights and could renew their leases at a market rate, and the estate had very few legal powers to move them on. The best avenue open to us was to offer attractive terms on alternative accommodation in the area's side streets. It was a difficult time – we were always conscious that we were dealing with people's livelihoods, people who in some cases had spent their whole working lives on Marylebone High Street. We drew some bad press at the time, but we remained confident in the long-term benefits of our plan.

Once we had possession of some of the smaller units, we had to make them more attractive to our desired retailers. Many units were awkwardly shaped, damp and uneconomic in size. A typical Victorian shop will offer just 32 square metres (350 square feet) of trading space with a light-well at the rear, leading through to a small storage room. In most cases we were able to cover over the light-well and knock the shop through, doubling the size of the open retail accommodation. We then converted the basements to provide sufficient storage and staff accommodation or, in some cases, additional retail space.



Marylebone High Street in the 1990s – a once thriving commercial community in desperate decline. © Howard de Walden Estates

Adjoining many of the High Street's shops were the residential entrances serving the upper-floor accommodation, which meant that the retail frontage was small and narrow. To make the shop fronts more attractive, we tried wherever possible to carry out lateral conversions of the residential apartments across three or four buildings, which could then be accessed via a single staircase. The redundant entrances could then be incorporated into the retail space, allowing for more expansive frontages.

We were keen to retain some of the quirkiness and character of the Victorian shops rather than just knocking out dull rectangular units. Examples of very useable but irregular-shaped shops include The Natural Kitchen at 77/78 Marylebone High Street and Skandium at 85/86 Marylebone High Street. We were also conscious that not everything needed changing, and that it was important to look after shops such as the wonderful galleried Daunt Books and the ever-popular Patisserie Valerie. The estate made a special effort to retain these tenants by offering comfortable terms at renewal.

Tenant selection for our new-look High Street

Bringing Marylebone High Street back to life – one key to success was to retain some of the quirkiness and character of the Victorian shops rather than just knocking out dull rectangular units. © Howard de Walden Estates





Marylebone High Street transformed – today business is booming and footfall three times what it was 12 years ago.

© Howard de Walden Estates

was a fascinating phase. We did not want a clone high street of major multiples, but nor did we want the expensive retailers that occupy Bond Street.

We wanted retailers with a point of difference – exclusive in terms of merchandise, but not in terms of price. We wanted to create a unique, friendly urban village. We were fortunate to find a young retail agency called CWM, which seemed to fully understand what we were trying to achieve. We went through a huge informal consultation – visiting numerous retailers and talking incessantly with residents, friends and anyone else with an opinion. The question we asked was: ‘What do residents and workers want on a day-to-day basis and what will make them visit Marylebone High Street rather than competing streets?’ We did not always get our selection right, as some of the new retailers gave outstanding presentations but turned out to be a disappointment – an inevitable consequence of dealing with independents without track records. Others surpassed all expectations, and the area was soon graced with the likes of Cath Kidston, Cologne & Cotton, Divertimenti, VV Rouleaux, Fishworks, The Ginger Pig, La Fromagerie, Rococo and La Pain Quotidien.

With the introduction of the popular Sunday farmers’ market and a Saturday food and fashion market called Cabbages & Frocks, Marylebone High Street has now become a genuine seven-day-a-week offering, with some traders reporting Sundays as their best trading day.

With the High Street now a thriving retail destination the bad press we received in the early days has turned into glowing tributes. We no longer find it necessary to spend thousands on promoting the street – its unique tenant mix promotes itself perfectly well – but we continue to organise the

annual Christmas Lights and Summer Fayre, both of which offer an important showcase for our urban village. This year more than 30,000 people visited the Summer Fayre on a sunny summer’s day. In a survey commissioned by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, Radio 4 listeners voted the High Street as London’s favourite street, and the estate won The Academy of Urbanism’s inaugural award for the best street project in Britain and Ireland.

But for me, the satisfaction is not that we have achieved recognition and awards, but the simple fact that I can look down Marylebone High Street and see and feel the wonderful community atmosphere and the crafted balance of shops. It is also the satisfaction of having confounded traditional retail theory by creating a successful modern high street while avoiding blue-chip multiples. In a sense, we have fired a cannonball up Marylebone High Street, but only a metaphorical one. ■

### Changing places: celebrating conservation and regeneration in England’s North-West

Henry Owen John

*Planning and Development Regional Director, English Heritage North-West Region*

Twenty years ago an unnatural silence was one of the most conspicuous characteristics of an area just to the east of Manchester’s city centre. Vast textile mills, once full of workers and clattering machinery, stood empty and derelict except for some light industry and some criminal activity. The place that Engels and Marx had studied as part of their seminal works on the condition of the working classes, and that had exported its innovative fireproof technologies to America, had lost its purpose.

Sixty kilometres (40 miles) to the west, swathes of once-prosperous and elegant Georgian terraces on the margins of Liverpool city centre were also only partly occupied and in decline, the scars of the Toxteth riots still visible.

A hundred kilometres (60 miles) to the north, but a world away, a market town overlooking Morecambe Bay from the foot of the Lake District fells did not show such catastrophic signs of failure, but nevertheless the effect of changes in the agricultural economy were there to see in the physical fabric of the buildings and streets.

Today, Ancoats, Canning (and other parts of inner Liverpool) and Ulverston are very different



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places. What they have in common is that their historic character and appearance, previously masked by dereliction and decay, has been used as an essential component of the much-abused 'r' word: regeneration. All continue to face challenges, but there are examples of successes to celebrate, some of which can act as a model for what can happen elsewhere. So, in today's bureaucratic speak, what does success look like and what is there to celebrate?

Ancoats today is still work in progress, but has been transferred from the no-go zone of the 1990s. Importantly it still contains a mix of uses, and is not completely overtaken by residential apartments shoe-horned into the former mills, although this is a significant and valuable component. Sankey's Soap, one of the foremost places on Manchester's

clubbing scene, is still housed in the lower levels of the Grade II\* Beehive Mill, and buildings which offer business and commercial uses provide for the type of mix which can help to make an area work. New build on sites where there was little of historic value or where structures of significance have been lost is also an important component of success: the types of uses that may not be easily accommodated in a highly graded listed building can often go in here. The spaces between the buildings are critical: Ancoats has a road system without priority at junctions, a corresponding lack of clutter and a better-than-normal relationship between cars and people.

In Canning today it seems inconceivable that splendid Georgian homes were ever at risk. In the early days of regeneration it was the housing asso-



Murrays Mills in the Ancoats district of Liverpool before and after its restoration by the Ancoats Building Preservation Trust (now known as Heritage Works). Juggling the varied objectives of different funding partners has been a huge challenge and the new uses that will secure the long-term future of the conservation area are still being put in place.

© Ian Finlay architects (before) and © BDP/HWBPT (after)



The once-prosperous Georgian terraces of Canning suffered severely from economic and population decline for much of the second half of the 20th century. Now in good order again, this part of Liverpool stands a good chance of riding out the recession, aided by the popularity of its distinctive historic character with owners and tenants alike. © English Heritage



Ulverston in Cumbria: formerly a struggling market town, Ulverston has been reinventing itself as a cultural hub with an emphasis on locally produced food.  
© North West Evening Mail



ciations and social landlords that came to the rescue. This was not without its problems – the subdivision of the generous interiors into apartments could not be easily done without causing some harm, and maintenance standards are sometimes less good than those of some (but not all) private owners. But without the housing associations, more terraces would have been lost when conditions were off-putting for the private investor. Because the regeneration of Canning has, in essence, worked, the focus is now elsewhere – for example, on the warehouses and merchants' houses of the Ropewalks, which grew up close to the Old Dock. But it should not be forgotten how close we came to losing something that we now take for granted. Put in the context of the decline in Liverpool's population from 825,000 after the Second World War to 450,000 in the mid-1990s, this near loss should not seem so surprising.

Ulverston has done a good job of re-inventing itself in recent years, notwithstanding the devastating effect that Foot and Mouth disease had on the agricultural and visitor economies. Here the physical renewal of buildings, shop-fronts, streets and squares has formed part of a wider cultural approach to regeneration. Arts businesses have been encouraged and thrive, there are street festivals and the celebration of one of its favourite sons, Stan Laurel, has, even without Oliver Hardy, helped to make Ulverston a place to visit, as well as to live and work in. The emphasis on locally produced food is also helping to sustain the economy in a way that allows continued investment in the town.

In these three very different places in the North-West of England there is undoubtedly success to celebrate – derelict buildings repaired and brought back into use, streets and squares re-laid with good

materials, a focus on the pedestrian rather than the car and a new localism. The historic and architectural character and appearance of these places, reflected in the listed status of key buildings and conservation-area designations, has been one of the drivers of high-quality regeneration. But such success does not just happen – it has to be worked at.

There are a number of ingredients essential to the regeneration of places in a way that draws on their special character and distinctiveness. These include the vision to see through dereliction to what might be; the strategy and partnership working needed to deliver it; and the resilience and commitment to overcoming the obstacles that will inevitably be encountered. Local authorities, regional development agencies and regeneration companies, private owners and developers and the heritage sector, including English Heritage and building preservation trusts, all have their part to play in ensuring that there are successes like Ancoats, Canning and Ulverston to celebrate in future. ■

## The Regent Quarter, King's Cross

Paddy Pugh

*Planning and Development Regional Director, English Heritage London Region*

The four street blocks to the east of King's Cross Station owe their existence to the transport developments which transformed this part of London in the 19th century. The Regent Canal, completed in 1820, and the Great Northern Railway Company's London terminus, completed in 1852, made this an ideal location for industries needing access to good transport links. Until 1830 this area had been open fields but by 1870 developments such as the St Pancras Ironworks and Henry Pontifex's Copper and Brass Foundry had transformed it into one dominated by industry and warehousing. The buildings were constructed according to best practice of the day, established in the textile mills and dockyard workshops, with solid brick walls surrounding iron and timber framing. When the original industries left, these robust, flexible structures were easy to adapt to new uses.

The result was that 100 years later most of these buildings had survived in their original form. So too had the distinctive pattern of courtyards, alleys and gateways around which they were built. Islington Council had recognised the special character of this coherent group of historic buildings

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and spaces and included all four street blocks within the King's Cross Conservation Area. Very few of the buildings were of a quality that merited listing, but most made a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area. Even so, by the end of the 20th century the area was in serious decline. Uncertainty over the development of London's Eurostar Terminal and a traffic gyratory system introduced in 1963 had left the area blighted. Many of the buildings were underused or derelict, and perceptions of the area were poor.

The planning policy framework was in place to encourage investment and guide change. Regional Planning Guidance had designated King's Cross as 'an opportunity area on the margins of central London'. Islington's Unitary Development Plan had also designated King's Cross as an 'Area of Opportunity'. The council's Planning Brief, produced in 1998, had a primary objective to 'transform an area of long-term decline by providing high-quality development and improving the image and public perception of King's Cross'. Yet landowner P&O Developments, and regeneration agency The King's Cross Partnership could not see any future for the area other than wholesale clearance and redevelopment.

Faced with the prospect of losing such an important part of London's industrial heritage, English Heritage commissioned planning consultancy Urban Initiatives to produce an Urban Design Framework for the area. The study's aim was 'the stimulation of a more creative response to the area's regeneration, one which not only respects the history and conservation area status of the site, but fully exploits the contribution which the existing buildings made to a distinct and unique sense of place'.

First, the practice carried out a systematic analysis of the three street blocks within the ownership of P&O Developments. Then it explored the potential for regenerating one of the blocks through a conservation-led strategy of repair and renewal. This resulted in the identification of four possible options with varying balances of retention and replacement of existing buildings. Overall, the objective was to explore whether a conservation-led strategy could deliver a commercially viable scheme. Engineers Alan Baxter and Associates carried out a condition survey of all the buildings to identify where retention and repair was practicable. Valuers Drivers Jonas tested the financial viability of the options and cost consultants Murdoch Green Kensalls checked that development costs were realistic. Drivers Jonas advised that all four options were commercially viable. In addition, the regeneration of one street block would lift rental values in the wider area by some 25 per cent by stimulating confidence and investment.

The Urban Initiatives Study enabled the landowner and regeneration agency to see King's Cross in a different way – to recognise the inherent qualities and distinctiveness of the buildings which had been hidden by years of decline and under-investment. Persuaded by the potential of the area, P&O Developments instructed architects and landscape consultants to prepare a full development scheme based upon the Urban Initiatives study. The resulting Regent Quarter is a huge success, not just for the developer but also for the city. It has created a vibrant new quarter and transformed perceptions of King's Cross.

This is a classic example of how a conservation-led approach to urban renewal can deliver distinctive and attractive developments by reinforcing the



A small blighted corner of the Regent Quarter conservation area that has been brought back to vibrant life.

© Urban Initiatives (before) and © Nigel Corrie, English Heritage (after)





An architect's impression of how the Regent Quarter conservation area would look once the King's Cross regeneration scheme was complete. © RHWL Architects

qualities and characteristics that make a place special. The Regent Quarter is testimony that it can also deliver commercial viability and wider investment opportunities by changing perceptions and stimulating confidence in the area.

Based on this successful experience, we have applied a similar approach to the Hanway Street conservation area on the borders of Camden and Westminster at the eastern end of Oxford Street. This is a fascinating backwater of attractive, but neglected, domestic-scaled buildings behind much larger buildings on the Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road frontages. The eastern end of Oxford Street has been blighted for years, and the redevelopment of Tottenham Court Road station for Crossrail has generated further uncertainty.

English Heritage has appointed Urban Practitioners supported by Allies & Morrison and CBRE to develop a range of options for retention and renewal coupled with improved connectivity to the surrounding areas – a similar approach to the

Regent Quarter. Each option has been prepared in full recognition of the need to demonstrate economic viability.

In recent years, Westminster City Council has been hugely successful in encouraging the sympathetic revitalisation of similar areas across the West End – at St Christopher's Place, Lancashire Court, Newburgh Street, Seven Dials, and in recent work by the Crown Estate in Swallow Street as part of its ORB project. Cumulatively this is changing people's experience of the West End, as once neglected backwaters are being given a new lease of life adding to the overall commercial attraction. The transformation of the Hanway Street conservation area could offer a further opportunity for sensitive, contextual change and kickstart the regeneration of the entire area. It will require vision and commitment from both the council and the landowners, but English Heritage is determined to ensure that the case for conservation-led regeneration is fully articulated and understood before decisions are taken on its future. ■

### Living sustainably in conservation areas

Chris Wood

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Everyone has a duty to live in a sustainable way, regardless of where they live. Within conservation areas, the aim should be to preserve those features of value that made them worthy of designation while complying with today's imperative to minimise the use of energy, which is fuelling climate change. Unfortunately there is a widespread perception that older buildings are inherently inefficient and solutions point to the replacement of, or drastic alterations to important features such as windows, walls, roofs and chimneys.

Clearly the world's population is not living in a sustainable way. Estimates vary but we need 2 or 3 planet Earths to provide for our present consumption. Using energy is a part of this issue, but is particularly important in England where most of it comes from burning fossil fuels. Reducing the energy used in the home is a very obvious first step towards 'good housekeeping' and more sustainable living. Research commissioned by the Energy Saving Trust indicates that TVs and hi-fis alone account for 16 per cent of the total domestic-energy consumption and the average household has up to 12 appliances left on standby or charging at any time. Major carbon savings can be made through improving the control of, and reducing the temperature for central heating, domestic water and washing machines. Other beneficial changes such as low-energy lighting and efficient boilers have very little impact on the fabric of a building.

Significant improvements to energy efficiency can also be made without harming the character of buildings. Loft insulation is the most obvious, but it is important that it covers those relatively inaccessible areas near the eaves. In most conservation areas windows are a particularly significant and unifying feature and the replacement of timber sashes with double-glazing in PVCu usually destroys this unity. Recent testing commissioned by English Heritage has shown that it is possible to upgrade existing windows to rival the performance of modern double-glazing.

Repairing historic windows must be the first and most sustainable option. Almost all wooden windows more than a hundred years old were made with slow-grown softwood timber, which is extremely difficult to source today. It is a testimony to the quality of this timber that so many windows

survive despite little regular maintenance. The failure to look after old windows is a major reason they are thought to be responsible for most of a building's draughts and heat loss. However, repairs and modern draught-proofing can virtually eliminate such problems. Heat is still lost through glass but the tests showed that net curtains, blinds and heavy curtains will halve this, and closing shutters or installing secondary glazing produces the same results as modern double-glazing. Critics point out that shutters and curtains are only effective at night. However, as people adapt to a more energy-conscious way of living they will quickly learn to leave unoccupied rooms 'closed up', as they were in the days of the previous low-carbon economy.

The same kinds of improvement can be made to steel and iron windows, which are also important features in some conservation areas. English Heritage and Historic Scotland have recently commissioned Glasgow Caledonian University to carry out laboratory tests on a range of alternative energy-saving innovations, all of which aim to improve the performance of historic windows.

The clarion call from many government agencies is to 'insulate, insulate, insulate!' While some insulation may be beneficial, great care is needed. The most effective way of insulating walls is to provide this externally, but this completely changes



The original windows on this terraced house have been draught-proofed. An air-pressure test showed that this was more effective than that found in 90 per cent of today's new buildings.  
© English Heritage





Testing the effectiveness of different improvements on historic steel, cast-iron and timber windows in the environmental chamber at Glasgow Caledonian University.

© Glasgow Caledonian University

the distinctive appearance of stone, brick, flint or timber-framed buildings. Adding a few more centimetres to the outside of a building can also create difficulties around windows, cills, doors and corners. Internal insulation is the more usual option but can lead to an unacceptable loss of floor-space in a small building as well as the destruction of internal features such as fireplaces, skirtings, panelling and covings. Old walls are often damper than modern ones and ill-considered insulation can lead to future problems.

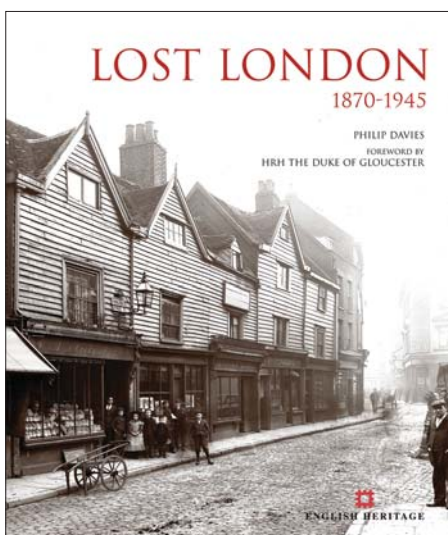
Roofs are vital features in conservation areas, and especially so in the case of terraced houses. For maximum efficiency insulation is best carried out

on top of the rafters but this will lift the roof-line above that of the neighbours. Insulating between the rafters is the obvious alternative solution but again, great care is needed to make sure that there is sufficient ventilation to prevent damp affecting the roof structure.

Chimneys are also essential features of traditional buildings but are often seen as a source of great heat loss, particularly if redundant. However, older buildings need more ventilation than new ones and if doors and windows are draught-proofed then the chimney provides much-needed air changes. Excessive heat loss can be prevented by installing a flue damper in the chimney-breast.

Renewable technologies can be a useful addition once 'good housekeeping' and fabric improvements have been adopted. Their efficiency and cost-effectiveness have yet to be fully demonstrated, however, and many of them – for example small wind turbines and roof-mounted photo-voltaic panels – can have a drastic effect on a conservation area. Solar water heating can bring significant benefits providing it is sited sensibly – ideally off the roof or within a hidden roof slope.

Ultimately, sustainable living requires everyone to carefully consider all their everyday activities – from travelling and working to how they adapt and run their homes. Much can be done now and technological innovation and a 'greening' of the fuel supply will significantly help in the future. To ensure that future generations can also enjoy the distinctive character of our conservation areas, drastic and irreversible change must be limited and the most valued features preserved. ■



## Lost London 1870–1945

by Philip Davies

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