



Urban Vision Enterprise CIC
Conservation People and Places APPG
21st Century Places: Values and Benefits
January 2021

1. Introduction

Urban Vision Enterprise is a social enterprise providing professional services in planning, regeneration, economic development and third sector organisational development.

Our specialisms include: heritage-led regeneration and conservation; planning mediation, neighbourhood planning; urban design; community engagement and consultation; business planning; community-led development and projects; training and education and third sector (not-for-profit) organisational development.

2. Response to the Inquiry Questions

What evidence exists of the economic, social and environmental benefits from the conservation, care and regeneration of historic buildings and areas, across the UK.

Most heritage is in productive use, providing a wide variety of commercial space, residential accommodation, community and recreational uses. Heritage has cultural value derived from the past, but is also part of the infrastructure of our towns, cities and rural areas today.

Historic buildings can provide flexible and affordable floor space, essential for supporting new small businesses and enterprise. Rural and agricultural buildings can support diversification. Historic environments can help to project a positive image and distinctive environment to attract investment, jobs, population and visitors to an area, from city centres to villages.

Historic places and buildings are key to attracting tourists and visitors, supporting a range of local businesses. Tourism is a significant part of the local economy in many urban and rural areas.

UVE has considerable experience in supporting heritage-led economic development and regeneration. Projects have included:

- Preparation of a 10-year business development plan for the Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre and Bradwell Abbey site in Milton Keynes (2017-18). This includes site development options and prioritisation of projects. The plan included improving floorspace to support enterprise and innovation, education and community and recreational activities.
- Preparation of a district-wide heritage strategy for Gloucester, dealing with protection, management, solutions to viability challenges and delivery of heritage-led regeneration and economic development.
- Business plan for Fenton Town Hall in Stoke-on-Trent to create floorspace for enterprise.

UVE has supported more than 100 neighbourhood plans, and many of these contain policies to help regenerate historic places, including high streets and town centres.

Further information on values of heritage can be found in:

- Heritage in Neighbourhood Plans - National Trust
- Conservation Professional Practice Principles - Institute of Historic Building Conservation and the Historic Towns and Villages Forum.

How can the conservation and regeneration of historic areas contribute to the wider agendas of governments across the UK to equity and 'levelling up', along with their focus on high streets revival?

There are examples in cities, towns and rural areas around the country of heritage being used to support regeneration. Historic area grant schemes funded by Lottery or Historic England monies have been a catalyst in some places for change, helping to create investor and business confidence.

High-quality historic environments help to attract shoppers and visitors, creating competitive advantage for town and city centres. The High Street Task Force and others have recognised that heritage is a significant factor in developing strategies of high streets and town centres.

In rural areas, villages with high quality historic environments can attract people to visit shops, pubs and cafes. Historic places tend to have higher proportions of independent businesses and specialist shops, supporting choice and diversity.

Historic buildings can add to the variety, choice and quality of housing in an area, from well-established terraced streets to new apartments in converted mills and factories.

Government policies and programmes need to be flexible to the different needs of different areas. There needs to be a more strategic and UK-wide perspective. The solution to the housing crisis in London depends to a large degree in employment and growth policies and programmes in other parts of the UK. The test for all policies and programmes should be whether they widen or help to close geographical economic discrepancies.

Is there a case for further increasing the level of investment in the heritage and infrastructure of places outside London and the south east of England to assist the 'levelling up' of lagging regional economies?

UVE has been involved in organising and running sessions at Regen 18 and Regen 19 on regeneration and economic development, including geographical economic inequalities, heritage-led regeneration and community-led development. These sessions highlighted that some Government policies and programmes channel growth, public funding and infrastructure into high growth areas. This includes a strong emphasis on subsidy (housing affordability) and infrastructure provision in

areas suffering from land and property inflation. The result is an acceleration of land and property price inflation in high growth areas, whilst areas suffering from viability challenges continue to struggle to attract investment.

Government policies, guidance and programmes betray a strong London-centric perspective. The assumption is that housing supply and affordability are the key issues across the country. The reality is that there is a severe housing crisis in London and other high growth areas, with housing being beyond the means of most people. However, in other parts of the country, viability and the need to create local economic opportunity are key challenges. This is not just a north-south issue. Viability is a challenge in parts of the south-east, for example the Isle of Sheppey, Luton and Lowestoft. In such areas, the key challenge is in attracting employment, to create economic opportunity, and to give people the means to find suitable housing.

The National Planning Policy Framework is written for London and other high growth areas. Large parts of the country have effectively been written out of the equation.

Heritage-specific funding and other regeneration and economic development funding should target viability and economic need, including viability challenges.

How can regeneration of the historic environment contribute to and interact with efforts to revive local economies in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent recession?

The importance of historic environments in supporting growth and attracting people into city centres, towns, and villages has already been mentioned.

Some of the changes to live-work patterns that have occurred in response to COVID crisis will stick in the longer-term. The post COVID period will require stakeholder - led strategies for high streets and town centres to create a long-term future. Use and adaptation of historic buildings will be a significant issue in most centres.

We would like to see greater emphasis by heritage bodies on the values of heritage mentioned in the first question. This includes realising the economic potential of heritage assets.

What evidence exists that historic buildings provide flexible, low rental space for start-up businesses, social enterprises and community facilities, thereby helping to stimulate local economies, particularly in more peripheral neighbourhoods?

Historic places have supported dramatic physical and economic transformations, especially in areas that have experienced commercial or industrial decline. For example, in Liverpool, run down industrial areas on the periphery of the City Centre (Ropewalks and the Baltic Triangle) have successfully regenerated over the past few decades. This process is now occurring in other peripheral industrial and commercial areas, such as the Fabric District and 'Ten Streets'. There are similar examples in most towns and cities.

The catalyst for change in such areas is low rental levels and flexible floorspace, which are essential to support micro and small businesses, start-ups, creative enterprises and knowledge-based employment.

The businesses and organisations that start the regeneration process can be priced out over time, as market confidence and land values and rentals increase. In some areas, social enterprises have acquired property whilst the values are low, so they can actually benefit from increased rentals.

How has heritage regeneration helped to boost the image and social cohesion of the areas they are located in, attracting investment and providing a catalyst for reversing economic decline?

The response to the last question is relevant to this question too.

The community (third) sector often has a key role in securing regeneration and growth. Creative enterprise is similarly important. There has been a paradigm shift in the community or third sector from core-funded models to sustainable business models. Many community organisations own multiple properties and are significant players in delivering regeneration for the local community.

Whilst the focus for many public bodies is on major employers, most economic activity lies with smaller businesses. The role of older and peripheral areas in providing affordable rentals for smaller businesses has already been mentioned.

Neighbourhood planning has proved to be an effective means of involving business and other stakeholders in planning for their areas. Many of these include policies to promote heritage-led regeneration and more adaptation of town centres.

How can the care, repair and regeneration of the historic environment help to meet the UK's commitment to sustainable development, including cutting emissions to net zero by avoiding the use and waste of scarce resources associated with demolition and redevelopment?

Historic buildings represent a huge investment of embodied energy in their materials and construction. At the same time, such materials tend to be very durable, sometimes over several centuries. Demolition and landfill represents a loss of this embodied energy, often with replacement by less durable buildings.

How can conservation-led regeneration of the historic environment help to promote sustainable patterns of development, striking the right balance between economic growth and social equity, while also curbing wasteful emissions?

Historic buildings are often durable and adaptable. Historic places often have high-density building patterns and were designed for a low-carbon economy in terms of movement and activity patterns. Historic areas tend to have more sustainable characteristics in terms of fine grain of mixed use (more facilities in walking

distance), pedestrian permeability, concentrations of facilities and public transport in historic centres, high density urban forms and green infrastructure, such as parks.

At the same time, peripheral historic areas mentioned previously can deliver dramatic economic and physical transformations, as in the examples mentioned previously.

What are the implications of the government's reforms to the English planning system, proposed in the planning white paper, for the conservation and regeneration of historic areas?

The main purposes of the planning system are:

- Ensuring the external impacts of development are taken into account;
- Allowing communities to have a say on policy and also development proposals for specific sites;
- Allowing Government to specify social, economic & environmental priorities, including meeting international commitments on Climate Change;
- Providing a mechanism for mediating interests;
- Protecting the natural environment & built heritage;
- Considering adequacy of infrastructure;
- Creating more certainty and investor confidence.

The Planning White Paper centralises powers and complicates the Local Plan process considerably, requiring a higher level of evidence and analysis, whilst bypassing local stakeholders and communities at later stages.

The proposed focus of Local Plans on rules and codes is far-removed from the innovative, entrepreneurial and creative forces that have transformed our towns, cities and neighbourhoods in the past, and which are trying to keep businesses afloat in the present.

Town centres in particular do not fit easily with the proposed reforms. City and town centres are complex areas, subject to ongoing change. At the same time, many are also historic areas. In the new proposals, neither of the 'renew' nor 'protect' categories would be appropriate to such areas. Renew would harm heritage, with the associated economic harm.

The White Paper gives the impressions that heritage, neighbourhood planning and town centres (and other complex areas) were very much an after-thought. Neighbourhood plans have proved to be a means to bringing forward policies and sites on a faster basis, but are down-graded by the White Paper proposals in the following ways:

- The proposed zoning system is focused on Local Plans, leaving little scope for neighbourhood plans to define and enable growth;
- The need for planning applications is removed in some circumstances, so neighbourhood plan policies would not be applied;

- The narrow focus on design codes for neighbourhood plan misses the motivations of many that have created neighbourhood plans.

This diminution of the role of neighbourhood plans in policy making and allocating sites will lead to less growth and disregards the thousands of hours spent in prepared plans. A positive aspect of many neighbourhood plans is that they tend to deal with heritage as an integral part of the economic, social and environmental planning of an area.

The removal of the ability to participate in planning decisions for specific sites and developments will reduce the ability of people, businesses and stakeholders to influence detailed planning and design matters. Design codes will not pre-empt all circumstances. The focus of design proposals on beauty, rather than design fundamentals, increases this problem. Most communities are interested in a wide range of factors, including economic opportunity, climate change, historic and natural environments, air quality, and other factors. It is unclear how these concerns would be reflected in the design codes envisaged.

The White Paper demonstrates a fundamental misconception that involvement of some of the community in creating design guidance or codes then implies support by all of the community for what happens in terms of specific developments on specific sites. We are very concerned over the reference in the White Paper to 'what development looks like' rather than other significant planning issues and quality of design. This patronises local communities by implying that they do not understand more fundamental planning and design issues.

Planning should be a creative, problem-solving, participatory and place-making activity, against the context of climate change. Unfortunately, the Planning White Paper rows backwards against all of these.

What have been the impacts of cuts in local government to the capacity of planning departments to facilitate the conservation and regeneration of sensitive historic areas?

Local planning authorities have lost general planning skills, specialist skills and capacity, including heritage conservation and regeneration expertise. Our experience suggests that this is reflected in some instances in poor quality decision-making. This is one of the reasons for the slow progress on local plans.

Some local authorities place onerous requirements on applications involving historic buildings, due to their lack of in-house expertise. Other local authorities fail to understand the economic importance of heritage, so miss opportunities for more sustainable, inclusive and effective growth.

How can post pandemic efforts to boost skills training support efforts to revive neglected crafts key to historic building conservation?

The maintenance and repair of historic buildings creates skilled employment (professional, technical, skilled manual and vocational), including craft-based jobs. Building refurbishment generates higher levels of pay and investment in local urban and rural economies.

In taking on heritage assets, skills can also include business planning, viability assessment, project development, project management and facilities management.

How can the conservation and restoration of historic parks and other important green spaces contribute to efforts to encourage exercise and thereby promote health and well-being?

Much of our work on neighbourhood plans involves improving green infrastructure and facilities for walking and cycling. This includes protection and enhancement of Local Green Spaces, footpaths and historic parks. There are health, environment and economic benefits to protecting and improving green spaces and infrastructure.

3. Authorship

Dave Chetwyn MA, MRTPI, IHBC, FInstLM, FRSA

Dave Chetwyn is Managing Director/Partner of Urban Vision Enterprise CIC and a Director/Partner of D2H Land Planning Development. He is also a High Street Task Force Expert, Chair of the Board of the National Planning Forum, an Associate of the Consultation Institute and a Design Council Built Environment Expert. Former roles include Head of Planning Aid England, Chair of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation and Chair of the Historic Towns Forum. He has authored numerous guides to planning, development, heritage and regeneration and drafted parts of BS7913.

4. Contact



Urban Vision Enterprise CIC

uvecic.co.uk
info@uvecic.co.uk
01538 386221 (Leek Office)


North West Office:

Suite 15
Oriel Chambers
14 Water Street
Liverpool
L2 8TD

North Staffordshire Office:

Foxlowe Arts Centre (1st Floor)
Stockwell Street
Leek
Staffordshire
ST13 6AD





Company No. 7690116.

Registered address: Foxlowe Arts Centre (1st Floor), Stockwell Street, Leek, Staffordshire,
ST13 6AD

