

INVESTING IN HERITAGE – THE RENAISSANCE OF NEWCASTLE’S GRAINGER TOWN

Grainger Town is the historic heart of the City of Newcastle upon Tyne. It covers approximately 90 acres (36 hectares) and comprises a complex mix of offices, retail, residential, leisure and cultural uses. It takes its name from the series of elegant streets of ‘Tyneside Classical’ architecture, including Grey Street which was described by Pevsner as one of the finest streets in England, that were conceived as a whole and built by Richard Grainger between 1835-1842. It also includes a Mediaeval 13th century Dominican Friary, remnants of the old Town Walls and many fine Victorian Buildings.

The area possesses a richness of character and is an asset that is quite unique. Virtually all of it is included within Newcastle’s Central Conservation Area, one of the first to be designated in England. Of its 640 buildings 244 (40%) are listed of special architectural or historic interest, of which 12% are listed grade I and 20% grade II*.

Although truly innovative in its day, in the late twentieth century, Grainger Town was exhibiting many symptoms of urban decay and economic and social decline including decaying listed buildings, half of which were deemed to be ‘at risk’; over one million square foot of vacant floorspace; neglected upper floors; poor environment and low standards of public realm; and a lack of developer, investor and occupier confidence. Perceptions of the City centre were at an all time low.

This generated an ambitious strategic and holistic regeneration programme. In 1997 the Grainger Town Regeneration Project led by the Grainger Town Partnership was established with the aim of addressing the underlying causes of decline, not just the symptoms. The Project is supported by English Heritage, English Partnerships/One North East and Newcastle City Council and is due to run until March 2003.

The Project has attracted £40m from the public sector, which will be used to generate at least £80m investment from the private sector, bringing the total invested in the regeneration of Grainger Town over the lifetime of the Project to in excess of £120m. To date, the Project has generated over £100m investment into the area.

The Grainger Town Partnership is a company limited by guarantee. Its Board has 20 directors from the public, private and community sectors who help to steer the regeneration efforts. The board links out to specialist advisory panels such as the Urban Design Panel and both Business and Residents Fora that provide community involvement and ownership of the Project. The Project is implemented by a Delivery Team of 14 officers, led by Chris Oldershaw the Director.

The Project’s Vision Statement is that “Grainger Town will become a dynamic and competitive location in the heart of the City. Grainger Town will develop its role in the regional economy with a high-quality environment appropriate to a major European capital. Its reputation for excellence will be focused on leisure, culture and the arts, retailing, housing and entrepreneurial activities. Grainger Town will become a distinctive place, a safe and attractive location to work, live and visit”.

The Project is based around investment programmes related to 7 regeneration themes that aim to realise the Vision Statement. The success of the Project can be illustrated through the achievements made under these themes to date:

- **Business Development and Enterprise** – 235 new businesses created
- **Commercial Development** – 23,600m sq of new commercial floorspace created
- **Access to opportunity** - 681 jobs created, over 32,000 construction job weeks completed and 4,325 training weeks completed
- **Housing** – 300 residential units created and 250 in the pipeline
- **Quality of environment** – Public realm improvements throughout the Project area completed and 59 buildings (many of them listed) brought back into use
- **Arts, culture and tourism** – Numerous events organised and supported, including Streets Alive!, Chinese New Year Celebrations and Tyneside Irish Festival
- **Management, marketing and promotion** – Several educational and promotional publications produced. Creation of a comprehensive website and video diary of the Project

The success of the Project has recently been recognised by a Best Practice award from the British Urban Regeneration Association for excellence in Regeneration and a commendation by the Royal Town Planning Institute. It is also seen as a major contributor towards the Newcastle Gateshead European Capital of Culture bid 2008.

A recent independent interim review of the Project's activities concluded that the Grainger Town Project has been successful in "promoting change, reversing decline and helping to produce more positive perceptions of the area. The Project has been well managed and the process of regeneration has proved effective and worked well."

The success of the Grainger Town project in the heritage-led regeneration of the historic heart of Newcastle upon Tyne was celebrated and promoted in the Partnership's international conference on 3rd - 5th July 2002, Investing in Heritage – Regenerating Europe's Historic Cities (see article on conference in newsletter).