

The image shows the interior of a circular stone tower. At the top, there is a large, bright, circular skylight. Below it, several smaller, arched openings are arranged in a circular pattern. The walls are made of rough, textured stone. The overall atmosphere is one of historical grandeur and architectural symmetry.

Historic Places Panel 2019-2021 Review



Historic England



Contents

Foreword: Ben Derbyshire, Panel Chair.....	2
Preface: Duncan Wilson, CEO, Historic England.....	3
Introduction	4
The Themes and Places Explored.	5
Movement	5
Blue, Green and Grey Infrastructure	5
A Tale of two Cities – Katie Wray, Panellist	6
Transport.....	8
Environmental Sustainability in Regeneration – Geoff Rich, Panellist	9
Docks.....	10
High Streets	10
The Role of Culture in Place Making - Nigel Hinds, Panellist.....	11
Engagement.....	12
Archaeology	13
Building Re-use.	14
Engagement as an Engine for Positive Change – Sophia de Sousa, Panellist.....	15
Capacity	16
Housing.....	16
Culture.....	17
Conclusions.....	18

Foreword: Ben Derbyshire, Panel Chair

Never has it been more critical to engage citizens in the task of ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future for their communities. Our task as critical friends is to support hard working and committed council members, officers and their stakeholders to deliver wellbeing in the places where they live and work. Our visits take place at the invitation of a diverse range of Local Authorities, and this report is based on our findings. I'm excited to take this task forward.

The Panel is convened by Historic England, but its views are independent. We have the opportunity to learn from the places we have been invited to visit, to create a platform for knowledge and best practice. I hope to stimulate two-way communication, feeding back findings and best practice between the astonishing range of places we visit, the Commission and to Government.

This retrospective is a tribute to Peter Studdert, my predecessor as chair of the Historic Places Panel. The clarity of themes that emerge in the report is a testament to Peter and the work of the Panel.



Panellists, Historic England staff and stakeholders at Quay Arts, Isle of Wight

Preface: Duncan Wilson, CEO, Historic England

This is perhaps an unprecedented time for investment in our historic towns and cities. There is a plethora of initiatives of which local authorities and others responsible for such places can take advantage. Many of them involve Historic England directly, for example our very successful High Street Heritage Action Zones. We engage in others in an advisory capacity. But all historic places benefit from a holistic view of the challenges and the most effective paths to transformation.

The role of our Historic Places Panel is to bring to bear a wide range of experience in charting ways to make that process sustainable and genuinely transformative. Ways which involve learning from other successful (and less successful) approaches, and which engage with the local community to ground the whole process. The HPP's views are independent of Historic England, but the work of the Panel draws on our deep expertise and local relationships. We know that the recommendations following each HPP visit are broadly welcomed and help to formulate strategic view of the direction regeneration schemes should take to improve places for everyone who lives, works and visits them. Often the historic environment pays a key role in that transformation.

We are very grateful to members of the Panel for generously giving their time and expertise in this important work.



Grimsby Dock Tower © HE

Introduction

Since the Urban Panel was re-launched as the Historic Places Panel in 2019 it has visited the Isle of Wight, Reading and Grimsby (2019), and Dover, Boston and Gloucester (2021). During the pandemic in 2020 it also made a 'virtual' visit to Nottingham due to the extraordinary position the City Council found itself in with the half-demolished Broadmarsh Centre.

Typical visits last for two days, featuring a working dinner at the end of the first day attended by a range of stakeholders including relevant council staff, elected members and representatives from community, education, property, industrial and cultural bodies among others. The days are packed with presentations, visits and discussions and, following the publication of the review paper, are followed with a smaller re-visit with Historic England staff to talk about implementation of the recommendations.

It is a diverse range of places that have been covered, with contrasting issues, but which also have a number of striking parallels that were revealed during the visits and the subsequent analysis contained in the review papers. Inevitably the pandemic has called into further question the function of town centres following the revolution in working practices that has occurred. It has also made more challenging the delivery of the ambitious work programmes the local authorities and their partners have been engaged in. All of the places were, at the time visited, levelling up priority areas, and all have been engaged in place making as a route to delivering public value.

The knowledge, commitment and passion shown by our hard working hosts in each instance has been tremendously impressive, as has been their generosity in devoting time and resources to the Panel.



The New Inn, Gloucester - a superbly intact medieval coaching inn. The city has a lapsed culture of hospitality that could be revived.

The Themes and Places Explored

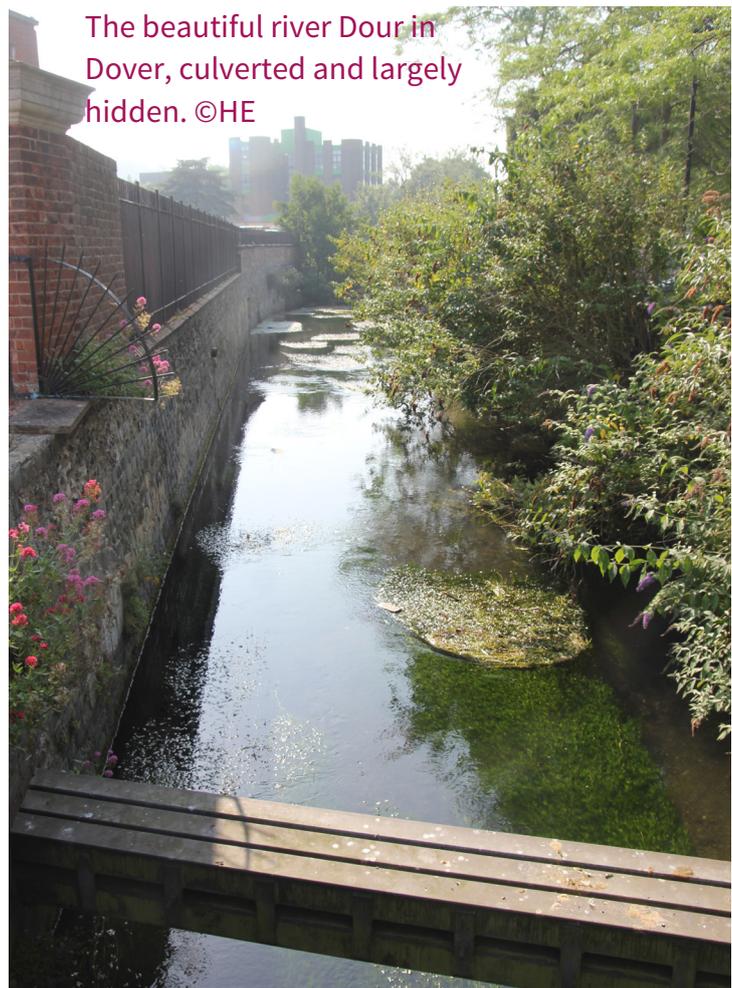
Movement

Harmful town centre roads were a feature of almost all of the places visited. In Dover, Boston, Nottingham, Reading and Grimsby such roads present significant challenges to amenity and 'liveability', severing communities, creating pollution and undermining coherence and character. Where capacity can be reduced, de-engineering such roads to introduce green spaces has been shown to be a way of mending the townscape, and the panel suggested Sunderland Riverside and Sheffield's *Grey to Green* projects as examples of this which have had transformative effects. In other circumstances, to ease pedestrian movement across such barriers the panel advised that crossings correspond as closely as possible to desire lines to improve legibility and amenity, such as in Dover, where York Street (a dual carriageway) does so much to separate the town from the beautiful Western Heights, or Maid Marian Way in Nottingham, which separates the Castle from the city centre. In Reading, the panel advocated the radical step of covering the Inner Distribution Road (the *IDR*) and to tie this in with improved pedestrian and cycle routes that would help reconnect the town, promoting economic vitality as well as health and wellbeing.

Blue, Green and Grey

Infrastructure

Allied to movement, Green, blue and grey infrastructure strategies were advocated as a way of improving the amenity of routes and destinations in ways that can enhance biodiversity, flood alleviation, wellbeing and connectedness. The sparkling river Dour at the heart of Dover (which is contained in a concrete culvert for much of its route through the town) was seen as a wonderful opportunity to connect the town centre with the natural environment by improving access and employing river restoration techniques such as that achieved with the river Marden in Calne, Wiltshire.



The beautiful river Dour in Dover, culverted and largely hidden. ©HE



A Tale of two Cities – Katie Wray, Panellist

A tale of two cities? There are some interesting comparisons between two places the Panel has visited in terms of the role that place has in it.

First, Gloucester Docks. Reaching its 15th birthday this year and seeing footfall of £7m in 2019 with 3,500 jobs created, on my first visit it seemed like an unqualified success, but on visiting it for a second time with HPP, I was struck by how circumscribed that success has been. The rest of Gloucester and even wider areas of the Docks hadn't quite received the magic dust trickle-down effect. A key challenge posed to the Panel by the Council was how to link the Docks with the town centre.

There are lessons here not only for other places, but for Gloucester Council in how they might tackle the regeneration of the city centre. Positives to take are the absolute clear vision the Docks had - outlet retail, moderate sized units with easy access for all. The City has lots to offer, the Cathedral is an obvious attraction, but the delightful Gloucester Guildhall Cinema and the brilliant conversion of the former Debenhams store to house the University of Gloucestershire building are less so.

These are exciting and dynamic attractors and an economic strategy needs to be created around these. Retailers and F&B should be carefully curated with a focus on independents that can become attractors in themselves (Ancoats in Manchester is a prime example here curated by public-private partnership) and it should all have a multiplying impact to create a strong city centre economy. Strengthening and diversifying the city centre residential offer is also key. But patience is needed, successful regeneration does not happen over-night and the Council should be confident because they have all the right ingredients.

And so to Boston, a town which would very much like city status. In contrast to Gloucester, which is surrounded by lots of other strong and challenging economic centres, Boston is in a rather isolated economic geography with a vast hinterland, which creates considerable accessibility challenges. The town centre felt like a much more thriving place than Gloucester, despite the usual upper floor vacancies. There was a solid mix of retail, commercial, industrial and residential along with passionate civic leadership and caring local developers, who had already strongly demonstrated their capability in heritage led regeneration.

However, they now have an opportunity to try something a bit new, something they aren't that experienced with as they tackle larger scale regeneration through PE21. It is an opportunity to set a new benchmark for Boston, especially when it comes to promoting a different form of accessibility and starting to tackle the removal of (excessive) car parks.

Going forward there are three things Boston can learn from Gloucester and others. First, draw a sensible red line boundary, (largely) ignoring land ownership, to achieve your vision and develop an appropriate Strategic Masterplan / Framework. With the benefit of hindsight this is where Gloucester could have broadened the outcomes of the Docks regeneration.



Boston is also at risk of erring here by not committing to the full and necessary connectivity between the Station and town centre.

A wide red line boundary moves us on to the second key point - partnerships. For inherent in a wider boundary is a need to have strong partnerships to realise the vision. Choosing formal and informal development partners is a crucial step, most importantly in them sharing your vision, but also the timescales for that vision. Long term partners and investors are key to success. As discussed above, truly successful regeneration takes time and there must be a shared confidence in the 'build and they will come' ethos. The local authority must also have the confidence to use the stick as well as the carrot and should be clear and steadfast in their vision. Boston has no shortage of partners for PE21, but are they the right ones and do they need more?

Finally, what is the vision? Getting this right from the start is the third lesson. Gloucester Docks nailed this and it has been successful as a result in developing the brand and attracting retailers and spenders. Boston needs to spend time in analysing the purpose and vision of PE21; what is the market they are trying to attract and the social, environmental and economic outcomes they want to achieve. Boston has a fantastic opportunity here in the food business and supporting burgeoning entrepreneurs. They clearly have a track record - attracting Plant & Bean resulting in 500 jobs.

So, a tale of two cities (or places) with shared challenges and opportunities at different stages on their journeys. It will be fascinating to observe and hopefully the Docks attracts me back for a third time.



Gloucester Docks © Rosemarie MacQueen

Transport

In market towns with large hinterlands the motor car is for most people living any distance away their only travel option. This has impacts on many aspects of urban life including air quality, pedestrian safety, land use and overall amenity. In many places car parking provision is in the main non-strategic, and frequently there was an over-provision of car parking, something seldom recognised by the local populace who link town centre decline with reductions of on-street car parking and pedestrianisation. This is a significant obstacle to overcome in making town centres move 'liveable'. Allied to this, the existence of lucrative private car parks on vacant town centre sites presents a real barrier to stitching parts of townscape together, something observed in both Boston and in Newport on the Isle of Wight.

Railway stations were frequently poorly connected with the town centre, the exception being Reading, where recent improvements have significantly enhanced the sense of arrival. In Gloucester, the dualled Bruton Way is a very significant barrier, beyond which the Forum Development is seeking to provide a direct, legible route through to the town centre. A radically improved road crossing will be necessary to properly capitalise on this. Active travel strategies integrated with railway stations where cycling is facilitated through the provision of secure facilities were among measures advocated. Bus stations by contrast were often quite an intrusion, with examples in Boston, the Isle of Wight and Grimsby, and the establishment of dispersed bus interchanges were promoted by the panel as the solution to this.





Environmental Sustainability in Regeneration – Geoff Rich, Panellist

We live in unusual, changing and challenging times, and especially perhaps for those engaged in the regeneration of our physical environment. The combined effects of the realisation of the climate crisis, energy price hikes and the Covid pandemic have generated seismic changes to patterns of movement, town centre office occupancies, changing retail choices, and rental values. These dramatic economic shifts have sent shockwaves of change through every high street, town and city in the UK, and disrupted the ‘normality’ of all things before.

A key part of this has been the accelerating awareness, realisation and acceptance that the climate crisis is real, followed by the declarations by many public authorities and private institutions– including Historic England – that immediate urgent action is required. Meanwhile there is an increasing realisation that in the search for a lower carbon future we have to start from where we are: doing more with the less, and the likely reality that the greenest building solution is the one that already exists!

These circumstances of course profoundly affect the approach to the conservation, adaptation and maintenance of existing buildings, and to managing our townscape as part of regeneration. It also presents new opportunities for regeneration to bring tangible results to local communities in real need of change.

Through the case study work of the Panel we have seen the direct and accelerating effects and opportunities, both in individual projects and area regeneration plans, including:

- *Investment in High Streets via High Street Action Zones*
- *Strategies for the adaptive reuse of significant town centre real estate to retain the embodied carbon of existing buildings (e.g. Broadmarsh, Nottingham)*
- *Recognising the opportunity to re-position a place through bold changes to perception and inter-linked assets (e.g. Grimsby)*
- *Opportunities for cities to take a joined-up approach to the opportunities and challenges ahead, combined with meanwhile uses for historic buildings (e.g. Blackfriars Priory in Gloucester)*

It has also sparked important discussions on the opportunities for participation and representation through regeneration, and the enhanced importance of inclusion in the process. It highlights the opportunity – and the requirement – for the heritage sector to play a full role in educating communities – and in particular to engage younger generations in the opportunities.

The Panel seeks to bring together and offer encouragement, and collaborative perspectives on the potential of places for clients and their communities, as part of a vision of progressive change, rather than a perspective on them as ‘historic places’. As part of this we recognise that the conservation of our historic environment needs to be about ‘managing change’ rather than preservation, and that the likelihood is that most traditional buildings need to evolve in some way in order for their fabric to be fit for purpose for the future.

Docks

Dockside regeneration featured in several visits, with Gloucester pointing the way with its outstanding success in this in the past few years. In Grimsby, Dover and Boston, however, the docks are still part of the national economic infrastructure, and tensions in providing for the requirements of a working port while at the same time regenerating an historic town have proven to be a challenge in each instance. Road and rail access and the need to provide secure areas in particular are frequently in conflict with either the desire to bring new uses to these often fascinating environments or to rejuvenate the historic towns they adjoin. Dover's iconic Lord Warden House (listed grade II) lies under-used and is likely to become fully redundant for this reason. In Grimsby these problems are starting to be addressed with the recent asset transfer of the Grade II* listed Ice Factory from the owners, Associated British Ports, into private hands.



Reading Market Place

High Streets

Struggling High Streets were, predictably, a theme common to each place, and the now familiar phenomenon of chain stores being replaced by local small to medium sized enterprises seemed universal. Beyond this the extent of vacant space in upper floors pointed to opportunities to diversify town and city centres with new homes, makers spaces, pop-ups and cultural activities in existing buildings. A familiar story though was the block that absentee landlords presented to achieving this, in terms of both contactability and willingness to engage, with tax arrangements being cited in Boston as a disincentive to bringing spaces back into use. Business Improvement Districts were seen as key partners in bringing those with space and those with a need for it together. In the Isle of Wight, the council successfully applied for Historic England High Street Heritage Action Zones for



Newport and Ryde following the visit, while Reading Borough Council was successful in gaining one for several parts of its town centre to re-invigorate those places with heritage led regeneration programs.

Engagement

The challenges of engaging with diverse communities and the extent that those communities can participate in the regeneration of their neighbourhoods were a common theme. Measuring outcomes focussing solely on material change can lead to such



Pre-dinner welcome and speeches at Llanthony Secunda Priory, Gloucester

activity being made peripheral, but the current extent of change proposed in most of the places visited from publicly funded projects makes this very necessary. Nottingham's *Big Conversation*, launched during the pandemic, demonstrated that online consultation need not be tokenistic, and can have much broader reach if carried out fulsomely. The quality of the briefing it provided over several weeks enabled people to respond at their leisure, and with over 3,000 responses it had unprecedented success. At a more personal level, the Panel was equally impressed by Cllr Richard Austin's Tree Planting initiative in Boston, which has involved hundreds of local people in making real physical change happen. In Gloucester, the Town Centre Commission was a model of how stakeholder representatives can be brought together to influence change, although the Panel felt that it would have benefitted from greater representation from young people and minorities.

In general, the Panel felt that broadening the governance of change to be more inclusive can have as many positive outcomes as the change itself. T

he HPP working dinners, which bring together local officers, elected members, and a range of local businesses, organisations and interest groups, also offer a sort of case in point of the power of getting that mix of people in a room for a conversation about their town or city. Connections are made, information and ideas shared, conversations resumed or kick-started.

Archaeology

In each place the risks and opportunities of encountering significant archaeology on development sites were, by and large only partially appreciated. The Panel was therefore keen to emphasise the multiple outcomes that can accrue from an approach that includes engagement. Archaeology has a universal appeal, and community involvement in this aspect of development can provide benefits in terms of skills, education, social prescribing and citizenship. If expertise is brought in at a sufficiently early stage in project planning it is also likely to reduce the risk of costs associated with any unexpected finds. The Boston *Big Dig*, which trained members of the public to engage in an archaeological dig as part of a large public realm project was cited as a successful example of this. Many historic towns are packed with archaeology. Dover and Gloucester, sited on Roman towns, were particularly notable in this respect.



Broadmarsh in Nottingham. A large site with the full range of issues.

Building Re-use

Vacant and in many cases dilapidated heritage assets lay in the heart of many of the places visited. Happily, since the Panel visits, a number of these have found new uses and a secure future. Shodfriars, a Grade II* listed medieval guildhall is sited just off the Market Place in Boston and features in much of the council's promotional literature, but was lying empty with a leaking roof. The plight of the building was highlighted during the visit and it changed



Panellists outside the grade II* listed Ice Factory, Grimsby.

hands the following day. The new owner made repairs shortly after and users have now been secured for the building. In Gloucester the Panel was pleased to learn that two buildings on Westgate Street in the heart of the city are now recipients of substantial grants from the

Historic England funded HSHAZ, which will see them repaired and returned to use. One of these buildings, the Grade II* medieval *Folk of Gloucester* museum, re-opens to the public in July. In the Isle of White, the Barracks in East Cowes has been purchased by Isle of Wight Council following the provision of an HE capacity Building Grant to the East Cowes Arts and Heritage Group who will lease the building, and £5.8m funding secured to convert it into a sailing school for underprivileged children.

Re-use is also seen as important for wider reasons; new construction is one of the main contributors of CO₂, and in Nottingham the Panel advised that the re-use of the vast concrete frame of the defunct Broadmarsh Shopping Centre should be considered for this reason and others; in terms of archaeological impact the Panel advised that adaptive re-use presented the least risk of harm to buried deposits.



Brass pavement inset - Boston. © HE

Capacity

Creating the capacity for effective place planning was in all cases regarded as an essential ingredient of future success. Local authorities are often the lead actor, but many other stakeholders from various sectors provide the energy, expertise, local intelligence and resources required to effect the transformations necessary to improve people's lives. Dover has a variety of diverse interests including Kent County Council, the Port of Dover and the National Trust, and Panel recommended that Dover District Council establish a Place Working Group to enable these to work together and provide a forum for debate.

Limited in house urban design expertise was however felt to be holding the majority of local authorities back at a time when most of those visited were expected to inhabit the role of client on major projects generated as a result of levelling up. The engagement of such expertise in house was felt to be a way that local authorities could deliver better outcomes and better value across the board.

Engagement as an Engine for Positive Change – Sophia de Sousa, Panellist

There is a growing interest and intent to engage with local people and organisations, which can only be seen as a positive development. However, there remains a perception that community engagement is largely an obligation rather than an opportunity, as a hurdle to overcome or a box to tick. This means that much of the community engagement that is described to us is still about collecting data or views rather than galvanising collaboration and partnership working with local people and organisations.

While some council teams have shown that they are making real progress in this space, many still lack the confidence, skills and resources required to develop effective engagement strategies that move people from commentators to contributors and collaborators.

One of the consistent problems in strategic terms is that councils tend to reach out to communities on a project-by-project basis and often each department, or indeed project team within a department, initiates a separate programme of engagement. This is resource-heavy and can lead to “consultation fatigue”. It also makes it difficult to weave together the conversations that support effective placemaking.

I have spoken often on these visits of the importance of engagement being supported by (and creating a pathway to) an “infrastructure for collaboration”. This works best when community engagement supports a holistic place-based conversation, rather than being seen as a means of “getting buy-in” on individual schemes or planning policies.

Some of the places we visit are already doing some really interesting things with their engagement, and in such cases our role is to help encourage, support and nurture. For those with less experience, we have seen that the recommendations and challenges put forward by the HPP Panel made during visits can have a marked impact, inspiring new ways of thinking and doing, catalysing shifts in culture and practice. One of the most important qualities of the Historic Places Panel is that it brings together a multi-disciplinary and cross-sector group of practitioners, with extensive national and international experience, and we can share examples and precedents that both illustrate the points we raise and inspire. We can also signpost useful tools and resources.

Housing

All of the places visited had dramatically fewer people living in the town/city centre than they did 70 years ago, even those which have enjoyed significant regeneration. This represents an opportunity but also begs a question – why is this so? The post war flight to the suburbs was caused by a range of factors that are a legacy of the planning decisions of that era, and to this have been added others. Traffic planning, the function and 'culture' of town centres and changes in patterns of property ownership are partially responsible for this. In Dover, the Panel heard that efforts to secure town centre residential development were hampered by the lack of a proven market for such property, leaving a question mark over values. However, in Gloucester the new housing development at Friars Orchard demonstrates the quality that it is possible (and necessary) to deliver, with high quality materials and public realm defining a new 'place' that sits comfortably in the heart of the historic city.

The management of existing floorspace for housing and other uses was also an issue common to all places. The often-vacant spaces above shops have long been seen as an opportunity, but as the panel heard in Boston, absentee landlords (who are often pension funds) present an almost insuperable problem in realising this. Not only is it difficult to communicate with these owners, but the tax rules often discourage them to engage in such conversions and in certain circumstances actually provide incentives in the form of tax write – offs to keep property vacant.

Another common issue is that the provision of family housing close to town centres is being eroded where there is unrestricted conversion to HMOs. This not only reduces the stock available for family housing, but also reduces the attractiveness of an area as a place for families to live. The Panel advised that in these circumstances councils should consider the implementation of Article 4 directions to enable the management of change as a way of





encouraging families back to the traditional suburbs that are often in walking distance from the high street.

In general, shortages in key skills of master planning, development planning, project management and procurement is reducing the delivery of high quality housing and mixed use developments. The readiness to sacrifice quality to ensure delivery was a feature in several places, and the obvious advantages of using the planning system, SPGs and design codes to obtain better outcomes frequently missed.

Culture

The role of culture in regeneration was very prominent in most of the places visited, and Grimsby and Boston are now in advanced discussions with ACE about the establishment of their first National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs). In each instance however, art was seen as only part of the overall cultural picture, with food, heritage, music and other fields making up a broader picture of activities. The use of vacant historic buildings as creative spaces is gathering momentum.



Bringing young people and culture back to the town centre - The Music Works, Gloucester

Previous page: The Friar's Orchard housing development, Gloucester



The Role of Culture in Place Making - Nigel Hinds, Panellist

The arts play a vital role in enlivening places and their culture, and there is a particular impact when arts and heritage interact. By finding fresh approaches, artists are able to unlock the intrinsic emotional power and interest of heritage, engaging local people and visitors alike.

Boston's Transported programme commissioned three artists to create highly striking large-scale artworks on six historic shipping buoys, which have been installed in a trail from one side of the town to another. Each buoy is a bold statement, provoking strong reactions and giving the town a fresh story. In a highly lively fashion, they bring the past of the port right into the middle of Boston, complementing the historic town-centre wharves.

In Gloucester, Joe Hill created three highly convincing optical illusions on the pavements of Westgate Street, bringing to vibrant life the city's archaeology for the opening of the cultural programme of the High Street Heritage Action Zone. People peered down into Roman baths, tiptoed along the tops of walls, all while walking the pavement of the city centre.

In a different way, Gloucester Archives' commission of four young local artists to document their community, under the mentorship of renowned British Jamaican photographer Vanley Burke, gave their work and communities civic recognition through a powerful exhibition at the Gloucester Museum as part of Gloucester History Festival.

The creative sector has long been recognised for its ability to move swiftly in bringing vibrant activity to under-used facilities and areas. JOLT and Music Works have taken two floors of the previously unused Kings House right in the heart of Gloucester, offering creative co-working space and a centre of musical activity and learning for a wide community of 3,000 young people across the city. Without such initiatives, these communities would have little or no sense of belonging to the heart of their city.

Conclusions

Many of the themes examined in each place have contained opportunities for cross-cutting outcomes, perhaps most notably in the field of public and stakeholder engagement, and this could have positive implications in the achievement of public value.

The development of capacity and delivering effective engagement are two such themes – but realising the full potential of these offer presents certain challenges. *The Big Conversation* in Nottingham enabled a fountainhead of ideas to come forward from local individuals and organisations, but a thorough analysis of the data has been difficult to access and the extent to which it has translated into continuing participation from those who contributed is not fully clear. The seeming difficulty (or reluctance) to harness local capacity is one of the key challenges local authorities face, and the appointment of a London practice to deliver the design work in Nottingham could be seen by some as a missed opportunity.

This could be due to the exercise being perceived as either as mainly a communications tool or a desirable 'add-on' element of individual projects rather than fully as a driver and deliverer of change in its own right. The current need for delivery within quite compressed timescales can certainly make meaningful people-led change more challenging. Alternatively (or in combination), it may be due to a shortage of the necessary expertise to facilitate and sustain the interactions required, for instance in local authorities where the delivery of large projects hasn't taken place for some time.

The prominence of cultural regeneration in many of the strategies encountered was striking, but in too many cases it was manifested simply as defined projects rather than a golden thread with the potential to influence the whole programme and improve the outcomes of the full range of projects. The re-animation of vacant historic buildings to accommodate cultural activity is just one example of this.

Other common interweaving issues included climate change, housing provision and the high street. The embodied carbon in the vacant floorspace of historic buildings can be converted to housing for a fraction of the carbon cost of building new homes. This could in turn re-invigorate high streets and at the same time reduce the need to travel for work or to go shopping. As the Panel heard though, problems of ownership and the ways in which properties are taxed lie at the heart of resolving this.

Grey, Green and Blue infrastructure, wellbeing and biodiversity also featured prominently, with examples of both highway and river culvert de-engineering cited as exemplars of where the provision of green space has delivered knock on benefits. Again though, capacity issues are a barrier. While this can be bought in, sufficient expertise to recognise the opportunities and be the "intelligent client" were at best thinly stretched, while the division highways and planning powers between non-unitary authorities has hampered place making efforts where close co-operation and integration is required.

The range of skills required to make great places is broad, and is certainly greater than any one place can be expected to have on hand, and the panel is a limited resource. Peer to peer



learning may hold at least part of the solution to the skills and experience deficits that most areas are experiencing, and which are one of the key barriers to these places reaching their potential. Innovative and skilful work is being done all over the country, but knowledge of this is frequently very localised. A way for local authority staff to access colleagues nationally who can mentor or give advice could offer a range of benefits in the delivery of both efficiency and quality.





Historic England

The Historic Places Panel provides a broad spectrum of independent expertise to help local authorities and others engage in the regeneration and revitalisation of historic places.

A list of current panel members and previous review papers can be found on our website:

historicengland.org.uk/about/who-we-are/committees-and-panels/historic-places-panel.

For more information on the Historic Places Panel please email:

governance@HistoricEngland.org.uk

If you would like this document in a different format, please contact our customer services department on:

Tel: 0370 333 0607

Email: customers@HistoricEngland.org.uk.

All information and weblinks accurate at the time of publication. Please consider the environment before printing this document.

Publication date: 14/10/2022

© Historic England

Design: Historic England