Can Urban Conservation be left to the Market?  
The Value of Partnership-led Conservation 
Regeneration Strategies.

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Abstract

In Europe and the USA there is a growing awareness of the wider benefits of supporting the built heritage directly through the public purse. This paper concentrates on an aspect of research conducted in recent years in the United Kingdom regarding the dynamic benefits of conservation. In the findings of the joint study of the Department of National Heritage, English Heritage and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (The Value of Conservation: 1996) the absence of case studies to provide evidence of the benefits of 'pump-priming' historic areas was recognised and the need to identify the benefits of such action was highlighted. This has further support from the Council of Europe's document Funding the Architectural Heritage (1991) which refers to the importance of monitoring the running, management and re-use of heritage assets. Moreover, examination of case studies allows the opportunity to consider whether investment is able to improve the economic and social performance of an area.

In this paper a comparison will be made of selected exemplar projects in Europe and the USA. Some of the acknowledged direct and indirect benefits of urban conservation strategies are examined. The benefits of co-ordinated partnership action to revitalise historic centres are considered in light of the Council of Europe Helsinki Declaration (1996) in which it was acknowledged that the sustaining of the cultural heritage should be a principle established for combined action in which both public and private operators have a responsibility to assist.

Introduction: The value of the built heritage

Why do we value our built heritage? Alexander (1) recognised that the built heritage provides us with a sense of place and personal identity, and a source of pride, which is of greater importance than its real estate value. Indeed Hubbard (2) suggests that the 'psychological and aesthetic value' of the conserved environment is so important that knowledge of peoples' conscious or subconscious commitment to buildings from the past should play a crucial part in the development of conservation policy and practice. Tiesdell et al (3)
further identify that the heritage has a wide range of values: aesthetic value; value for architectural, environmental, and functional diversity; value for cultural memory or heritage; resource value; as well as an economic and commercial value.

The property owner will generally only consider the ‘investment value’ of an individual property. The Investment Property DataBank (4) has provided evidence that heritage listing can secure a higher investment value over comparable non-protected property in desirable investment locations. However, in the majority of locations this is not the case and there is significant recent evidence that heritage protection will restrict the value to the owner through an inability to adapt or redevelop. Left to market forces alone this could result in the dismantling of the historic built environment (5). There is, therefore, an argument for intervention by the public sector in the market. Yet demands of accountability mean that the use of public funds must be scrutinised to see whether there is value to society from investing in the heritage.

In a recent study by the European Commission (6) the built heritage has been described as a ‘public good’ which for the public sector carries a specific responsibility as ‘it is only good housekeeping to honour what history has handed us’. A similar conclusion has been made by the Council of Europe (7) which recognises the cultural heritage as an economic, tourist, scientific, educational and sustainable asset which needs to be protected by the commitment of the whole community through partnership of public and private sectors. Moreover, in a wide-ranging review of learned literature on conservation sponsored by the United Kingdom’s Department of National Heritage (8) it has been concluded that there may be ‘multi-faceted outcomes of conserving the cultural built heritage’ in terms of the dynamic benefits to society. However, it further identifies that there is little material other than ‘anecdotal evidence’ to support or refute this hypothesis. Whether the available evidence should be described so harshly is doubted although it would be fair to say that in order to properly test the wider benefits of the built heritage as a premise for investing in it, an analysis of case studies of conservation approaches and strategies should be made according to pre-determined criteria.

**Existing evidence**

**North America**

In the United States of America, the value of the heritage is regarded as being ‘in credit’ in economic and social terms. By example, Purloff (9) has stated that that the concept of an ‘amenity strategy’ is ‘an overall empowerment document for jobs'. Currently in the region of 60 US cities are developing ‘cultural or heritage plans' because it has been realised that such action can create major
economic benefits. Moreover, McNulty (10) in an economic review of a 7 year amenity programme in relation to 100 US cities considered whether environmental, cultural, recreation and heritage values could in essence be taken to the bank as a way of creating jobs and, further, whether they could be taken to communities that had derelict factories and unemployed workers, and be offered as a job reinvestment strategy. One of the most significant findings of this review was that heritage resources are probably the cheapest and most effective public relations asset in a market strategy. Moreover, he encouraged investment in the heritage, concluding that it was one of the best avenues to create jobs and other opportunity in cities in North America.

The North American property market appears to hold a positive view towards investment in historic districts (which may be contrasted to the approach in the United Kingdom). Designation of historic districts along with neighbourhood preservation and revitalisation schemes have grown in popularity in the United States over the past two decades. Some would argue that attitudes toward historic culture have become too commercialised with an over emphasis on the benefits for tourists. Yet it has been noted (11) that designation of an area for special protection can immediately improve the investment value of an area, creating a prestige value for historic buildings. At the same time this has led to criticism that the acceleration of capital values correspondingly increases rental levels and in turn may lead to rising displacement of low income and elderly households.

Research undertaken in a historic district of Chicago by Schaeffer and Ahern (12), did find significant gains in housing sales rates and prices following designation as a protected area in 1977. However, it further identified the direct costs of conservation. Thus it was recognised that although an area may improve in investment terms, the problems of gentrification and subsequent displacement of residents, and the loss of small businesses, will have a direct impact upon the local community unless the process is carefully managed. Moreover, in the same study, research into two other locally designated historic districts in 1982 it was identified that there was a significant decline in property values following designation. The authors speculated that much more stringent controls over property usage in these areas dampened investor confidence (13).

Gale (14) has suggested that although designation does not significantly effect the economic value of real estate 'the intricate processes of speculation, rehabilitation, and reinvestment associated with revitalising neighbourhoods' may nevertheless inflate property values'. He further indicated that many US urban planners have embraced historic area designation as a device not just for encouraging historic protection but more significantly as a means to stimulate property rehabilitation and community reinvestment in infrastructure, i.e., by raising pride in neighbourhood history and the built environment it has been found that resident confidence in the future of the area has increased.
Heritage can also be seen as a resource for social bonding. In Chattanooga, Tennessee, USA, the cultural heritage was used to bring together the immigrants, inner-city dwellers and minorities in seeing value in their city (15). This approach was used to solve the major problem of derelict housing within the city which became a major civic issue. By the encouragement of dialogue between the public and private sector, approximately 14,000 existing substandard units within a designated area will be wholly sponsored by the private sector, this began out of a heritage commitment of defining Chattanooga as a liveable place.

The United Kingdom Evidence
Lichfield (16), has examined the intangible quality of the cultural heritage in his assessment of the 'comprehensive redevelopment' versus 'conservation' options for Covent Garden. In 1973, 250 historic buildings were listed for protection effectively saving the area from complete destruction. Lichfield gives us an indication of market pressures and the social externalities which could have been dismissed had the case for conservation been lost. He indicates that through evaluation methodology comprehensive redevelopment could be assessed to be highly profitable in financial terms. But the potential benefits would be lost when social costs were taken into account. Moreover, proposed displacement of housing and business would have borne most heavily on low income residents and small business operations.

The test of time has shown that investment in retaining this historic quarter of London was worthwhile. The area now has some of the highest retail and restaurant rents in London while local residents and business office uses are still evident. If comprehensive redevelopment had taken place what loss would the economy have seen? The list is endless: tourism, direct and indirect employment (such as the suppliers to restaurateurs and retailers), the skills that have been promoted through sales of crafts, even the street artists would have lost one of their best avenues in England. Moreover the residents of Covent Garden have perhaps one of the most desirable locations in the world.

The Covent Garden example identified the need for an understanding of the potential that historic buildings and areas can produce. Imaginative and flexible solutions are often needed to release the economic value which may be hidden in a protected building or areas. Clearer guidance as to the extent of protection or permissible intervention would assist potential investors. But in the United Kingdom the tendency has been for the property market to be reactive towards the historic environment and often in a negative sense, rather than being pro-active (for conservation).

All too often conservation strategies have been developed when amenity groups and the local community see their heritage being demolished. Such was the case in Bristol in the 1970's. The city planners were severely criticised for their policy approaches adopted between 1968 to 1973 which allowed a series
of developments that wrecked its complex topography and skyline. However, in 1972 conservation area designation began and by 1977 the Historic Building Council (HBC) targeted Bristol as one of the first successful long-term UK conservation strategies. This was due to a combination of factors but mainly as a result of the positive interaction of public and private sectors. Work took place in 8 sites which formed a 'ring of dereliction'. With financial support from the HBC of £1.3m in the first five years of the programme and further annual allocation for the following five years of £0.25m the city was able to encourage refurbishment by the private sector. The programme had 3 aims: to tackle key groups of buildings; to preserve vital elements of the city's heritage and restore continuity and coherence in the central areas; and to reintroduce housing into inner city areas. Over its full period 88 % of the derelict historic buildings located in the centre of Bristol were restored. With a public investment of £1.85m for a return of £9m from private sources within the first 5 years and an investment of £1.95m for a return of £12m in the second period the relevant gearing was regarded as a success. This was due to the funding of structural repairs through public sources which acted as a catalyst for private expenditure.

Aside from the improvement of the historic fabric itself, the important benefits that were derived from the scheme were identified as:

- a greater diversity of uses and businesses than from equivalent redevelopment.
- the restoration of individual shops with housing above.
- the development of new small business enterprises by local people.
- increased vitality and diversity in the urban scene.
- a social contribution to the city.
- visual and aesthetic improvement. (17)

A more pro-active approach can be indicated in the partnership arrangement created initially by the Civic Trust and Calderdale District Council, namely the Calderdale Inheritance Project (CIP) which first centred on the Yorkshire textile town of Halifax. In this case there was an attempt to evaluate the costs and benefits of the initiative although it was recognised that the outputs would be 'hard to quantify' (18). However, a description of the benefits suffice in providing evidence of the social and economic effects within the Calderdale area.

The individuality of this project is evident by its community driving force. The downturn in the economy affecting the local textile industry in the 1970's and 1980's resulted in significant job losses. Many historic mills and other business buildings became redundant. Shops began to suffer as falling incomes took away their trade. There was even a threat to close the railway link to major cities. The final blow came in 1982 with the closure of the Dean Clough, the largest industrial mill complex in Europe, which had provided strength in
the area for 150 years.

In 1985 the local council announced a decade of special activity and established the CIP initiative. Its aim was to enhance key areas and stimulate a process of reinvestment and regeneration through public meetings (to establish priorities of action); a series of small scale improvements (to achieve maximum impact and encourage private investment); and publicity and promotion (to raise the profile of the programme both locally and nationally). The programme created a whole new process of urban and social regeneration which was successful due to the direct involvement of local people.

Total capital expenditure by the council over 8 years was approximately £1m, external resources from public agencies attracted £2m, and approximately £10m of private sector was stimulated. In terms of social and economic benefits the following points can be identified: (19)

- physical works helped to sustain around 300 person years of construction employment.
- building refurbishment created space to accommodate industrial and commercial businesses including around 100-150 direct job gains.
- an estimated 75-100 indirect job gains associated with the capital investment in town centre related businesses.
- 100 shopfront refurbishment’s created related growth effects
- tourism growth supporting 3000 FTE jobs (direct and indirect) and annual expenditure of £39m.
- increased rental and capital commercial property values.

Finally the listed Dean Clough complex was transformed by a local entrepreneur to create a centre of international renown with an award-winning workspace for art, culture, education as well as housing over 200 businesses and 3000 employees. (20).

**Other major studies**

More recently both Pearce (21) and Tiesdal et al (22) have considered different aspects of the relationship of conservation within a number of schemes of urban regeneration operated throughout Europe and the North America. They recognise that packages of private sector money can be levered into historic areas through various public financing initiatives. Moreover, that through this housing conditions can be improved; tourist potential can be realised; cultural identity can be reinforced; business confidence can be raised; additional employment opportunities realised and building resources can be re-used enhancing their visual and functional attraction. Both conclude that success in this process is essentially concerned with re-imaging the historic city or quarter so that it is a place where people and activities will wish to return. However, there has been little direct scrutiny or correlation of the investment in
supporting conservation programmes matched to the dynamic benefits which may result.

The need for this form of research has been given official recognition (23). In this context a major research programme has been commenced to monitor the benefits derived from three current conservation-led regeneration programmes in the heart of three major European centres (24). Although it will be some time before the full benefits of these strategies can be revealed, an initial review of action can be indicated:

Three case examinations

Edinburgh ‘Old Town’, Scotland.

The development of a strategy for the regeneration of the Old Town has emphasised the roles of tourism and the built heritage in relation to the city’s economy and has sought to achieve long-term sustainable improvement in the environment and the economy by promoting a productive balance between the interests of residents, business, and visitors (25).

The ‘Old Town Renewal Study’ in 1984 revealed wide scale problems relating to vacancy and dilapidation in the historic building stock and a general feeling of neglect and dispair. Following this the Edinburgh Old Town Committee for Conservation and Renewal was established (1985-90) to tackle the problems. In 1986 a detailed study was commissioned to discover the existing and potential housing in the area. The strategy was widened in 1991 when the Edinburgh Old Town Renewal Trust was established as a management agency by joint funding provided by Edinburgh District Council, Lothian Council, Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Limited and Historic Scotland (The Commission for Historic Buildings and Monuments for Scotland). The trust manages the regeneration process, co-ordinating the environmental, social and economic revitalisation of the area by creating a balance through active partnership between the local community and development bodies.

The current local plan promotes mixed use development and the trust produces an action plan each year establishing a framework for partnership action to increase the residential population (increasing from 3000 in 1981 to 7000 today with an end target of 12000); to improve the economy (promoting business and tourism activity); to pursue a creative balance of mixed uses through town centre management; and improve and re-use the historic fabric. The trust can issue approximately £500,000 p.a. towards building conservation grants. Gap-funding is provided by the other partners with assistance from the National Heritage Lottery Fund.
By 1996 it was estimated that there had been an overall investment of over £300m. Approximately £1.5m had been awarded in conservation grants, securing investment of £18m for improvement work, and £134m has been committed to major projects such as the Festival Theatre, the new Museum of Scotland, the Sheriff Courts, and Edinburgh Castle. Since 1992, when the original action plan was prepared, over 30 major sites have been highlighted as development opportunities, some of which are now exemplars of functioning, economically profitable, heritage buildings providing housing, hotel space, offices, restaurants, library space, shops, university space and lawyers consulting rooms.

The success of the work undertaken is partly indicated by the designation of Edinburgh's 'Old and New Town' as a 'World Heritage Site', which required an approved management process. The action plan for the Old Town, has led to significant new housing and commercial activity, as well as increased tourist expenditure both in the Old Town and elsewhere in Edinburgh. The coordinated approach of the trust and its public sector partners has brought significant investment from the private sector and after 10 years is achieving a balanced and sustainable economy with high conservation standards.

**Temple Bar, Dublin, Ireland.**

The regeneration strategy in Temple Bar, Dublin is also reliant upon a separate management structure and began as a flagship to mark Dublin’s year as European City of Culture 1991. The Finance Act 1991 added weight through special tax incentives in the area against the cost of refurbishment. The Temple Bar Renewal and Development Act 1991 established two companies namely the Temple Bar Renewal Ltd.(TBR) and Temple Bar Properties Ltd.(TBP) to organise and initiate improvement activity. TBP are now in the second phase of their development programme for this formerly derelict area. Phase 1 (1991-
96) achieved much work in the area (28) including new developments or property refurbishment for:

6 cultural organisation; 5 established organisations new to Temple Bar; 3 newly formed organisations; 133 residential apartments; and 63 retail units were let or sold. During phase 2 (1996-1999) it is planned to create residential accommodation for up to 700 people amongst other objectives.

The total investment of public funds committed to the TBP has been IR£40.6m provided through a combination of European Regional Development Funds and National Exchequer Funds. In addition, loans have been taken by TBP from the European Investment Bank and the Bank of Ireland to finance the commercial programme of retail and residential developments. These loans will total approximately IR£60m over the 1991-1999 period and will be repaid when the retail units are let and apartments sold. The company is required to make a 5% return to the Exchequer. It is also estimated that the private sector within the development period will invest an equal amount, approximately IR£100m.

The socio-economic success can be judged by:

- The residential population has grown from about 200 to around 900 people.
- 140 new businesses have been established in the area.
- The development has a significant impact on the tourism and 7 new hotels have been built.
- The project is estimated to have created 1,903 long term jobs in the cultural industries, and 3000 temporary new jobs in the construction and related industries, i.e. direct employment related to the development period only.
- Pedestrian movement through the area has trebled in four years.

Temple Bar has been an intense revitalisation programme. A few examples of excellence in conservation and some outstanding examples of modern architecture have been praised. However An Taisce, an organisation established to protect the built and natural environment of Ireland has condemned the substantial demolition of buildings of character and the breaching of height standards in new developments. The Department of Arts, Culture and Gaeltacht emphasise that Temple Bar renewal is a ‘Cultural’ strategy and not a conservation strategy, even though the historic quarter has the highest number of listed buildings in Dublin, and its ‘Conservation’ was identified in the original action plan objectives for the area published in May 1993. Indeed statutory policies towards the built environment have been found to be inadequate with loopholes allowing the complete demolition of the interior of the buildings.(26) More recently however attitudes have changed, there has been a wider acknowledgement of the need to conserve, recognising both the social and economic benefits of this. Firmer policies are in the pipeline to preserve and maintain the built heritage.(27)
Figure 2. ‘The Ark’, Eustace street, Temple Bar, Dublin; a refurbishment project designed to provide a Cultural Centre for children. While the detailing on the façade of the former Presbyterian Meeting House is commendable, everything but the façade of the early Eighteenth-Century building was demolished.


The final case study is in relation to the city centre of Newcastle upon Tyne. This ‘holistic’ conservation regeneration strategy did not develop until 1994. However, the changes in the area that can already be identified are perhaps more poignant in that in a short period they have come about through a concerted partnership approach.

‘Grainger Town’ was named after the developer builder Richard Grainger who created this late-Georgian ‘Tyneside classical’ style commercial centre within an existing network of medieval and 18th Century streets. It includes a higher than average percentage of outstanding historic buildings, with 20% of the buildings listed in the exceptional category of protection. There is a lack of economic performance in the area with low rents and capital values, also the loss of the area’s residential accommodation is evident. Newcastle city centre has been further hampered by detrimental traffic management over the last 20 years and by the redevelopment of the quayside area half a mile away.

A ‘buildings at risk’ survey was carried out, over the whole historic building stock in 1991. The results were saddening with double the national average at risk (50% of the 620 listed buildings) and over a quarter of the buildings in a vulnerable position. Approximately 93,000 sq.m. of floorspace was found to be unoccupied. The ‘Grainger town’ Study (29) was commissioned in 1992, and enforced the need to identify development opportunities but within a firm conservation planning framework. In 1993 English Heritage announced the need to develop more specific criteria for the allocation of funding and to focus on specific ‘areas’, this was considered more likely to achieve a successful outcome. Indeed in many cases a high rate of
grant aid (in some cases up to 80%) was viewed as necessary to have any impact. In 1994 Grainger Town became one of the first ‘Conservation Area Partnership Schemes’ (CAPS) in England, out of 14 launched in 1994. The findings of the ‘Grainger Town Study’, formed the basis of an ‘action plan’.(30) The CAPS commenced with a basic annual funding of £300,000 from English Heritage and £200,000 from Newcastle City Council. The aim, however, has been to use the CAPS funding to attract further partnership funding. This has been achieved through the annual ‘Living Over the Shops Grant’ (LOTS) and from the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). These funds have varied annually from approximately £200,000 in 1994/1995 to £800,000 in 1995/1996 and in the current financial year a large sum has been designated in the region of £11.2m. Further funding for speciality development schemes has been available from the National Heritage Lottery Fund. The city council are keen to forge stronger links with English Partnerships, a government development agency, accountable to the Secretary of State for the Environment, and it is proposed to set up a joint venture company to oversee the regeneration i.e. a management company limited by guarantee and the possibility of a second company limited by shares, to undertake development works in the area. The scheme has received much interest in the UK national press (31), stating that the regeneration could create over 2000 jobs and around 700 new homes. An initial 6-year programme has been agreed and a Partnership Board and Executive team will develop policy and co-ordinate implementation.(32) The Board membership will include representatives from business organisations, local businesses, developers and financial institutions.

Figure 3. A view of Grey Street. Future proposals include environmental ‘streetscape’ improvements.

This scheme is in its third year now and although it is difficult to draw an effective conclusion of the overall socio-economic effects and impacts upon the area within such a short time span, one can identify individual properties
that have received funding and that new businesses and residences have been created in vacant, formerly dilapidated listed buildings. The action has galvanised by partnership and significant public investment which can be monitored over the next few years.

**Conclusion**

The importance of the existing historic fabric of urban cities must not be underestimated. But the private sector alone will not safeguard it. The establishment of long-term strategies supported by district or city plans, and an integral public funding mechanism is imperative.

The management of all three cases indicates the importance of public-private partnership. The idea of developing a specific management agency for conservation-led regeneration according to specific action plans is relatively new but has obvious potential. The structure of the Temple Bar Initiative is an especially focused scheme, in that ownership of the buildings, funding and decisions on the type and design of proposed use is all within the authority of TBP, subject to planning permission. However the lack of conservation input indicates the need for firmer conservation legislation and also indicates the importance of qualified specialists employed as full time members of the management company. The trust arrangement in Edinburgh is a good example of the benefits of gathering the right team members, comprising of architects, art historians, planners with knowledge in the field of architectural conservation, surveyors and financial specialists. The physical evidence of action indicate its success so far. However there is an awareness that stronger control may be needed in order to balance the mix of facilities for tourists and those of the living community, hence the annual review of the action plan. It remains to be seen how the proposed management agency for Grainger Town will be formed. There is a need for a careful balance between conservation and economic interests. It is proposed that a joint venture may be formed by English Partnerships and Newcastle City Council. The company would receive funding from English Partnerships and draw on the power of the City Council’s compulsory purchase powers in order to revitalise the area.

In many countries there will be a reluctance to allow official conservation bodies to become partners in joint venture companies, but if it can provide an effective means to revitalise historic quarters there can be little grounds for objection. In the UK the Department of National Heritage has debated whether its statutory advisor and fund giving body, English Heritage, should be able to form joint venture arrangements but no conclusion has been drawn yet.

The conservation action plan is imperative in creating a regeneration framework. While all of the 3 pro-active strategies were case studies which developed from action plans, the importance of maintaining firm structured
principles is evident. For instance, although the action plan for Temple Bar, (which included conservation as one of the five objectives), was developed in 1990 and later incorporated into the City Development Plan, the publication of the development programme in 1992 notably dropped the conservation objective in favour of cultural objectives. It was unfortunate that the original action plan was breached and superseded. TBP have totally or substantially demolished 20 buildings whereas the action plan provided for the demolition of only 5. The Old Town trust first prepared their action plan in 1992 and it is reviewed annually. This allows the opportunity for public and community involvement into the future objectives and development of policy. Moreover the action plan contains a character assessment, which can assist in preventing any unwanted developments.

The Grainger Town Action plan although only 3 years old has been useful in identifying how funds should be issued. Review of the action plan has resulted in a change of treatments to ‘Buildings at Risk’ (BAR) from ‘rescue grants’( which only delayed the process), to the new emphasis of directing funds to “repair and reuse” and “raising the quality” such as through the successful ‘shopfront renewal’ scheme.

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