



Exchange Delft – Newcastle: Contemporary Architecture in Historic Areas

Background

The subject to be studied in Delft was contemporary development in the historic environment. Therefore it is important to consider the growth of Delft and the age of the built form in the historic city centre. I was given a presentation on the history of Delft and the policies and plans which guide development. The development of Delft began with the digging of the oldest canal 'Oude Delft' and received city status in 1246 from Dutch Earl Willem II. By the mid 1300's Delft had developed to a size which remained until the 19th Century. The historic core was partly destroyed with the first major fire in 1536 and then in 1654 200 houses were destroyed by an explosion at the gunpowder warehouse. Overall, Delft has successfully retained a large number of historic buildings and the conservation area status of the historic centre is certainly justified.

Landscape and Built Form

The canals within the city provide the basis for the structure and layout of the built form with development having strong frontages to the canals. In Newcastle, development was originally centred around the industrial growth of the city. The industry grew from the ability to use the River Tyne and subsequently the Ouseburn for transportation. The Tyne Gorge landscape also influenced the growth of the City with the Castle Keep being built at the high point of the gorge. The layout of any development within the historic city is strongly dictated by the established built form. It seems the historic development of both Delft and Newcastle was influenced by key landscape features.

Delft is very compact in many parts of the historic centre and development is encouraged here before development on the periphery is considered. The city centre of Newcastle has seen much development over time. New development is not restricted to the historic core and therefore there are more opportunities for development of a larger scale which is less restricted by the characteristics of the historic environment.

The Historic City Centre

The tour of the historic core showed the vast number of extremely old and valuable buildings in Delft and the great efforts to protect and enhance the appearance of the conservation area. In most cases the contemporary in-fill developments have been successful in respecting their historic neighbours whilst interpreting the historic characteristics in their modern design. It is clear that a more vigilant approach is taken with the canal fronted development in order to ensure high quality in-fill which adheres to the strong building lines and characteristics of the street. The rear/back lane areas are treated with a less vigilant approach yet still present high quality development. Here there is more opportunity for variation in design and layout which differs from the linear form of the canal fronted groups of buildings. This approach is similar to that taken in Newcastle, historically the main street frontage elevations are more grand and of high quality with the rear areas being simpler in design and materials.

Whilst most developments and refurbishments have been successful, the Vermeer Centre and housing has been less successful. This may be due to the decision to opt for a pastiche rather than a contemporary design informed by the characteristics

of the adjacent buildings. With regard to the housing element of the scheme, the decision to move away from the characteristics of the area has resulted in a development with a very 'English' appearance which fails to relate to the historic environment of Delft city centre.



High quality development



The Vermeer Centre

Spoorzone

I was given a presentation on the redevelopment of the railway area followed by a tour of the area itself. The Spoorzone is on the edge of the historic centre yet feels very different in character. The raised railway line forms a barrier in the city centre, splitting the area into two parts. In redeveloping this area of the city centre it is hoped that the replacement of the raised railway line with underground lines will help to rebuild the physical and psychological connections between the residential area to the west and the historic core to the east. The redevelopment will provide new housing which will have differing interpretations of the characteristics of the historic core. The Quality Plan for Architecture and Cityscape guidance sets out clear regulations to be followed in the design of new development. The guidance produced for this area is very similar to the guidance produced for sites in Newcastle. The positive characteristics of the locality are identified and included in documents of various forms. In Newcastle this has often been in the form of a Design Code which states specifics relating to scale, massing, plot size and detailed design. Many of these elements are also included in the Quality Plan for Architecture and Cityscape Spoorzone.



Existing Spoorzone



Vision for the future

Decision Making and Policy Guidance

The architecture committee in Delft have great influence on decision making when it comes to new development in the historic city centre. This is one of the main differences when drawing comparisons between decision-making in the two cities. In Newcastle, the Newcastle Conservation Advisory Panel looks at applications and provides recommendations to Officers. However those recommendations do not have to be taken into account when making the final approval or refusal decision. I believe this is also the case in Delft. Overall, perhaps the process in Delft is more successful for a number of reasons. An architectural panel is required by law and the individuals on the panel are practising professionals. In addition, the committee makes decisions based on policy, any application made will be judged against the policy and decisions will be made as to whether deviations from the policy are

acceptable. The Policy Document for Architecture and Cityscape documents building features. This is similar to the Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Plans produced in England although the approach taken is more of an appraisal of the historic fabric and guidance on its future management rather than creating a rigid plan for new development based on the characteristics of the historic environment.

Summary

It was clear from the visit that Delft has a concentrated area of historic buildings within the city centre core. The decision to designate the historic core as a conservation area was important to retaining this concentration. There is a clear policy and architectural plan for redevelopment which is far more rigid than that in place in England. Perhaps in some instances, Newcastle would benefit from this type of system however with such a regulated plan there is less opportunity for variation in new development. I do feel that built form of Delft requires a more rigid architectural policy. For example, where there is opportunity for infill redevelopment on canal fronted streets it is important to respect and enhance the historic environment and guiding rules on redevelopment can help to ensure this is the case.

The visit to Delft including the tour of the historic core, the presentation on the Spoorzone, the visit to the new housing area and University of Delft showed that there are many similarities in the approach to redevelopment. It will be interesting to see the direction taken by both cities in the future.