

URBAN MATTERS

By Geoffrey Wilson

Major initiatives being developed by England Heritage, in partnership with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, will strengthen urban regeneration and encourage good architecture which enhances the historic environment

At a time when a great deal of building is taking place in our towns and cities, involvement in urban regeneration is understandably high on English Heritage's agenda. This issue of *Conservation Bulletin* focuses on urban matters.

The link between successful urban regeneration and urban conservation must be strong if what emerges is to be viable, congenial and truly enhance the sense of local character. The turn of this century, as with its predecessor, is marked by a striving for progress and modernity. English Heritage acknowledges and responds to this development with all its skills and experience at its command.

New building forms are appearing in our historic towns and cities, as once factories and warehouses did. English Heritage seeks to help rather than hinder in the search both for appositeness of impact and for quality of

architectural expression. In this task we are greatly assisted by the burgeoning relationship with our colleagues at the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE).

English Heritage's regional organisation supports teams of specialists who have not only a knowledge of local places but also all those involved. The value of this understanding cannot be overstated and strengthens our credibility in situations where local knowledge and involvement are paramount. Our role is to assist and advise creatively and positively, recognising the supremacy of environmental character as a benevolent component in the regeneration process.

Towns and cities have a temporal as much as a physical layering, though the degree to which the past productively informs the present is not always, at least initially, a truth widely acknowledged. Thus there is a need for advocacy and

The first of a new generation of Exploratory Science Centres, Explore at-Bristol by Wilkinson Eyre Architects, is a sensitive conversion of and addition to a listed concrete structure built in 1903 by Great Western Railways as a goods shed. It was one of the first structures in this country to be built using the reinforced concrete system developed by François Hennebique – most evident in the elegant tall arched structure of the ground floor space, which once spanned across railway tracks

New public square above an underground car park, stainless steel Planetarium and connected concrete structure with corporate roof terraces and exhibition space





The Planetarium by night, with glass bridge to main building. The final concrete half arches meet pillars with original metal cladding showing the level of a former station platform

restrained yet informed debate within the compendium of skills brought to bear on an holistic regeneration. Within the complexities of the urban setting, a host of different aspects – social, economic, historic and aesthetic – must mutually contribute to an organic urban development.

In the midst of many good developments during the 1960s and 1970s, some schemes intended to relieve traffic congestion have proved ill-conceived. Once-living areas have been isolated by ring roads or stultified by too many surface car parks. With heightened contemporary public awareness and

involvement, however, it is an ideal time to work with the grain of local environments to achieve better urban solutions.

The articles that follow offer a robust view of the opportunities given by a conservation-based urban regeneration. We hope both to inform and stimulate further discussion and activity within and without English Heritage. □

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