

## Oxford Strategic Partnership: Public Realm Working Group

### APPROACHES TO THE PUBLIC REALM: EXAMPLES FROM OTHER UK CITIES

#### SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

Following the report dated 5 June 2009, with examples of what has been done in the public realm in cities comparable to Oxford, this report looks further at Chester, and what it has done to develop its *Local Distinctiveness Strategy*, at York and its architectural lighting strategy and at Cambridge with its old university in the heart of the city. Some other examples of the use of distinctive street furniture and public art have also been included.

#### Chester

The earlier report cited Chester's *Place Marketing Strategy (2006)* and its *Local Distinctiveness Strategy (2002)*. Since these strategies were adopted, the new unitary authority of Cheshire West and Chester has been established. As a result, strategies and their relevance to the local authority area are under review, and there is some sensitivity about ownership and release of documents. The city of Chester is in the middle of a major city centre redevelopment, which has stalled. It is hoped that this will bring opportunity for development of the public realm and public art, but there is currently nothing to report.



#### Street Furniture

The former Public Art Officer for Chester City Council commented very favourably on distinctive *street furniture* (cycle racks, seats and bins) commissioned from established public artist Sebastian Boyesen. This was installed in one area of the city and has been well received, but there have not been funds to allow it to be replicated across the city.

#### Public art

The sculpture pictured, *Midsummer Watch Jugglers* by David Annand, was made from stainless steel and was installed on a roundabout. It shows two figures in Elizabethan costumes juggling with firebrands and refers to the midsummer watch, a pageant dating back to 1498, forbidden by the Puritans but re-established in 1996 by Chester City Council. This was funded by s106 money, and was cited by the Public Arts Officer as a good example of popular public art reflective of the heritage of the city.



The Public Art Officer commented that *s106 funding* can have excellent results in public art, but it requires a policy framework, and a dedicated person with expertise to select work which is visionary and inspired and to manage the commissioning process. Chester developed a *Public Art Strategy (2001)* out of which guidelines for developers were developed.

## York

The report to this group dated 5 June 2009 referred to York's *Sustainable Street Lighting Strategy* (2007). Following on from this, their lighting officer, Ricky Watson, has carried out various trials on dimming lights, rationalising use of lights on signs and bollards, and changing lights to LED and other lower wattage lighting in order to achieve a better quality of light, with energy and financial savings. The Council obtained venture funding, from a regional investment company, to pay for the replacement of lighting, and expect to be able to repay the investment within 5 years through ring fencing the energy savings. Other changes have been funded from their ongoing maintenance budget.

The changes met with some resistance from conservationists and the public before they were made but have received very favourable comments, or no complaints, afterwards. The changes have been and are being introduced gradually with trials and partial changes. The better quality and spread of light has helped improve anti social behaviour in particular areas, as well as making energy savings.

The new lighting systems also make a visual impact: York uses flood lighting on the old city walls, York Minster and other historic buildings. The old lighting system uses gels to change colours. Longer term and more efficient lighting effects and colour change can be achieved with the LED flood lights.

*Illuminating York* is now an established annual festival with specially commissioned, site specific light performance and installations across the city. The 2008 publicity promises to:

*'showcase York as a vibrant, contemporary and creative city. The event breathes light and innovation into York's historic and urban environment, attracting visitors from far and wide... Illuminating York is also an ongoing project, which aims to use light and innovation to breathe new life into York's historic urban environment after dark to attract overnight visitors and assist the development of the evening economy.'*

*Illuminating York* is produced by an independent organisation, with the assistance of the City Council. The Council also organises projections onto York Minster and other buildings at Christmas or for particular events (during national Blood Donor Week, the Minster was flooded in red).



Architectural Lighting



Detail from Patrice Warrener installation at York Minster

Ricky Watson would be very happy to discuss their lighting developments with Oxford City Council. He can be contacted through the York City Council switchboard: 01904 551550.

## Cambridge

Lighting: The University's 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations were launched in January 2009 by a light show projected onto University buildings over two days. The show, produced by world-renowned light artist Ross Ashton, traced 800 years of Cambridge's history, and included specially produced drawings of two of the University's most famous alumni, Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin, by renowned illustrator and alumnus Quentin Blake. The year's celebrations will be concluded with another light event. The legacy of the project for the city is yet to be decided.



A video of the light show can be seen on this link:

<http://www.800.cam.ac.uk/page/85/800th-anniversary-light-show.htm>

Wayfinding signage project: An ongoing priority for the Cambridge City Centre Management Partnership is to highlight and promote the complete retail offer in the city, linking new developments (the Grand Arcade and Christ's Lane) with independent shops in the historic centre (which are seen as unique to Cambridge, adding local distinctiveness and a competitive destination edge). The whole circuit also includes areas offering entertainment, eating, drinking and relaxation, linked by effective signposting to improve the way people are directed on foot around the city. To achieve this, the Wayfinding signage project is being developed by a stakeholder team led by the Head of Tourism and City Centre Management. For more information contact: [emma.thornton@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:emma.thornton@cambridge.gov.uk)

The Wayfinding signage project is also of interest to the University's community affairs department, which sees it as a way of improving signing, and therefore access, to the University museums, colleges (many of which have works of art), and other parts of the University open to the public.

Public Art Consultation and local plan: Cambridge City Council has found it impossible to deliver high quality public art without a proper process in place. They have therefore undertaken a substantial public art consultation to feed into a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). This has included:

- A public survey to establish awareness of and attitudes to public art
- An issues paper asking for views of stakeholders
- Consultation with officers in the Council covering planning, legal, active communities, community development and arts and entertainment services
- Review of good practice within other local authorities (Essex, Southampton, Derby and Northern Ireland) including site visits and interviews with Public Art Officers
- Public consultation of the draft SPD

The final stage is currently under consideration. The overall findings from earlier in the consultation were that the existence of the Public Art SPD would have significant long-term positive benefits, in particular:

- To keep the distinctive character and qualities of the built environment
- To maintain/enhance the built historic character and streetscape
- To give residents and visitors access to a range of high quality arts and cultural activities, recreation and sport

Details are available on these links:

<http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/public/docs/Statement%20of%20consultation.pdf>

<http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/public/docs/Public%20art%20sustainability%20appraisal.pdf>

The Cambridge Local Plan, which includes a section on 'Designing Cambridge' – responding to context, design of external spaces, shop fronts and signage – is available at:

<http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/public/pdfs/ccc-local-plan-2006.pdf>

Funding of public art: Most public art in Cambridge, other than that within the University or colleges, has been funded by s106 money. This has resulted in a reactive and ad hoc approach to public art. Recently, it was agreed to pool s106 money in order that a strategic approach could be developed. This pot has grown to approximately £500 000, which can be used for public art around the city. Through the Public Art Consultation they are looking to use this money strategically. The Council is also hoping to be able to attract match funding from other sources, such as the Lottery. Their Green Spaces team has recently won Lottery funding to open up and tidy up a city centre cemetery.

Town and Gown: The University's Community Affairs office works closely with the City Council to encourage people to explore the heritage on their doorstep. This is principally done through events, such as Bridge the Gap, an annual charity walk around the colleges with a map, and an alternative route map for disabled people.

Challenges remain for the University, colleges and Council in relation to a cohesive approach to public art and perception of the public realm. The University and colleges have access to private money and gifts and have tended to take an ad hoc approach to commissioning public art.

National Urban Design Group Conference: This conference will take place in Cambridge in September 2009. Themes will include cultural master planning and public art (social place making, as against place making driven by spaces and specifications), and tall buildings in historic places.

Contact: For more information and to exchange views on Oxbridge public realm, contact Nadine Black in the Planning Department of Cambridge City Council on [Nadine.black@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:Nadine.black@cambridge.gov.uk)

## **Exeter**

City Centre Regeneration - Princesshay scheme: The Princesshay scheme represents the biggest single investment in regeneration in Exeter's history with an investment of over £200 million. The developer, Land Securities, in partnership with Exeter City Council, has delivered a unique and vibrant city centre scheme that will substantially benefit Exeter and enhance its reputation as the regions capital city. Princesshay provides 530,000 square ft of new shops, residential apartments, cafes, bars, restaurants and improved public spaces including new public toilets and the creation of a 270 space multi-storey car park. It has

incorporated a diverse range of architectural styles respecting the city's rich history and beautiful Cathedral to seamlessly connect and support Exeter's status as a heritage destination. The scheme has opened up fresh views of the Cathedral and created improved settings for the medieval Almshouses and the City Wall. The development has also included a new Exeter Visitor Information and Tickets centre, together with access to the Underground Passages. The scheme has been designed to integrate with the existing High Street and strengthen the whole Exeter shopping experience. Improved, more inviting, pedestrian spaces strengthen links between the High Street and Southernhay and between Paris Street and the Cathedral Quarter. There are 123 apartments throughout Princesshay providing a mix of one, two and three bedroom homes.

InSite Arts (visual arts consultants), was commissioned to develop a public art programme specifically for Princesshay. This was developed through extensive consultation with the design team, Land Securities and its partner, Exeter City Council. Examples include

*'The Exeter Traceries'* by Katayoun Pasban Dowlatshahi: A new public square, Princesshay Square, a continental-style piazza featuring cafés and restaurants has become a new focus for eating and dining in the city. A glass pavilion forms the centrepiece of the square and is also the site of one of the developments most exciting pieces of public art. Six glass panels have been installed on the façade of the pavilion. Inspired by the sacred architecture of Exeter Cathedral, and its close proximity behind the square, the artist has created a series of 'windows', which echo the notion of a medieval rood screen. The designs appearing on each glass panel, applied through a process of hot enamelling and silk screening, also carry references to the city's network of medieval subterranean aqueducts

*'Glow Stones'* by Jeff Bell: Jeff Bell's collection of glass 'pebble seats' create an irresistible series of resting places in Princesshay Square. Inspired by the texture of Exeter's weather beaten historic city walls, these tactile ribbed glass structures, made up of planes of stacked glass, are positioned in what appears to be random points in the square. Their placement has been carefully guided to 'reveal' the new sightlines through this public meeting place and, in particular, to direct the view towards the spectacular vista of Exeter's Cathedral.

By daylight these structures resonate with the reflective and refractive qualities of glass. By night they assume a gem-like quality - special lighting, integrated into the structure, gradually and gently illuminates the pebbles with a rainbow sequence of colour.



<http://www.princesshay.com/index.aspx>

Danielle Battigelli, 23 June 2009