

# The Awards for Planning Excellence

# A REVIEW

A look back at regional awards for the best in  
North West planning policy and practice



**RTPI North West**

mediation of space · making of place

# INTRODUCTION

With the Covid-19 Pandemic preventing so many of the RTPI North West's social activities in 2020, it was decided to look at other options for giving the RTPI NW Membership new and interesting content. Thus, alongside the usual Annual Review of the year the Region has also decided to look back at the Awards for Planning Excellence which have done so much to showcase the best in physical and policy based planning, both Regionally and Nationally for 43 years now.

RTPI Awards began with the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977 when the RTPI introduced the Silver Jubilee Cup as its top award for planning achievement. The Silver Jubilee Cup continues to be awarded at the national level but in the early 1980s it was replaced in the NW Region with the John Coaker Cup, named after a secretary of the RTPI North West who died while in office. The John Coaker Cup would continue to the early 2000's, with winners including the East Lancashire Railway (1992) and the Duke St/Bold St Action Plan, Liverpool (1999). It was then replaced by the current Awards for Planning Excellence.

In the following pages we review some exemplar Case Studies of Award-winning projects and plans from the last 15 years of Awards, from each part of the Region and from



different categories of Awards. We look at what those projects achieved, why they won and what best practice they demonstrated. We also look at how those Award winning projects have developed in the years since their win, what further success has been achieved or, in some cases, where a project might have failed to live up to its initial promise, and why. In the case of Award winning plans, we look at how those Plans have gone on to influence the world around them.

Finally, there is an article from our 2020 Awards Team, looking at the past 10 years of Regional Awards, what makes a winner and what the next decade might hold for best practice in the planning profession.

**Christopher Wilson**

*RTPI North West Promotion of Planning  
Task Group Leader*





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# CUMBRIA

**The projects for Cumbria show excellence in both physical design and plan making, but also how changing circumstances can make converting that initial excellence into long term sustainability, challenging.**





## K Village, Kendal

*Commendation for Best Regeneration & Sustainable Community Scheme in 2011.*

*Submitted by WDR & R Taggart, WYG, The Ballyrogan Group of Companies*

### Background

The K Village development was complete in 2010 on the site of the former K Shoes Factory and is an edge of centre mixed use development comprising retail, residential and leisure uses. The development was aimed at providing an alternative retail offer to that within the nearby attractive market town of Kendal. The scheme originally gained planning consent in 2006 for a mixed residential, leisure and factory outlet centre development of 120 apartments, 4182sqm factory outlet centre, 1733sqm of restaurant floorspace & 511sqm K Shoes heritage centre with an internal courtyard.

However, following this approval a number of subsequent applications were approved in 2007 and 2010 to reconfigure the range of floorspaces and layout also allowing office space to be provided.

The commended K Village was at the time of the awards, an attractive redevelopment of the former K Shoes Factory which had operated from the site since 1844. The proposals went some way to retaining the heritage value of the site through the incorporation of the K Shoes heritage centre and the outlet was expected to create almost 200 jobs. With the exception of the heritage centre, the western frontage facing onto River Kent



provided a well-connected and attractive riverside walk along River Kent with commercial uses on the ground floor and an internal covered mall. Its retail function as a factory outlet centre was considered complimentary by some and controversial by others given the abundance of independent traders operating in Kendal town centre and the impacts the redevelopment would have. The scheme also successfully catered for a number of constraints on the site such as its Flood Zone 3 designated and its location on the southern limits of the Kendal Conservation Area.

### Development Since the Award

The evolution of the K Village following 2010 paints a rather familiar picture of uncertainty for the retail industry since the 2008 financial crash. In 2017 the retail and

office space on the ground floor was predominantly empty and converted into a new gym operated by Anytime Fitness which was seen as a more viable use. Shortly after this in 2018, another retail use was converted, this time to an office. This planning application confirmed the Council's position that the long-term vision for the K Village is likely to change after its success had been somewhat questionable and they considered that the retail ground floor uses were unviable and were being sustained primarily due the income generated by the residential accommodation and less so by the office uses. Council Officers recently commented that the failure of the retail element of the outlet may have been due to its out of centre location and the mix of tenants not quite providing the offer to draw shoppers.





In November 2018, planning permission was granted for the part redevelopment of the outlet to convert the existing premises into a 69 bedroom Travelodge hotel, 88 one bed apartments, further office space and flexible retail/office space. As of November 2018, there were only three commercial units still trading at the entire outlet: Anytime Fitness, Terrazzo and Clarks Factory Outlet. The consented redevelopment of the outlet is now underway and the remaining commercial occupants have moved from the site with the exception of Anytime Fitness.

## Outcomes

Despite the commendable and comprehensive redevelopment which notably took into account the heritage and technical constraints of the site, ultimately the retail offer which anchored the outlet failed. As highlighted by the Council, much of the retail and office space has in fact been vacant since the building was complete in 2010 and has evidently had no appeal to traders. The re-purposing of this retail space further emphasises the question of how do we plan resilient high streets for the future to meet our changing needs?



# Upper Eden Neighbourhood Plan and Community Interest Group

*Commendation for good practice in plan preparation in 2012, then award winning for Catalytic Rural Community and Neighbourhood Plan in the NW under the Localism Act 2011 in 2013 (submitted by Development Planning Solutions Ltd and the Consortium of Parish Councils).*

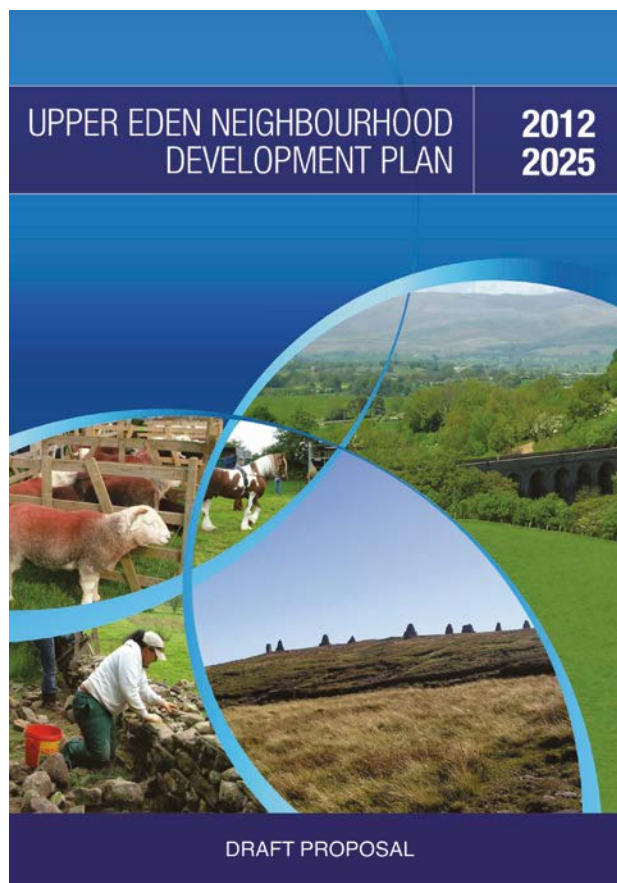
## Background

The Upper Eden Neighbourhood Plan was the first to be 'made' in the country following a successful referendum in March 2013. Not only was it the first to be made, it combined 17 parish council's whom each agreed to contribute £2 per dwelling within their parish to match funding received from the government. This was a path-finding project and was one of many put forward at the time by the DCLG but was the only one to materialise. The Neighbourhood Plan Group agreed that one of its key aims was to increase housing in order to boost economic investment as the current development plan adopted by Eden District Council largely constrained this type of growth.

This Neighbourhood Plan was the first to be made in the country which is an impressive achievement in its own and merited its award in 2013, however equally as impressive was the manner in which the Neighbourhood Plan Group formed through gaining the support of 17 individual parishes in an attempt to resolve a common concern amongst the community through these new planning powers.

## Development Since the Award

The Neighbourhood Plan contained seven policies and remains part of the development plan for Eden District Council. Tom Woof- the planning consultant who acted on behalf of the Neighbourhood Group commented that the only policy that has been used effectively is Policy UENDP2 (Housing on Farms). This policy allowed established farming enterprises or rural businesses to provide additional dwellings that can be used by family members, holiday letting or renting to local people. It is understood circa 20 planning applications have been submitted with direct reference to this policy.





## Outcomes

The Neighbourhood Plan had limited success in planning terms with the majority of the planning policies largely underused. However, the success of Policy UENDP2 will have gone some way to supporting a number of rural businesses. Tom Woof commented that in terms of lessons learned from this case study, Neighbourhood Plans only really have a role where there is a gap within existing local or national planning policy and there is a local issue that needs addressing. Another such example of this is where a group of local residents asked a local planning authority to address whilst carrying out a review of their development plan, a common issue where B&B's were converted to residential dwellings (C3 Use Class) without an affordable housing contribution which in some case

rendered the conversion unviable. The Council initially refused but later agreed to include this policy within the draft local plan after the local residents threatened to seek funding to draft a Neighbourhood Plan to address the issue themselves. However, since the introduction of Neighbourhood Plans in 2012 the evolution of the planning system such as the NPPF or permitted development rights has resulted in a considerable amount of Neighbourhood Plan policies becoming outdated quickly. Therefore, the key outcome from this case along with a number of other Neighbourhood Planning cases indicates that this is a good mechanism where there is a omission in existing policy, however this loophole may be corrected at any time resulting in the Neighbourhood Plan to be out of date.



Photo: Billy Wilson/Flickr



# LANCASHIRE

**The projects for Lancashire again show how delivering commercial success can be challenging but given the right location, offer and private sector buy-in, achievable. Also, how a strong and well designed plan can drive successful commercial endeavours, over the long term, with the right commitment from those implementing it.**



## New Market Facilities, Preston

*RTPI NW Creating Economically Successful Places and Overall Winner 2018.*

*Submitted by Preston City Council and Frank Whittle Partnership Ltd*

### Background

Preston City Council's new contemporary Market Hall and Box Market, designed by FWP in collaboration with Greig & Stephenson Architects, provided a much-needed replacement of the previous aging indoor market and refurbishment of the existing canopies. Creating facilities that offer the 'best of Lancashire local market traders'. The Award-winning project consisted of the restoration to the existing market canopies; the Old Fish Market constructed in 1924 and the Covered Market constructed in 1875. Both canopies are Grade II listed and were in desperate need of maintenance, repair and decoration.

The judging panel commented that: "When the panel visited we found an attractive 'European style', vibrant, well used facility which concentrates on a much-improved food offer but also contains some of the more traditional market stalls. What makes this scheme particularly effective is the creation of a contemporary glazed enclosure of some 1,200 sqm in the central portion of the main building."

The Preston Markets project was led by Preston City Council's Planning Department. Prior to the project getting underway it was important to establish a clear and robust planning policy platform for the development proposals. Preston Markets lie at the heart of the city's priority regeneration area and it was recognised that the Council's



investment in its own Markets would act as a significant catalyst for bringing forward wider regeneration benefits throughout the city centre. Hence for the maximum regeneration benefits to be capitalised, the linkage between the Markets development and the adjacent proposed schemes, such as a long-awaited cinema and restaurant development, needed to be clearly articulated to avoid the other developments being located in sub-optimal locations elsewhere in the city.

This vision and policy platform for the Markets Quarter was crafted in the Preston City Centre Area Action Plan, adopted in 2016. This adoption paved the way for the planning and listed building consent applications that followed, and which received consent in August 2016. One of the planning challenges that was faced during the design process and in the determination of the planning application was overcoming the potential conservation concerns of siting a modern market hall structure under a sensitive listed canopy.

Working alongside the scheme architects, Preston's planners liaised closely with Historic England and the local conservation group to develop a design and use of materials that are wholly sympathetic to the listed canopy.

Developing in a tight city centre environment was another challenge for the planners. In order to minimise the impact of the disruption caused by a major redevelopment project, Council planners liaised closely with neighbouring businesses and residents in order to avoid any significant issues arising.

### Outcomes

The new Market Hall is effectively Phase I of a larger scheme. Known as 'Animate' it will comprise a £50 million leisure complex of a multi-screen cinema, ground floor restaurants and bowling alley on the former Indoor Market site. The site and the completed scheme will be City Council owned and developed by partners Maple Grove developments. Construction, following a revised planning application is expected later in 2021, with no sign that the 2020/21 Covid-19 Pandemic is delaying or harming the project.





# Spinning Point Phase I, Rawtenstall

*RTPI NW Regeneration Category Winner 2017 Submitted by NJL Consulting*

## Background

In November 2015, NJL Consulting submitted a full planning application on behalf of the RTB Partnership for Phase 1 of Spinning Point. The RTB Partnership was a joint venture between Barnfield Investment Properties, Rossendale Borough Council and Together Housing Group. Spinning Point was the comprehensive redevelopment of a 1.38 ha site within Rawtenstall Town Centre boundary and Conservation Area. The site formerly comprised the Valley Centre, a derelict shopping centre that had been vacant for a number of years and had become an eyesore in the town. It was demolished in 2012 to make way for a temporary public square before the plans for the redevelopment of the site were finalised. The application sought consent for the comprehensive redevelopment for a bus station and ancillary retail/café units, car parking, landscaping. The development also included partial-demolition and refurbishment of Rawtenstall Town Hall, a locally listed building. Planning permission was obtained in March 2016 and the scheme was constructed over 2017/18.

The development represented a significant investment in Rawtenstall, regenerating a prominent site to the benefit of the local community. The application site had been earmarked for regeneration for a long time by Rossendale Borough Council and the development of a new bus station and the redevelopment of the former Valley Centre area were key objectives of the Core Strategy.

The project won £1.9 million from the LEP's Growth Fund to add to Lancashire County Council's £3.5 million funding. The funding was solely for a new eight lane bus station in Rawtenstall.



Work involved extensive public consultation, with input from local heritage groups leading to significant redesigns to protect the most attractive parts of Rawtenstall Town Hall, reduce the height of the new bus station and retains a public square and open space.

### Outcomes

This development was intended to be the first phase of the regeneration at a key site in Rawtenstall. However, subsequent events show that it can often be difficult to

follow up a public sector led investment in infrastructure with commercial options. The £9.4 million Spinning Point Phase II redevelopment was intended to comprise a hotel, retail, residential complex (29 one and two-bedroom apartments) and luxury spa. By 2019, it was clear that market demand did not support the hotel and retail options in this small Pennine Lancashire town.

The alternative is likely to provide more public realm and parking, but detailed plans remain to be finalised as of 2020.





# East Lancashire Railway 2020 Development Strategy

*RTPI NW Best Regeneration Initiative Award Winner 2010 Submitted by East Lancashire Railway Trust.*

## Background

The East Lancashire heritage Railway (ELR) runs for 13 miles from Heywood to Bury in Greater Manchester and then on to Rawtenstall in Lancashire. The ELR opened in stages as the line was progressively restored and to also build up volunteer support, wider partnership solidarity and marketing expertise between the Trust partners. It reached its full length after the Heywood section was opened in 2003. The Heywood section became necessary because of the introduction of the Metrolink's first stage Bury to Altrincham line and the need for the ELR to have the vision to maintain a heavy rail connection over Metrolink and out on the main line via Heywood and Castleton Junction. It was at the time the Trust partnership took this bold decision to progress the Heywood section in addition to its other restoration commitments and regeneration ambitions that in 1992 the ELR won the RTPI John Coker Cup in recognition as an agent for change - already achieving extensive regeneration of the Upper Irwell Valley and backed by a sound supporting wider vision now bringing potential benefits also to the Roch Valley's sphere of influence. By 2010 the ELR had built up its direct visitor figures to more than 100,000 visitors/year with many more visitors and residents enjoying the improving countryside, its villages and towns within the heritage railway corridor.

The success of the first 20 years of the railway raised aspirations amongst the Trust partners to a level where it was necessary to take stock of what had been achieved to support future funding applications but to also to put a focus on the next ten years of priority projects so all partners within the Trust could develop individual initiatives within their own organisational structures. Partners also sought guidance on issues relating to business, organisational and marketing development



within the operating company (ELLRCo) which up to this point had been almost entirely a volunteer organisation and needed to make a step change in these key areas. Accordingly, in June 2008 Locum Consulting were appointed to assess the impact of the railway since its opening in 1987 and to determine its potential to attract increased visitor numbers and further enhance the local economy.

A number of commercial and developmental issues were also identified, including the fact that the events programme is very strong, accounting for almost three quarters of seat sales, whilst general non-event day seat sales are lower than most other equivalent heritage railways – signposting the need for significant marketing and promotional efforts.

A target of achieving 200,000 visits per year was identified as an ambitious but achievable by 2020, reliant upon the delivery of 11 developmental and organisational priorities outlined in the Action Plan which formed part of the Strategy:

1. Strengthening the Company Structure
2. Castlecroft Transport Museum Commercial Development
3. Business Performance and Visitor Services Improvements
4. Marketing Plan
5. Burrs Countryside Halt
6. Family Facilities
7. Rawtenstall Station
8. Ramsbottom Visitor Destination Plan
9. Buckley Wells / National Railway Museum Satellite
10. Heywood Development
11. Castleton Development

### Development Since the Award

The Development Strategy was not just adopted by the ELR Trust as abstract guidance, but the format of the Action Plan was adopted as the Trust's means of monitoring and measuring progress at Trust Board meetings. Several new staff were appointed in 2009/10 to deliver organisational change and by the time of the Award, one of the 11 projects, Castlecroft Transport Museum, had already been completed.

### Outcomes

By 2016 the ELR had met its target of 200,000 visitors/year, with notable growth in core visitors outside of events. Key achieved investments, proposed in the Development Strategy include:

1. Ongoing investment into Rawtenstall Station
2. A new halt at Burrs Country Park
3. A railway carriage café on Heywood Station.
4. A variety of family friendly facilities and activities.

In winning the RTPI award twice the ELR has done so largely based on its determination to critically reassess its progress and at the same time to chart a future path that partners will all sign up to. Shortly after reaching its 2016 milestone of 200,000 visitors/year and in approaching its 10 year anniversary of publishing its 2010 Development Strategy the ELR Trust partnership again commissioned an Impact and Assessment Study together with a Development Strategy that will take the partnership up to 2030.





# GREATER MANCHESTER

**The projects for Greater Manchester show how excellence can be delivered at both the largest and smallest of scales. This section looks at the major changes at Manchester Airport, but also how a comparatively simple planning tool, Ketso, developed at Manchester University has gone on to deliver change internationally.**



# Airport Infrastructure through Planning

*Innovation Award winner 2016. Submitted by Manchester Airport Group*

## Background

The transformation of Manchester Airport and the surrounding area was, and still is, a key strategic development for the city of Manchester and the region as a whole. Major infrastructure schemes such as this can be challenging, full of risks, and often times contentious. It was evident that a cohesive Masterplan for the delivery of this gateway was required. Manchester Airport Group's in-house planning team duly delivered, and were commended for their work with an Innovation Award, as well as being announced as Overall Winner, at the RTPI North West Region Awards in 2016.

In discussions for this article, Andrew Murray, Planning Manager for Manchester Airport Group [MAG] explained were the core attributes and successes of this project lie. Key to this is the ability to provide a collaborative and plan led approach, along with stakeholder engagement to instil trust and credibility in the project. Engagement on a professional, political and community level, including regular meetings with the affected local authorities, has provided greater transparency to the ongoing process, and allowed the project to progress with little objection.





In order to inform Manchester City Council's Core Strategy (2012) and achieve a strategic site designation, MAG's planning team, alongside early engagement, created a comprehensive evidence base to provide sufficient support for the exclusion of 500 hectares of land from the Green Belt around the airport. This provided a clear route and strategy for the planning team to translate the Airport's Masterplan and Transformation Programme into a successful planning application in 2016. As has been reiterated by Andrew, "through a sustained commitment to the clear articulation of the airport's growth and development objectives, to the active engagement of and communication with local communities, to the positive

participation in plan making, MAG's planning team was able to deliver consent for a huge and potentially contentious £1bn infrastructure scheme practically uncontested."

### **Development Since the Award**

So far, this has resulted in the development of the new Terminal 2, with the first phase anticipated to be complete and opened in early 2021. At the peak of its construction there were over 2,000 contractors on-site and £1 million being spent on the project every day. Once again engagement has been key, with retailers, passengers and government bodies utilising the new space, its capacity and design has being crucial. There was a clear strategy



to prevent the airport from becoming too generic and the internal design is primarily centred on its locality, with features such as honeycomb lighting to represent the Manchester bee. In terms of capacity, there will be 50 percent more seating available internally than currently available in Terminal 1 and 2 combined, as well as an improvement in the retail and restaurant offering. This development is just one of the steps towards the airport's ambition to handle 55 million passengers a year.

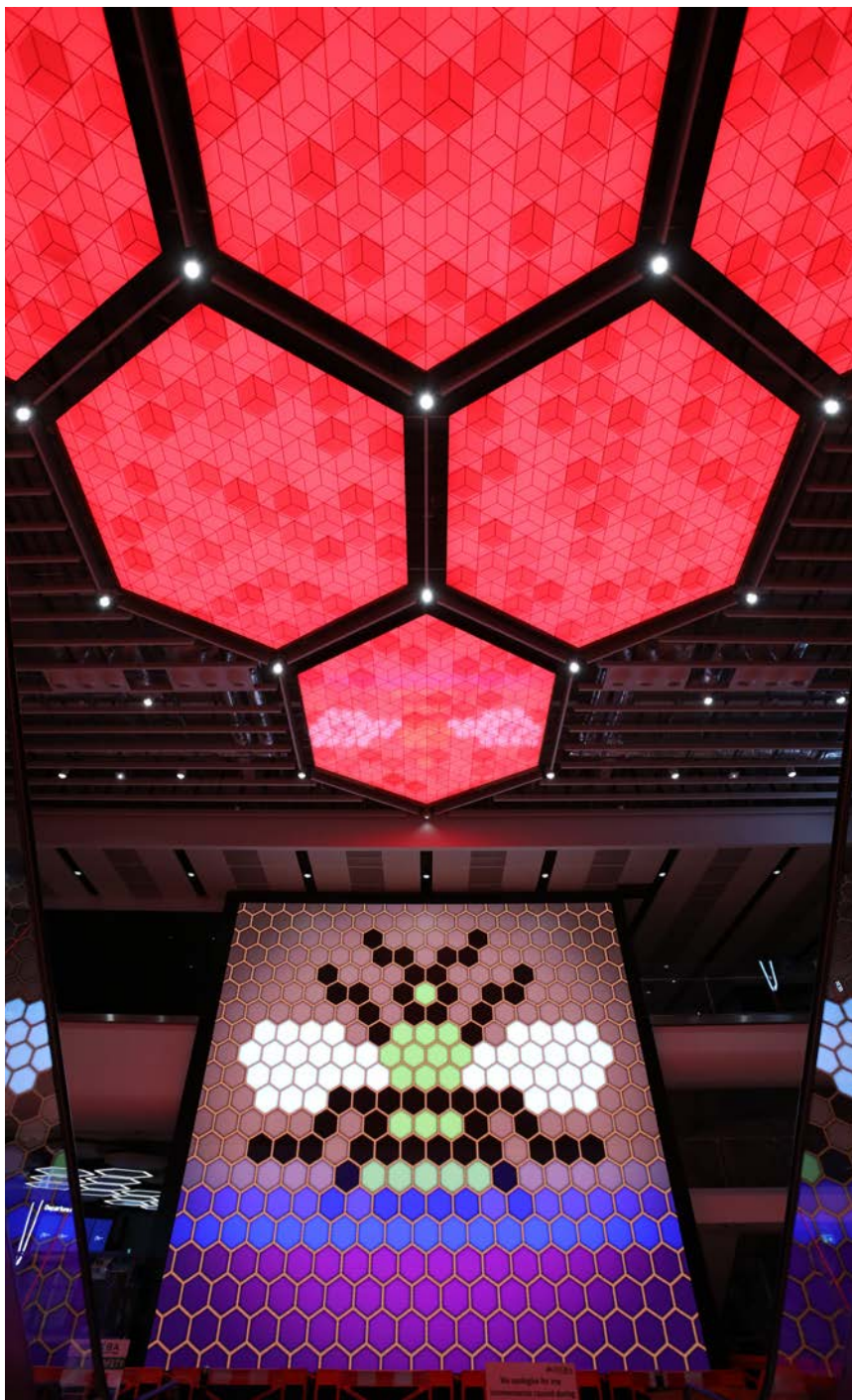
### Outcomes

For the near future, when hopefully some normality returns, MAGs planning team will be looking to start work on their review of the masterplan. After securing the capacity uplift

that the new infrastructure affords their main immediate challenge, is to overcome the surface access capacity constraints which have recently led to heavy congestion affecting access into and out of the site. Whilst this will be considered, work will also continue alongside Transport for Greater Manchester, and through the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework, for the extension of the Metrolink via the proposed HS2 station through Davenport Green, and the construction of a direct Metrolink/tram-train link between the airport and Stockport. There is still a lot more to do, but progress is clearly evident around the airport today and the masterplan has provided the best platform for Manchester Airport Group to achieve this.







# Ketso

*Commendation for Contribution to Positive Community Engagement 2013. Submitted by Manchester University*

## Background

Ketso, a southern African word for 'action' is also a hands-on tool for engagement, invented by Dr. Joanne Tippetts based on her first-hand experiences in rural regeneration in Lesotho. Noticing that women were not always getting their views across during engagement, Joanne looked into developing a framework that would provide every participant with an opportunity to voice their opinions. Following further development during her PhD in planning at The University of Manchester, Ketso was launched as a social business. The toolkit has seen great growth in the last seven years since achieving a commendation from

RTPI North West for Contribution to Positive Community Engagement. From being used in 20 countries at that time, it is now used in 77, by a variety of organisations in different fields including planning, environment, health, and community development.

Utilising coloured, reusable 'leaves', participants are asked to write down their ideas on a subject, then to share them on a shared felt workspace. These thoughts can then be structured into themes and discussed further, identifying priorities and clear action points. Joanne has been amazed at the way in which Ketso has developed and diversified in recent years, stating that "Planning has a long tradition





of innovation in participation practice. It is exciting to see this innovation evolve from a planning context into new fields, helping everyone's voice to be heard". Some organisations, such as Health Improvement Scotland and the Glasgow Refugee Asylum and Migrant Network, now have the toolkit rooted into their ongoing engagement, highlighting its success in bringing together community members, including marginalised social groups, and service providers to grapple with challenging topics.

## Outcomes

One key element to the growth of Ketso has been put down to the way in which Joanne and the Ketso team embedded her research on effective engagement into the design of the toolkit. As a consequence, it enables anyone to run effective workshops, an important shift with greater requirements seemingly placed on project officers and practitioners to engage with communities and stakeholders on limited budgets. Its flexibility means it can be used by anyone, anywhere, in any field. More locally, Ketso has been used by the Great Manchester Wetlands Partnership on the Carbon Landscape Project - a

£3.2million landscape-scale restoration project working alongside communities to achieve a connected ecosystem in this post-industrial area. Ketso has been used on various occasions, from initial stakeholder engagement to support the funding bid, as well as with community members to understand their perspectives on their local landscape. During the pandemic, the project is trialling another innovation, engaging with community members online with each participant having an individual, hands-on Ketso kit. Joanne is hopeful that this work will contribute towards the Wigan Flashes potentially being designated as a national nature reserve.

Whilst there has been a great increase in the range and spread of use of Ketso, Joanne wishes to see the toolkit being used more in planning and development. She aspires to see it being utilised to mobilise dialogue around green recovery from the pandemic and climate change planning. Joanne stated how the 'pause' forced on us by the pandemic provides a window of opportunity to "reimagine our urban areas" and would like to see Ketso used to promote "creative and inclusive dialogue in this global rethink".



# Stockport Plaza

*Conservation and Planning Award 2011. Submitted by the Plaza Trust*

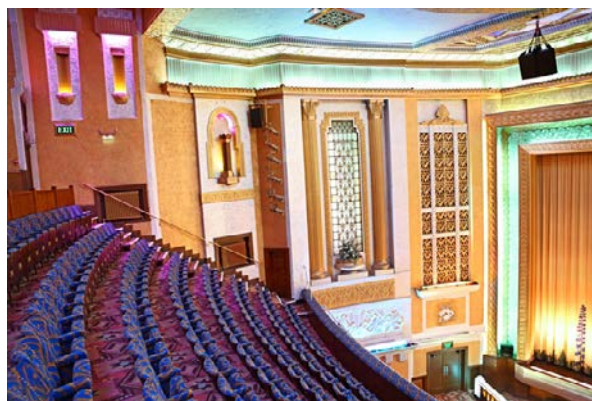
## Background

From Laurel and Hardy to local band Blossoms, the Grade II\* listed Stockport Plaza has seen a variety of characters and performers on its screen and at its doors. A clear indication of the Stockport Plaza's position as a regional and national treasure, but also a reflection of the hard work that has taken place since the beginning of the century to restore this 'super cinema' to its original 1930s architectural glory.

As well as receiving the RTPI award for Conservation and Planning in 2011, The Stockport Plaza Trust, alongside Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, also received accolades from RICS and IHBC in the same year. The Trust has worked closely with the council to develop the building as a multi-function space whilst retaining and re-instating its original features. Ted Doan, the General Manager of Stockport Plaza, has credited their continued progress on the open relationship they have with the local authority and their continued effort to work as a collective alongside local businesses and the community to sustain the plaza as the "beating heart of the town centre."

## Development Since the Award

As a charitable organisation, the Trust has been involved in various fundraising projects since receiving the award to assist the ongoing restoration. This has included the sale of the venue's seats in 2013 to individuals, as well as to other venues and charitable groups. This has in turn supported the purchase of new auditorium seating reminiscent of the original 1932 seats. In the same year restoration work on the Circle concentrated on restoring its original gradient, thereby improving its architectural integrity. The amount of work that has gone into the restoration is well documented on their website and is clearly extensive. A result of the dedicated and continued work of individuals within the Trust as well as the support of the local authority. Paul Hartley, the Conservation Officer at Stockport Council highlighted how the authority has supported the Trust "through publicity and marketing, financial





assistance” as well as the “provision of specialist conservation advice guiding the ongoing interior restoration of the building.” It is clear that The Plaza is a key asset to the Council and the area, with the aim of supporting Stockport’s visitor and night time economy. The planned redevelopment by the Council of the adjacent Stockport bus interchange and Mersey Square will place The Plaza at its heart while also modernising the area to improve accessibility.

In 2019, the Plaza served as a location for a 1930s political rally during the National Television Award winning drama *Peaky Blinders*. A number of local bands and artists have used the location as a backdrop to represent the town’s identity. The Plaza continues to be a significant and iconic building in Stockport town centre. This year has been a considerable challenge to the restoration but work has continued. Internal murals by local artist, Bridgid Brind has progressed, and the carpet in the café has been replaced by a local contractor with the refitting of the Britons deco styled green diamond carpet.

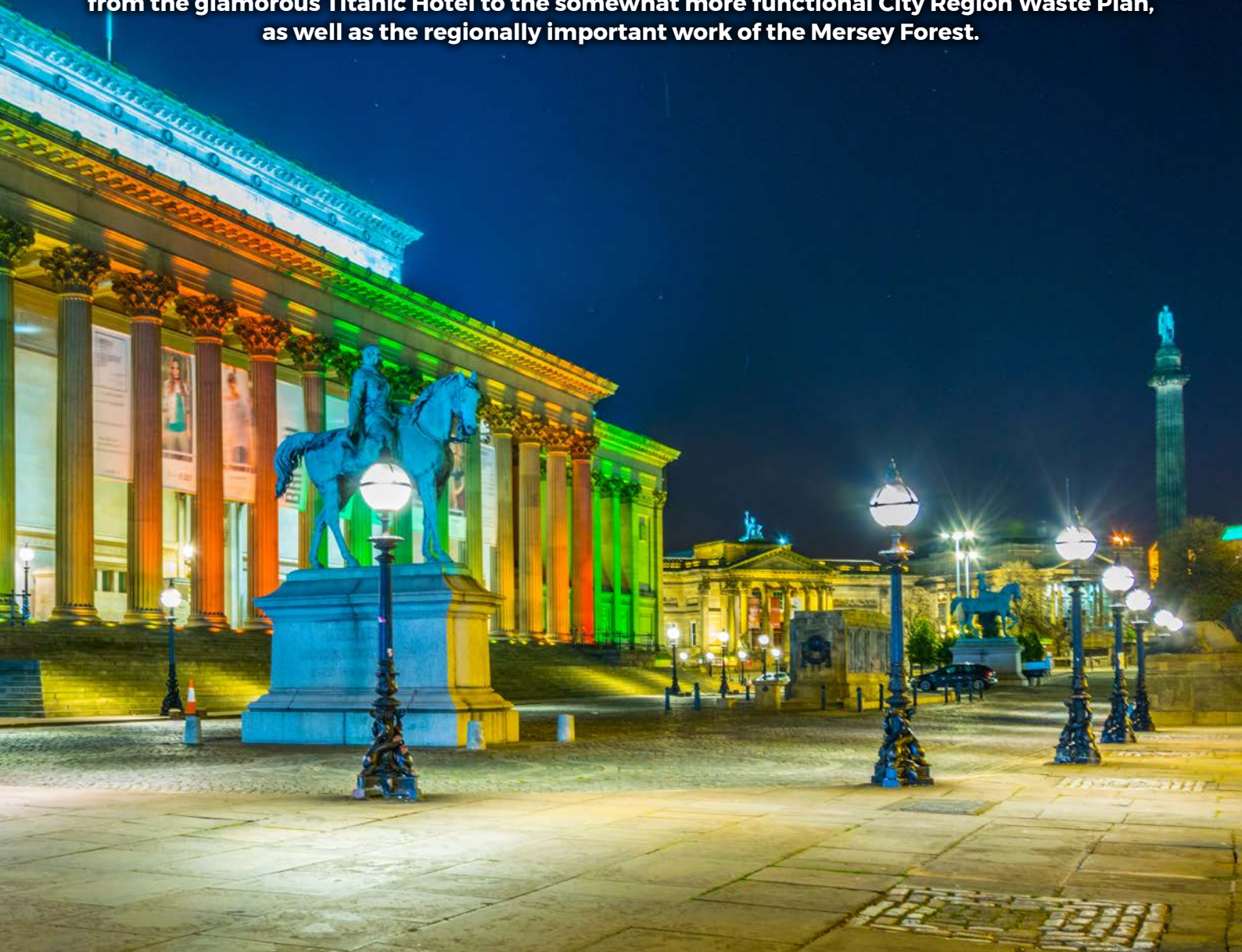
### Outcomes

As Ted Doan stated “it’s a long interval, but the curtains will rise again.” Since the award in 2011, the plaza has gone from strength to strength with the relationship between the building, volunteers, community groups and the local authority being key to the project’s progress and many will be looking forward to the Plaza with its restored 1930s glamour re-opening its doors once again in the not too distant future.



# LIVERPOOL CITY REGION

**For many years Liverpool has had a leading role in urban regeneration, but here we look at some of the less well known regeneration projects, from the glamorous Titanic Hotel to the somewhat more functional City Region Waste Plan, as well as the regionally important work of the Mersey Forest.**





# Titanic Hotel Liverpool

*RTPI NW Heritage Award and Overall Winner 2015. Submitted by Hinchliffe Heritage*

## Background

The conversion of the grade II\* listed Stanley Dock warehouse in Liverpool into the Titanic hotel and conference centre won the RTPI NW Overall Award for Planning Excellence 2015. The scheme is owned by Stanley Dock Properties, part of Dublin-based Harcourt Developments and was led through the planning process by Hinchliffe Heritage. The conservation and conversion of the North Warehouse and rum warehouse at Stanley Dock to create the Titanic Hotel and Rum Warehouse exhibition space was one of the biggest adaptive re-use projects in the country

Stanley Dock is part of Liverpool's remarkable maritime heritage. It is within the Liverpool World Heritage Site (WHS), the centrepiece of the Stanley Dock Conservation Area and an ensemble of listed buildings. However, Stanley Dock and its warehouses laid empty and slowly decaying for almost 30 years. Their poor condition and vacancy were a cause of great concern: the fabric was decaying; original building materials were stolen; English Heritage placed them on its Buildings At Risk Register and; Liverpool City Council enforced some emergency repairs to prevent major collapse. Their huge scale meant huge repair costs. Their future was in grave doubt. The



surrounding area suffers from industrial obsolescence, is the least visited part of the WHS and is isolated from the city centre. These factors created a huge challenge for their adaptive re-use.

The Stanley Dock site was acquired in 2010 by Stanley Dock Properties Ltd who immediately began the process of getting permissions and finance in place. They began work on site in January 2013 with the conversion of the North Warehouse (a Grade II\* Listed Building) and the rum warehouse into an hotel and conference centre, which opened for business in June 2014. The restoration of the North Warehouse at Stanley Dock is the first urban regeneration project to be delivered in this part of Liverpool and the first to bring visitors into it. The restoration and conversion of the rest of the Stanley Dock ensemble is on-going (see [www.stanleydock.com](http://www.stanleydock.com)) with occupation of part of the monumental Tobacco Warehouse expected in 2021.

The judges thought that this project represented an exemplar model of best practice in heritage led regeneration. The judging panel said 'The whole project team had taken on an incredibly difficult building in a challenging location to create a destination that should act as a catalyst for regeneration in this part of Liverpool. The attention to detail and quality of finish has led to an award-winning project that should be recognised as a template for best practice. The conservation elements have not been compromised throughout the project and have been a consistent running theme from inception through to implementation'. The judges considered that the whole team should be praised for their determination in ensuring that such a vast conversion scheme took place without losing the essence of the historic warehouse and its context.

### Outcomes

The Titanic Hotel has gone from strength to strength since winning the RTPI NW Award, in 2016 they won the UK Luxury Hotel of the Year, the Best Day Spa Award and a commendation in the Best Newcomer to the Visitor Economy at the Liverpool City Tourism Awards.





# The Mersey Forest

*RTPI NW Innovation Award Winner 2014. Submitted by The Mersey Forest*

## Background

The Mersey Forest Plan is the long-term and strategic guide to the work of the team and partnership. The Mersey Forest is one of England's Community Forests, and was established in 1991. It covers 1,370 sq km of Merseyside and North Cheshire. It is a partnership currently comprising the core partners of seven local authorities (Cheshire West and Chester, Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St. Helens, Warrington), Natural England, the Forestry Commission, and the Environment Agency, along with a wider partnership of landowners, businesses and local communities. The partnership is supported by a dedicated Mersey Forest team.

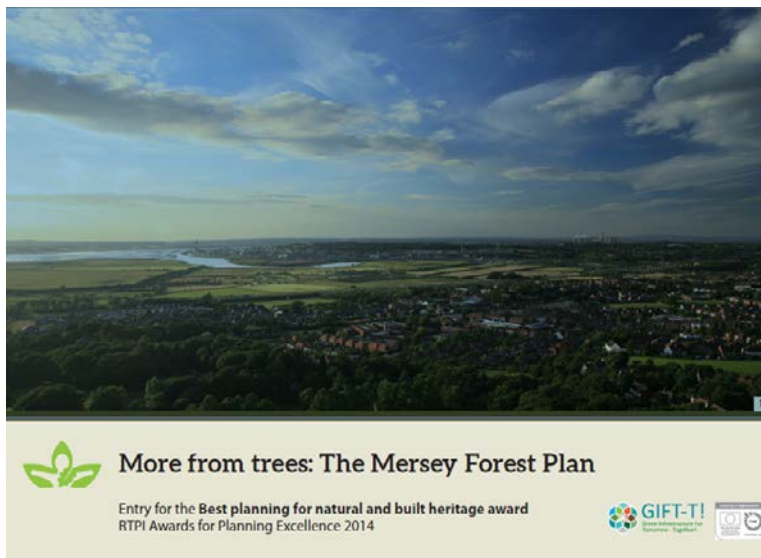
The 2014 Plan had been designed to provide the framework for a continued high level of achievement, but with a greater emphasis being placed on the planning context set by the National Planning Policy Framework, under which it can be a material consideration. In particular, it provided spatial guidance for tree planting consistent with partner statutory plans, demonstrates cross boundary working, and was underpinned by a robust process of community consultation.

The judging panel felt the scheme demonstrated both innovation and collaboration across local authority boundaries and sectors. The approach to community engagement across such diverse communities and areas was particularly welcomed.

## Development Since the Award

Since 1991, the Mersey Forest has achieved the following:

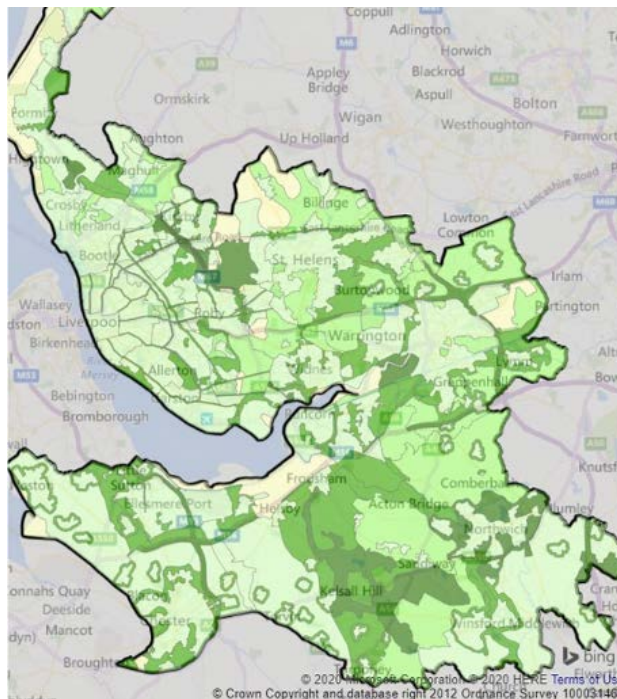
- Sub-Regional Woodland cover has doubled from 4 percent in 1991 to 8 percent today
- Nine million trees planted, three times the England average
- 8,000 plus urban street trees planted
- Two third of sub-regional of woodlands have brought into management, three time that since 1991.
- Almost a quarter of the sub-regional population live within 500 metres of an accessible woodland of at least 2 ha
- Over three quarters live within 4 km of an accessible woodland of at least 20 ha
- Two thirds of people visit their local woods.
- Over 200km of good quality walking or cycling routes have been created or reopened.
- For every £1 invested, there was £2.60 of Gross Value Added and £10.20 of total economic benefits.



## Outcomes

In terms of Best Practice and lessons learned, the following can be said:

- The achievements to date are due to a strong partnership, from national to community levels. Working at different levels enables a short chain between policy and delivery, and vice versa
- Monitoring and evaluation is vital to demonstrate the outcomes from investments and promote achievements
- The benefits of trees and woodlands are relevant to the agenda of many groups, public, private and community focused. However, the funders or beneficiaries are usually interested in buying particular benefits of the trees and woodlands, but not necessarily all of the benefits. There is an ongoing challenge to pull together the different funding sources in order to be able to fund projects that truly deliver multiple benefits.
- Green infrastructure planning has provided a more strategic approach to planning for green space and the natural environment, bringing together different environmental organisations under a common framework and speaking in an appropriate language to non-environmental sectors.





# The Liverpool City Region Joint Waste Local Plan

RTPI NW Collaboration Award Winner 2015. Submitted by the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS)

## Background

Co-operation on the Joint Merseyside and Halton Waste Local Plan was agreed at the outset by Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St. Helens and Wirral Councils recognising the strategic and controversial challenges of sustainable waste management. A Joint Local Plan, involving six Councils can only be delivered through genuine close collaboration and excellent working relationships between relevant Officers and Members. In the case of the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Waste Local Plan, collaboration at Officer level was delivered through a Steering Group of Senior Planning Officers overseeing a

shared service organisation – Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service, where a specialist team was recruited to prepare the Plan and guide it through its consultation phases. Council Members were active especially at the consultation phases when the Plan was scrutinised by Committees, Cabinets or Full Councils, depending on the requirements of the particular Authority.

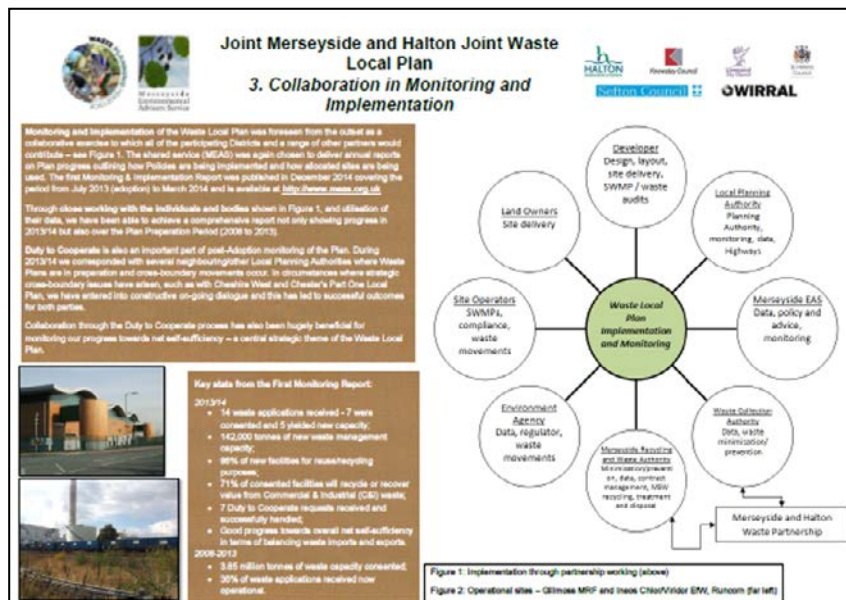
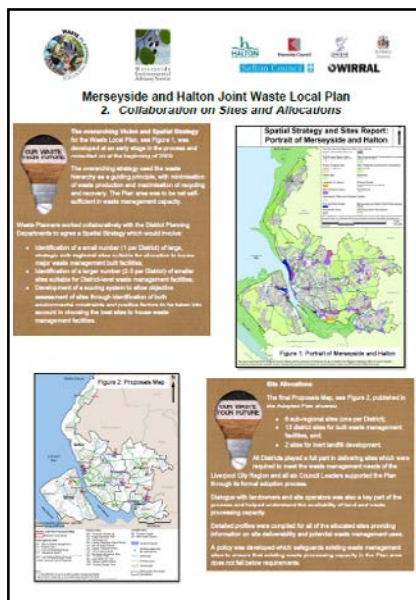
Consultation events were held each Council area during the 6 stages of the Plan preparation period. A total of 6000 individuals and organisations were consulted on the sites and Policies in the Plan as it was being developed. Reports on these consultations were published, making clear how comments received were being taken into account at the next stage of Plan preparation.

Specialist Technical Advisory Groups (TAG) comprising statutory agencies, waste industry and NGOs were convened to discuss various technical areas such as waste industry site requirements, landfill capacity and the needs of Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority.

The adopted Plan contains 17 policies, ranging from the very general WM0 covering a presumption in favour of Sustainable Development to detailed, challenging and forward-looking requirements such as WM8: Waste Prevention and WM10: Design of Waste Management Developments.

The judges commented that the Plan was ‘an excellent flagship project for cross-boundary policy making for which those involved can be justifiably proud and a worthy winner for our collaboration award’. This was a clearly exceptional collaborative effort on behalf of a number of different officers and elected members from a number of different Council’s over a considerable period. The plan, which is an extremely important, and often overlooked element of planning, was delivered over an eight-year period and demonstrates a strength





of collective vision and determination to 'get it right'. The project involved careful and considered cross-boundary working to deal with problems at a sub-regional level and to share the burden in an equitable manner. The collaborative effort ensured that resources could also be shared, and a long-term management and monitoring systems set up sharing the overall resources. An excellent flagship project for cross-boundary policy making for which those involved can be justifiably proud and a worthy winner for our collaboration award.

## Outcomes

The Plan is still used as part of the Development Plan for the area and it is carefully monitored through reports prepared annually. It is commonly used to determine waste applications, and some of the policies

such as WM8 and WM9 are regularly used to guide major development sites with regards to site waste management and ensuring sufficient infrastructure is put in place for waste storage and collection. Overall, MEAS think that the Plan has been considered useful particularly in providing a consistent approach to dealing with waste applications across Merseyside and Halton. MEAS are currently working on further documents to support the Plan such as guidance on Site Waste Management Plans and expect to be reviewing the document in near future in line with requirements.





# CESHIRE AND WARRINGTON

Cheshire is home to both significant economic facilities and a rich heritage. This section looks at Case Studies of both how urban heritage is being protected and how the key regional facility of Alderley Park is being developed



# Chester Characterisation Study

*RTPI NW Best Planning Document Award Winner 2011.*

*Submitted by Taylor Young & Cheshire West and Chester Council*

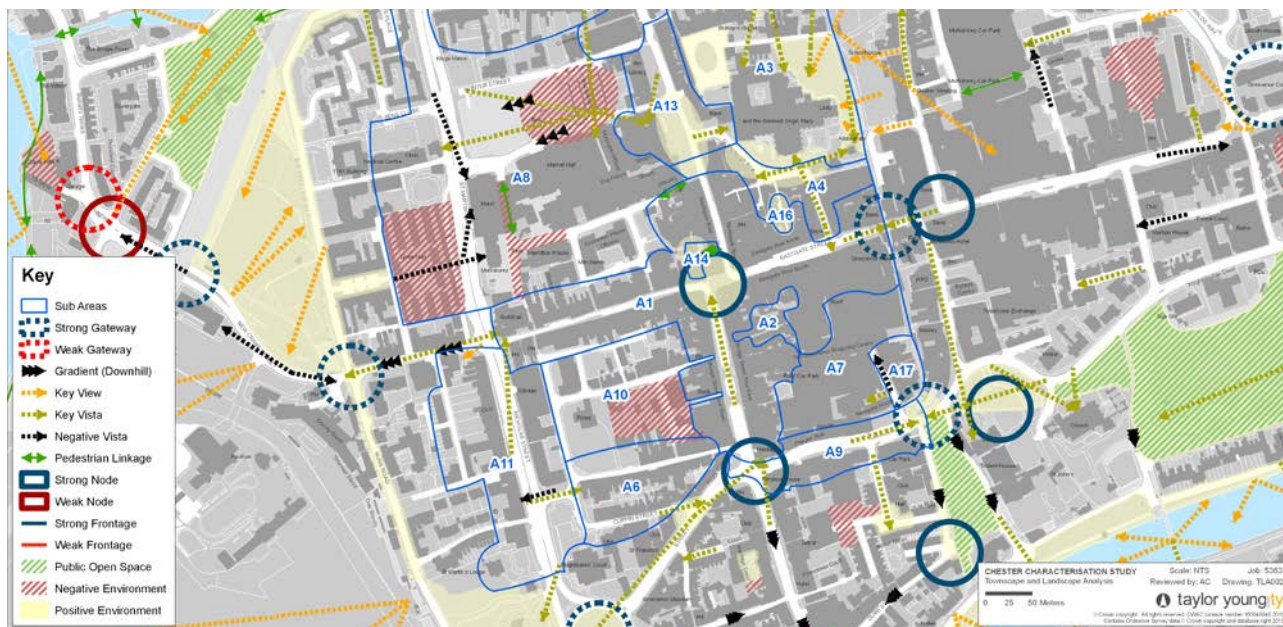
## Background

The Chester Characterisation Study is intended to guide development in Chester city centre and is used as a material consideration in the development planning process. Recommendations are made within the Study as to how conservation policy can be improved, how the character of each of the study areas can be enhanced and the form of new development that would be most appropriate.

The Study provides a record, as objectively as possible, of the character of the built environment and natural and designed landscape, as derived from its heritage and history. The Study was based on extensive fieldwork analysis, including over 4,000 photographs of over 100 sub-areas and 200 buildings of merit. The study provided a character assessment identifying areas of critical importance, those that provide positively to the character of the area, those that are neutral and that those that are







negative and detract from the character of the area.

In 2011, Historic Area Assessments were an emerging area of conservation study, with the Chester Characterisation Study being one of the first to follow the guidance provided by English Heritage's (now Historic England) 'Understanding Place'. Following the completion of the study English Heritage asked to use the Chester project as a case study in further forthcoming detailed guidance on undertaking Historic Area Assessments.

At the time of submitting the work, all of stakeholders on the project, including Chester Civic Trust and Chester Renaissance, commented positively on the progression and final outputs. With John Herson from Chester Civic Trust stating that Taylor Young 'produced a comprehensive, valuable and very interesting study which I hope will help to guide decision-makers and developers to produce better results in Chester in the future'.

The RTPI NW judges said that it was 'a very professional piece of work which goes above and beyond statutory requirements. A fine example of good practice which

could be replicated elsewhere and therefore a significant contribution to professional practice'.

## Outcomes

The Study was used as part of the evidence base for the local plan and is a material consideration in the planning decision making process. It is a key document that the Cheshire West and Chester Conservation and Design Team use consistently when assessing applications in the Chester area. It is very successful in identifying and describing the character of the areas within it and allowing a clear understanding to be gained of each area. The Conservation and Design Team often refer to the Study in application comments and encourage colleagues in the Planning Team to utilise it. The Study also provides a useful tool when giving advice at pre-application stage and applicants are still encouraged to carefully consider its contents prior to design development. The Council believe the Study has overall had a positive influence on the conservation of Chester.

# Alderley Park

*RTPI NW Regeneration Award 2016. Submitted by HOW Planning*

## Background

In 2013 AstraZeneca (AZ), to the dismay of many in the North West, announced its decision to relocate its research and development function from the company's large campus development at Alderley Park to Cambridge. AZ had operated from Alderley Park for more than 40 years; it was the global lead centre for the firm's cancer research activity and employed more than 7000 highly skilled staff at its height. It was a major blow to the North West's life science sector and represented massive disinvestment likely to have far reaching effects on the sub regional economy, mainly focussed on Cheshire East.

Manchester Science Partnerships (MSP) acquired the site unconditionally in March 2014 and subsequently appointed HOW as its lead planning and environmental adviser. HOW Planning (now Avison Young) in partnership with Cheshire East Council devised an effective and innovative planning solution to provide the right result for their client. MSP's committed investment over the next decade is intended to create an internationally important bioscience campus; secure c.7,000 jobs; provide up to 275 new homes (including some retirement); a village shop, hotel and pub; new sport and recreation uses for the local community - all adding strength to the Northern Powerhouse and





supporting the Science Corridor. This was considered an exemplar scheme which will without doubt have key economic, environmental and social benefits to the North West and beyond.

Judges said 'this is a very interesting project which piqued the judge's attention given the economic and political context, including the Northern Powerhouse. This is an example of good solid planning by the project team, who sought to work alongside the planning system and the local authority planners to bring forward a successful framework for future development. The judges were impressed with how the framework sought to offer a viable and realistic future for this big (and important) site and how it could contribute to the wider economic growth of the city region'.

Dr Chris Doherty, Managing Director of Alderley Park, said 'we are delighted to receive this acknowledgement from the Institute. Before submitting the planning application, we undertook extensive consultation and were pleased to be able to outline our vision and ambition for Alderley Park, which we believe is a hugely important asset for the North. Our partners at HOW did a first-class job and the Alderley Park team are now firmly focused on delivering

the development and ensuring the massive potential of this site is fulfilled'.

### Development Since the Award

Alderley Park is now owned, being developed, by Bruntwood SciTech, a joint venture between Bruntwood and Legal and General. Bruntwood SciTech is seeing £247 million in investment, including the Mereside Bioscience Campus. The Park now offers more than 1 million sqft of high specification lab space, a range of scientific services and an accelerator delivering business support for start-ups and scale-ups. It is home to over 60 established and 150 pre-start up companies.

Recent development has included the 15,000 sqm Glasshouse', which opened in February 2020, and offers high specification, collaborative workspace to tech companies and related innovative businesses.

In the last couple of years, the residential element of the project has moved forward with residential schemes by PH Homes, PJ Livesey and Bellway Homes.



# AWARDS, THEN AND NOW

## The Past 10 years – and beyond...

The RTPI awards have celebrated planning excellence across the North West Region for several years and have recognised projects and people that have created exceptional places and improved the lives of those who live and work there. These annual awards have covered the wide range of planning activity from large, high profile new developments, through to small scale conservation and community projects. They have also recognised the planning policies, local plans and other guidance produced by planning teams which have helped to create better places.

Alongside these project and spatial planning categories, the awards have celebrated the North West Young Planner of the Year. Each year, this award has recognised the outstanding Young Planner working within the region, who has shown dedication, enthusiasm and commitment to town planning. The Young Planner award is highly sought after, and, looking back, many previous winners have gone on to bigger and better things within the planning world!

The North West RTPI works closely with the Education sector within the region, particularly with the two main Planning schools at The University of Manchester and the University of Liverpool. As part of this, the annual Moss Madden Student Award is presented in memory of Professor Moss Madden, a former Head of the Department of Civic Design at the University of Liverpool, former Chair of RTPI NW and world renowned figure in planning research and education. Both an undergraduate and postgraduate award has been awarded each year to recognise the student submitting the best dissertations / final projects from accredited planning courses in the region, as judged by representatives of the RTPI NW Regional Activities Committee. In recent years, these winning dissertations have covered a wide range of topics, including design-led regeneration, the impact of housing need calculations on housing delivery, and the experience of social and reconciliation urbanism from across the world!

The North West Planning Awards could not have gone ahead over the years without the generosity of its sponsors. For several years, they have been sponsored by consultants WYG – we are extremely grateful for their continued support!



2019 Overall Winner - Arnside & Silverdale  
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)  
Development Plan Document (DPD)

2019 Young Planner of the Year – Hannah Payne





## What makes a winner?

When assessing award entries, the RTPI Judging Panels have always looked for projects that have shown exceptional quality and which demonstrated best practice and innovation. Looking back at the previous awards winners over the past 10 years and beyond has reminded us of the quality and range of projects within the region and the vital role planning has played in bringing them about.

Many of the North West RTPI award winning schemes have also won other awards from related construction and development organisations. These include the Wigan Life Centre (an RTPI Award Winner in 2012) also won a number of other awards including an RICS Regeneration Award in the same year and had previously been awarded the Best Public Service Development at the UK Property Awards. This emphasises the collaborative and diverse nature of many of our winning schemes.



## Why are the awards important?

It is important that the planning profession publicises its successes, and that the people who play such a key role in creating better places are given the recognition they deserve. These awards help to dispel any negative myths around planning by emphasising the positive role planners play in supporting sustainable growth and helping to create better places for us all. The awards also help to illustrate the diversity of planning activity and the wide range of people involved. Successful schemes have ranged from multi-million city centre developments, to local community projects in suburban or rural locations. Winning projects have been submitted by large international property consultants and by local neighbourhood groups - this highlights the importance of the RTPI awards to the wide range of people involved in planning across the region.

A couple of examples of previous schemes which illustrate this real diversity of projects are:

- On the Banks, Burnley – A major long-term regeneration programme based around the Weavers Triangle and Leeds-Liverpool Canal area – securing over £100 million investment in the area (Submitted by Indigo Planning - Award Winner in 2014).
- Upper Eden Community Interest Company, Lancashire – a smaller scale community led initiative which co-ordinated a review of a previous community plan within the area (Submitted by the local Parish Councils – Awarded a Commendation in 2012)



## 2020 – a very different year!

2020 was a year unlike any other and due to the Covid 19 restrictions, the award judges have had to do things very differently this year! Rather than the usual group site visits and meeting award entrants face to face, the entrants put together a digital presentation and were assessed following a series of online interviews. This new way of working worked very well, and the judges were all impressed with the way that the applicants were able to show their passion and their pride in their projects online through their presentations and interviews. Hopefully, in 2021 the judges will once again be able to visit potential award sites and meet their fellow planners in the flesh!



2020 judging panel – Judging Team Screenshot

In 2020, for the first time, the awards also included a new category for Local Authority Planning teams within the region. This new category recognises the exceptional work that local authority planners are continuing to do, often with limited budgets and resources. Over the past years, winning schemes typically involve successful partnerships between the public and private sectors and involve collaborative working with a range of partners – the award winners have shown that this is vital in achieving the best outcomes.

## The future...

Looking forward, the awards will continue to showcase the best of planning activity across the North West. With the increasing importance of digital technology, the awards will highlight new and innovative ways of working that can help to make planning more accessible and more inclusive. As we begin to 'Plan the World We Need' in the future, the awards will continue to recognise excellence in planning and the key role of the profession in achieving positive change







**RTPI North West**  
mediation of space · making of place

# **AWARDS FOR PLANNING EXCELLENCE**

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