

KENT DESIGN

Meeting to shape our built environment

Drivers of Distinctiveness: Maximising the Heritage and Culture Potential of Place

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Venue: Commissioner's House, Chatham Historic Dockyard

Kent has rich historic and cultural environments that are important assets but are we doing enough to creatively manage them and to maximise the heritage potential for inward investment and building visitor economies? This was the question underpinning the third conference in the Drivers of Distinctiveness series. Participants from the heritage, cultural, public and private sector came together in the Historic Dockyard Chatham to consider 4 themes; placemaking; the economic dividend; managing historic and cultural assets; and the role of the creative sector.

The first speaker in **Session One**: 'Culture and heritage: unlocking the latent potential for placemaking' was John Worthington. His key focus was the 'value of identity' – the values that make a place. John invited the audience to find the human potential of a place as well: what increases the wealth of a place? He encouraged participants to do subversive planning: to do things outside of their job roles that could make things happen. He pointed to small projects that made things change and John also referred to Chelmsford where a bottom up participatory city visioning process called 'Changing Chelmsford' made the most of events such as an Ideas Hub and Ideas Festival. John left the audience with a key message: prototype and test ideas. Fail early and succeed sooner.

Andy Brown, Planning Director of Historic England South East, followed with an exploration of why heritage never gets old. Andy outlines an argument that heritage is not about 'preserving in aspic' but rather that conservation is actually about breathing new life into old buildings. He stressed that management is the key and questioned whether planning had made the shift from preservation to conservation. To manage conservation, planning had to take on an enabling role based on three core values: respect; understanding; and consent. Referring to the National Planning Policy Framework, Andy quoted a key policy for historic environments to 'enhance and improve the places in which people live their lives'. What does enhancement mean for heritage? For Andy, it means improving the quality, value, and extent of heritage. It is to add value and not only to protect the fabric. It means modern idioms that respect the value of the Conservation Area. It means recognising that value-based heritage is in the present – it is constantly being renewed as a re-negotiated idea. In this new meaning of heritage, the role of the expert is a guide to help people articulate what they value about the place.

The third speaker, Martin Hall from Medway Council, spoke of his work in Ebbsfleet. His research explored the geology of Ebbsfleet, the river systems and the prevalence of

chalk cliffs and mining landscapes. He demonstrated how geology had influenced building materials. Martin also found a strong east-west orientation and a strong experience of 'fighting the horizontal'. Other areas of his research, took him to map the quarries, rivers, movement, industrial heritage and he questioned: how can they all become part of the working landscape? How can these key features of a place help people perceive their place?

The final speaker in Session One was Ben Found, Senior Archaeological Officer at Kent County Council. His focus was on the Heritage Strategies that were being supported across the county. He started by saying: heritage needs planning to perform. Heritage is not a bolt on, it plays a positive role in the enjoyment and enhancement of quality of life. Ben stressed heritage is not only an asset but it is the vitality that it can bring. Kent's rich heritage is the result of the interaction between people and place throughout history. In Kent, a positive strategy is needed. What form do these strategies take? What are their visions? What are the longer terms aims and how are they achieved? Ben referred to a number of cases where the emphasis has been what the local people value about their place and how they must be included. The Dover approach has been theme based around the question: What is special about this place? For example, geography, location, maritime history and the invasion, agriculture, industrial histories. Each of these themes are articulated in a 'theme paper'. The next stage has been considering what is vulnerable and where are the opportunities? The aim is to capitalize on the assets and their regeneration potential. The consultation generated 27 action-based recommendations. Ben's advice was to involve local Councillors and officers, the neighbouring districts, special interest groups, voluntary sector, local people, planners, developers and local experts in the consultation process. For Ben, the key message was how to ensure Heritage Strategies address economic, social and community value so that heritage communicates in different ways to different stakeholders.

The audience Q&A highlighted:

- The importance of taking people out on walks to discuss heritage and includes post-occupancy evaluations
- The cultural landscape needs to be better integrated into an understanding of place
- A good example of subversive planning is the Skip Garden in Kings Cross which included a training scheme that became a permanent business
- Management plans are an important process for placemaking and should help bring back focus on 'place'.
- The importance of understanding who the change makers in a place are and ensure they are engaged.

Session Two on 'Culture and heritage: the economic dividend of identity and place' discussed how the image of a place can be transformed to attract inward investment and build visitor economies.

Leanne Tritton, Founder and Managing Director of ING media started the session by asking how do we package heritage? For a long time, culture and heritage was often considered top down, but now how to broaden audiences is becoming more important. There is a need for an entrepreneurial spirit to the packaging of heritage to reach people who will come. The 'Disneyland effect' is a form of packaging. What is it that they do well? Disney understands their audience. They are selling to the 'heart and soul' – an emotional attack. They are also capable of changing their product. Heritage and culture does not always think that way. She thought that it is often it is often the thinking about heritage that it is in aspic. Leanne highlighted a good example; the V&A remaining true to its purpose but also connecting with the mainstream through a focus on fashion. Leanne pointed out many publicly-funded cultural places are straight-jacketed in their

promotion. In many cases people are not shown what other things they can do to support a gallery so that it can become a 'day out'. As an example, Leanne presented Damien Hirst's contentious statue of Verity in Ilfracombe; everyone has an opinion about it and the statue has helped support 'dwell time' in the area. Similarly in Brighton, i360 is a great attraction and people come to look. Leanne concluded that to sell places they need to be places 'to be'. She pointed to the power of social media as a new way in which people consume media. How to attract the bloggers to your places (some of which have 10 million followers)? Leanne ended with a message of the importance of engaging young people in new ways by marketing heritage in different ways and to follow common trends.

Peter Bettley of the Private Office of Roger De Haan, spoke about the regeneration of Folkestone. The regeneration started with the need to make Folkestone a more attractive place for the employees and families of SAGA in order to attract talent. The Roger De Haan Charitable Trust was set up with a lifestyle and well-being focus. The primary project has been the Creative Quarter that provides workspaces and a residential offer. Other projects have included the Folkestone Triennial a 'gallery without walls' that has led to permanent works. An Academy has been set up to upskill people, raise aspirations and encourage relocation of companies to the area. A coordinated sports strategy promotes well-being and has led to two new build sports facilities. Folkestone Harbour is a 35 acre site is being developed on commercial principles ensuring a mix of 1000 residential homes and community facilities with a focus on quality buildings, public spaces and sea defences. Restaurants, sport, art and recreation create a Seaside pier idea. The derelict pier infrastructure is being restored and the maritime heritage of the area is being interpreted for locals, communities and visitors. The public promenade is engaging with artists and a programme of music and events to create opportunities for meeting, eating, drinking, and walking. The aim is to rebuild an identity with the sea. A disused railway is also being redeveloped. Peter demonstrated the commitment of Roger De Haan to the economic and social success of Folkestone, not only to increase visitor numbers but to also cater for the improvement of the quality of life of residents and the work community.

Tim Lewis of Small Back Room talked about the importance of creating a great destination brand based on experience of place. A successful place will have many relevant experiences. The logo for a place is only a small part of the brand. He asked the audience to consider what is their destination brand? Is there a story to tell about the place? Tim introduced four principles or cornerstones of creating good destination brands. First, define who you are as a place and what you are. Bring these two features together. Second, build from the inside out. Consider the local culture, sense of ownership over place from people in the boardroom to the cleaner. They will all have an understanding of the place. Third, put the emotion in. Build your brand attractors by focusing on the physical and emotional experience. Fourth, understand the spirit of the destination. Search for the insights which create a sense of ownership from those connected with the destination. In summary, Tim's message was the art of destination branding is to think beyond logos and strap lines and make brand an active tool of engagement and interpretation.

The final speaker in this session was Richard Holdsworth speaking on the transformational journey of Chatham Historic Dockyard. Richard identified four core aims of the regeneration of the dockyard and its scheduled monuments. The Trust chose preservation through re-use as a primary driver. The Trust had to ensure that revenue was sustainable therefore finding key tenants and visitor attractions was a major factor. The Trust wanted to make sure the Dockyard was an anchor of community pride and sense of place. Finally, the Trust wanted to ensure the regeneration of the Dockyard would boost the local economy which is currently £60 million per year. Key to the

success has been the approach taken to invest in visitor attractions based on repair and restoration, interpreted heritage, and the addition of retail elements. Other users of the site have been encouraged to live and work on site through businesses such as craft stores and a micro-brewery. There are two University of Kent departments using the site, and it is a sought-after film location. Richard described the Dockyard as a mixed-use estate that provides an equilibrium between users and heritage. The Trust has responsibility for the upkeep of utilities, roads and pavements and 47 scheduled monuments; maintenance costs exceed revenues. The intention is to close the gap with new residential development. Richard concluded by reflecting on lessons learned. First, it takes time (30 years). Second, it's important to maintain the long term vision. Third, partnerships are the way forward. Fourth, relationships with Historic England and the local conservation team helps share the risk. Finally, Heritage Lottery Funding has been fundamental to the Trust's success. The vision is to have the most complete and preserved dockyard. The challenge is how to balance quality of experience with expansion.

The Q&A focused on:

- How to engage younger people? Historic England engages with schools to generate a local interest in heritage. The need to embrace social media is growing.
- How different audiences require tailored events
- What is it that are people consuming? There needs to be faith that people know what's relevant to them. The message cannot be patronizing.
- An experience of place is an emotional attachment. Developing this is key. Does social media help? Social media can help find the voice. The question is how to develop this voice?
- It's a competitive world. It's not enough to have the product. The important thing is how to make it relevant.

Session Three explored the challenges of managing change in the 21st Century Historic Environment, particularly with the introduction of contemporary architecture. The first speaker was Chris Bearman of Allies and Morrison who started by introducing the practice's book *The Fabric of Place*. The book explores how cities, towns and villages can evolve and change by building on their historic form and identity rather than by sacrificing it. Chris chose the conceptual idea of the 'pre-existing' to examine a number of the practice's projects in which design had been shaped by the pre-existing site and context. In Highbury Square the old football stadium was carefully transformed into new housing uses. The typology of the 'London Square' formed the starting point. The heights and density of the stands were retained. The perimeter stepped down to the surroundings. In place of the north and south stands, new contemporary housing blocks have been designed. An excellent example of urban infill respecting the rich, local grain of streets, avenues and squares. Chris also presented Kings Cross Central masterplan based on an understanding of the Victorian infrastructure and re-connecting back to the city by restoring paving and landscaping.

The second speaker was David Hills of DSDHA who began by introducing the concepts of 'removal and additions' to start new narratives. In the process of 'undoing' bits of structure to make new space. He described how twitter and Instagram are developing new points of the city and follow narratives. One DSDHA scheme at the Royal Albert Memorial connects with the Royal Albert Hall. Another project in Portsmouth emotionally connects historic stories and links the active town with the historic dockyard. Points in the masterplan help to brand the place and the masterplan includes a new public space, the market square. The scheme also considers new ways of arriving. A key aim was to undo the museum context by using public spaces as places to engage with the content, creating multiple uses for audiences.

Simon Harrison of Ebbsfleet Development Corporation stressed the importance of heritage: what happened before the Garden City brand as the starting point. Simon referred to the principle set up by the Maori in New Zealand whose oral history structures perceptions of the cultural landscape: the connection between people and the land. In Ebbsfleet, these connections can be found in the quarries as the industrial heritage. Simon is keen to cultivate shared narratives of Ebbsfleet from the perspective of the industrial past, the developer and the Garden City. Simon explained the masterplan of Ebbsfleet has identified conditions for growth: (i) bringing in the green and the blue taking advantage of the distinctiveness of lakes and the green grid (ii) make the most of the built heritage (iii) work with the landform to develop distinctive neighbourhoods (iv) interpret the cultural landscape in the architecture such as use of flint. Design coding has not worked and considering working alongside Design Review. (v) Capture local narratives which make the place worth investing in and resourcing and (vi) Promote local colour and materials, using the site's fauna and flora.

The Q&A covered three points:

- The importance of starting with the narratives of place
- The usefulness of design codes in bringing about distinctiveness?
- In heritage-based plans/masterplans, how to engage with house builders in these discussions to avoid use of standard types? Some good examples are from Cambridge where Countryside were the 'Master Developer' for continuity of design quality.

In the **final session** the focus was on how the creative sector has regenerated places. John Barber of Folkestone Festival gave an account of the community-led cultural initiative. Set up in 2008 to overcome the socio-economic difficulties of the seaside town. Taking advantage of 2012 Diamond Jubilee and the Olympics, the festival brought together a wide range of communities such as the Nepalese, Italian and Spanish, alongside an Air Show. The festival brought in 110,000 visitors. Trade went up by 100%. Key to the success was work with public agencies to provide services and venues. The help of enthusiastic volunteers was critical. John ended with the message that seaside towns need reasons to draw people and events are one such reason because they provide colour and life. Utilising the seaside identity, new uses and activities can improve the image of a place and draw in inward investment.

The second speaker was Helen Havercroft, Head of Growth and Development from Thanet District Council. Helen listed Thanet's many achievements and confirmed that Thanet is doing well. One key achievement is that heritage has not been destroyed for housing. Other achievements include HS1 connecting Thanet to London and other places, as well as the Turner Contemporary in Margate that brought new people to the District. Key to Thanet's ability to maximize its heritage potential has been its partnerships with Historic England and the Arts Council who saw the opportunity. Helen admitted planning could be more robust about maintaining design quality and the special qualities of place. Thanet has good house prices and it is important to keep people living and working locally. Helen then outlined what needs to be done next. A number of key projects are in the pipeline. First, Dreamland in Margate has been given a new lease of life around events and a heritage theme park. The Margate Marina's industrial past is of local interest. In Dalby Square in Cliftonville, terraces have been re-purposed and turned in HMOs and multi-generational housing. Helen ended with an aspiration for Thanet to remain committed to sense of place and distinctiveness.

Working closely with Thanet Council, Sophie Jeffrey was the Project Manager for the Arts Council and Historic England funded project, 'Margate Arts, Creativity and Heritage'

(MACH). Sophie began her talk with a personal story of how she had built up an emotional connection with Margate; that special relationship between people and Margate. When Sophie moved to Margate, many cultural and heritage venues were closed and the programming was detached from the place. A handful of people were passionate about Margate and they helped unlock the place. This led to the place-based heritage and culture project, MACH. Sophie offered three wise statements: Start where you are; celebrate what you have; do what you can. Her key message was to tell the story in many different ways to broaden the appeal. She warned against selling a fantasy but to tell an honest story. Start with pop-up activity and places that have meaning such as Heritage Open Days to test the market and to grow the volunteer base. Encourage meanwhile use and public art installations. Experiment with new uses for the industrial scale buildings. Sophie reminded the audience it is not all about the buildings but about events, public realm and signage. Sophie also reminded the audience to engage people on the street where they live.

Chris Lamb summarized the wide ranging discussion and highlighted 5 topics for the audience to consider:

1. What support do you need to develop the 'reason' for tenants and audiences to come to your place? Do you have associated uses and experiences that could broaden your attraction? Are you reaching young people?
2. Have you got the support to develop your story/brand/emotion and narratives about your place? Have you considered new trends on social media?
3. Have you considered the different types of collaboration and partnerships to help you succeed?
4. Is planning playing an enabling role and promoting the values and special qualities of the place?
5. Do you need support to put in place robust strategies to manage change, promote high quality design, and encourage re-use of heritage?