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Contact: contact@appg.info

PRESS RELEASE

IHBC supported Conservation, Places and People (CPP) Parliamentary APPG: 'Community groups... in the driving seat' heritage regeneration



The extent to which community groups should be in the driving seat was a key theme of the most recent meeting of the IHBC-supported All-Party Parliamentary Group (APP) on Conservation, Places and People.

David Blackman, consultant to the IHBC Secretariat, writes:

The topic of the public meeting of the APPG, which took place on July 12 2023 at the House of Commons, was 'Regenerating Historic High Streets: Lessons Learned'.

Owain Lloyd-James, Interim Strategy and Listing Director at Historic England (HE), outlined progress on the High Street Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) programme, which is due to finish in April next year. He said the outputs of the programme, which is run by HE with £95m of government funding, included bringing back to use vacant or under used commercial floor space, creating residential units and restoring or reinstating shop fronts.

He said that while the selection of HAZs across the country had predated the introduction of the government's levelling up agenda, they had 'clearly coalesced' with the priority areas identified by the government programme.

The programme's 'keyword' is 'sustainable', Lloyd-James said: 'We want those to be better places after we've left and long after we've stopped investing. 'This change has to be sustainable and that's the intention: to change outcomes over the long term.'

Community-based organisations, involved in running HAZs, were often able to focus on delivering in a way that local authorities with other priorities, especially during the pandemic, were not, he said: 'When we leave each of those places, those places have increased capacity to carry on delivering, which is what we've seen in Coventry. We stopped funding but that doesn't mean the work stopped.'

Ian Tomlinson, of the For Tyldesley HAZ , said his body's high street design guide had been developed with the community, including contributions from traders, residents and young people.

'It's very important to get young people involved, because this is going to be their town. they're going to look after it in in the future,' he said.

Tomlinson added that his role in the HAZ had greatly benefitted from being embedded in the Greater Manchester town.

'I've lived there 30 years so it's not as a 9 to 5 job. I know all the folks at the local restaurants and there are constant questions. It sometimes takes 40 minutes to walk down the street because everybody's asking questions.'

Dave Chetwyn, Managing Director of Urban Vision Enterprise CIC/ Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) told the meeting that where town centres have developed a residential population, it's been 'game changing', diversification had also contributed to successful high street regeneration. 'It's no longer retail, it's the whole offer.'

Vicky Payne, Strategy, Research and Engagement Lead at the Quality of Life Foundation and author of a recently published book on the future of the high street.

She said: 'The current crisis is a crisis of big retail not of the high street typology itself. We think that the high street can be about much more than the retail, that it can achieve this shift and thrive over the coming decades.'

'There's no great demand at the moment for out of town centre uses, but it's still very important to have that focus on town centres. Town centres can be the focus for all sorts of uses, not just retail, they are inherently connected and sustainable places.'

Duncan Wilson, chief executive of HE, said a common theme of the most successful HAZ projects has been a champion locally who is not from the local authority and has pushed them.

'The risk is if that person disappears with no succession plan, the project will drift off. That dynamic working with but not in local authorities is critical to successful projects, but there is also that risk that the organisation may not be as large and robust, therefore we need to make sure there is a succession plan and another way forward.'

James Grundy MP, the chair of the APPG, said that getting the community in the driving seat is key.

'If you have a local authority led project you get the project the local authority wants and if it's community led, you get the project the community wants and that's what gives it the robustness and stability.'

'I very much expect that Tyldesley will be a fully regenerated town and they'll have the community itself to thank, and Ian and everybody who's been involved in it because it's grass roots up rather than top down.'

'If the community is behind the project it will succeed, because people will want it to succeed.'

See more on the IHBC-supported CPP APPG [HERE](#) and more background to the linked Inquiry report and launch [HERE](#)

The Conservation, Places and People APPG has been established to champion efforts to use the conservation and regeneration of the historic environment to help deliver thriving and sustainable communities.

For any questions, please contact David Blackman at the Conservation, Places and People APPG's secretariat on email at contact@appg.info or by phone on 07748 165862/0208 245 7687.

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All-Party Parliamentary Group on CONSERVATION, PLACES & PEOPLE

Secretariat: The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC)

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Contact: contact@appg.info 07748 165862/0208 245 7687