Town Centre
Heritage-led
Regeneration
Case Study
Heritage Lottery, Welsh Government, Cadw and Local Authorities have developed a good record of partnership working to support the regeneration of town centres through the implementation of several townscape heritage initiatives (THI) in the country, as well as associated community engagement projects. This case study takes an overview of the Townscape Heritage programme, and looks at an example of how this and associated community projects are transforming a coastal maritime town in north Wales.

Since the formation of the National Lottery in 1994, the Heritage Lottery funding programme has been supporting the preservation, conservation and heritage of places throughout the UK. More recently the Welsh Government Vibrant and Viable Places framework for Wales stipulates under its Prosperous Communities national outcomes:

“a well-managed historic and natural environment contributing to the distinctiveness of Wales' landscape and settlements with heritage and historic character conserved, valued and sustained.”

Townscape Heritage (Previously known as Townscape Heritage Initiative) is a funding programme which is initiated by Heritage Lottery to deliver improvements to the built historic environment. It is often made up of a range of funding partners to create a sizeable pot of money (a form of common fund) to deliver physical projects and to support community regeneration.

Both the national regeneration (now the Vibrant and Viable Framework), Heritage Lottery and CADW priorities have generally complimented one another, with good examples of work which has delivered on combined programme outcomes at a local level, usually managed by local partnerships, and in most cases have local authorities administering the ‘common’ fund.

As of September 2011, a total of 22 towns in Wales had successfully applied for THI funding, with a total of £27,205,900 either spent or allocated in the country. Many of these had moved on to a second phase of work. As administrators and delivery partners of the common fund, the local authority usually set-up a grant fund for individual property owners to develop projects on properties often within a defined conservation area.

Design quality

The targeting of funding from Heritage Lottery and CADW to conservation areas and historic buildings demands a higher quality of design to ensure that buildings do not fall into disrepair sooner than expected. Buildings in town centres can often be neglected, particularly some which are used as commercial premises and retail, due to the changing demand of retailers and shopkeepers. Townscape Heritage funding generally targets those in failing repair, and often helps towards ensuring structural longevity as well as a traditional appearance in the streetscape. This requirement for design quality often requires that architects can demonstrate an ability to meet stricter criteria, and continue to upskill their workforce through training. Accreditation by professional institutions such as the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC), Architects Accredited in Building Conservation (AABC), the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors’s Building Conservation Accreditation Scheme is considered to be a good measure of competence. For site engineering work, it is often desirable that contractors can demonstrate their suitability for conservation work by being placed on the Conservation Accreditation Register for Engineers.

The Townscape Heritage programme also aims to improve traditional construction skills and techniques. In many cases it will organise workshops for building contractors and tradespeople to train on aspects of lime plastering, traditional dry-stone walling and timber framing, with the hope that these skills are used on funded projects.

Supporting town centre regeneration, business development and community engagement: Holyhead Case Study

A key focus of regeneration efforts in Wales have been on supporting the traditional high street and town centres. This is also reflected in the VVP framework, which prioritises ‘town centres serving 21st Century towns’

It is acknowledged in the framework that town centres are ‘the heartbeat of our communities; they are where people meet where people shop and where people work.’
This is a vision shared with Heritage Lottery who has established the fund to ‘help to reverse the decline of our best-loved historic townscape... To create attractive, vibrant places that people want to live, work, visit and invest in’.  

The Holyhead THI commenced in 2011, after the Isle of Anglesey County Council secured funding from Heritage Lottery to implement the programme. The funding was also timed to match investment the Welsh Government and the European Regional Development Convergence Fund were making in in Wales. A total of £3.2M was raised to undertake a programme of physical renewal in Holyhead town centre.

The programme in Holyhead was designed in such a way which would secure outputs which would satisfy the requirements of a number of different funders, and was in-line with the regeneration ambitions for the town, which were identified in the Holyhead Forward Strategy.

So far, the programme has grant aided over 20 properties, secured 26 full-time equivalent jobs and accommodated 40. Eighteen new homes have been created in the town centre, with over 2,000sqm of property refurbished.
Townscape Heritage programme also adopts a strong element of community engagement which seek to establish and support active heritage groups in a town, and broaden the appeal of heritage within a community. This is addressed through a series of additional initiatives. In Holyhead, this has been achieved through the Holyhead Community Heritage Initiative for Maritime Engagement (CHIME) project which employs a Ranger to promote the heritage of the town. The initiative recently supported a successful project which reinforced strong links with Holyhead and the Dutch Navy. During WW2 there was an influx of Dutch sailors to Holyhead as a result of the invasion of the Netherlands in 1940. Many took up minesweeping duties whilst based in Holyhead, and a large number settled in the town after the war.

The CHIME project, and other partners funded a Dutch Mariner Memorial located on Newry Beach, and celebrated its unveiling in late 2014, with representatives from the Dutch Navy in attendance. The CHIME project continues to work closely with local partners in Holyhead, such as the Holyhead Maritime Museum, Town Council and the Porth y Felin Partnership (who manage the project).

Holyhead THI – Key Stats

- Grant aided over 20 projects
- Secured 26 full time equivalent jobs
- Accommodated 40 full time equivalent jobs
- Created 18 homes in the town centre
- Created or refurbished over 2,000sqm of property
- Levered in £780,000 of private sector investment
- Levered an additional £20 of other public sector monies for every £1 the Council has contributed

- Created or refurbished two public monuments
- Assisted in the creation of the Holyhead Community Heritage Partnership
- Hosted the Holyhead Open Heritage Weekend
- Held 5 training events in traditional skills with 34 local agents and contractors attending
Conclusion

Successful regeneration schemes are considered to have achieved a good balance of both people and place-based outcomes. Heritage-led regeneration has the ability to merge both, through physical and community projects.

In 2008, Heritage Lottery published an Evaluation of the THI programme throughout the UK, and many of the findings are relevant today to heritage regeneration initiatives generally. Some of the lessons learned over the course of the programme included;

“...that the most successful schemes form part of a larger vision for local and regional development” and “...that concentrated and visible investment works better than piecemeal and dispersed spending.”

The Vibrant and Viable Places Framework also states:

“The historic environment is a powerful driver for renewed community confidence and inward investment, and lies at the heart of local distinctiveness and sense of place.”

Heritage and the historic environment will continue to play a significant part in the regeneration of our towns and cities, and there are numerous examples of the positive contribution it makes to renewed community confidence. Programmes are also facilitating and supporting economic growth in town centres across Wales, particularly when refurbishing run-down commercial premises. In addition to this, heritage plays a vital role in supporting the tourism economy for towns in Wales, and ensuring that a town can retain its traditional and well-maintained appearance is of critical importance when seeking to establish itself as a destination for visitors.

Useful web links

Vibrant and Viable Places Programme:

Cadw Regeneration and Sustainability:
http://cadw.gov.wales/historicenvironment/regenerationandsustainability/?lang=en

Heritage Lottery Fund (Townscape Heritage):
https://www.hlf.org.uk/looking-funding/our-grant-programmes/townscape-heritage

Holyhead Townscape Heritage Initiative:

References

Holyhead Townscape Heritage Initiative

Evidence Paper to the Welsh Assembly in 2011.


www.hlf.org.uk/looking-funding/our-grant-programmes/townscape-heritage


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