

Case Study – The Restoration of Auckland Castle **Submission to the RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence 2021**

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Auckland Castle, home to the Prince Bishops, has been restored to become the anchor for the new visitor destination. Auckland Castle is one of the most significant complexes of medieval buildings in England. It is one of the last surviving episcopal palaces, overlooking the medieval deer park and it has international significance. The Auckland Castle project has acted as a catalyst for wider regeneration of the Town Centre. The Council and its partners have been successful in obtaining £53M Government funding through its Town Deal programmes. The vision is to supercharge the County's visitor economy.

Project Background

Auckland Castle is one of the most significant complexes of medieval buildings in England. As a favoured residence of the Bishops of Durham for at least 800 years, it has international significance for archaeology, architecture and landscape. It is one of the last surviving episcopal palaces, overlooking the medieval deer park. The Castle began life in the 11th century and was remodelled during the next 500 years. The last significant intervention was by Bishop Trevor in the 1750s. Bishop Trevor hung the thirteen paintings of Jacob and the patriarchs by Francisco de Zurbaran in the Dining Room. It is thought that Bishop Trevor's purchase of the Zurburán paintings in the 1750s may have been a statement of political support for the cause of Jewish emancipation in the aftermath of the repeal of the Jewish Naturalisation Act in 1753.

In 2011, the Church Commissioners attempted to sell the Zurbaran paintings through a London auction house before Durham County Council and Historic England intervened. This intervention led to the preparation of the Auckland Castle Conservation Statement, which identified and defined the importance of the building and categorised its international heritage significance.

In 2012, Jonathan Ruffer (a London financier and philanthropist) acquired the Castle and established the charitable organisation, Auckland Castle Trust. They operate as The Auckland Project. Over the course of the next couple of years, Durham County Council worked with The Auckland Project to develop plans to conserve and restore the Castle and for it to become the anchor for the new visitor attraction. Planning and listed building consent was acquired in 2015. Following construction, the Castle reopened to the public in November 2019. The Castle will reopen again to the public in July 2021 once Covid restrictions permit.

The work at Auckland Castle has led to a number of other buildings across the town being brought back into economic use to support the attraction e.g. The Spanish Gallery, The Mining Art Gallery as well as new buildings being constructed, such as the Auckland Tower and Faith Museum. The Auckland Castle project has also acted as a catalyst for wider regeneration of the Town Centre. We have established a Regeneration Partnership Board, which includes Durham University, Bishop Auckland College and the local Enterprise Agency. The Council and its partners have been successful in getting the Town Centre designated as a Heritage Action Zone and we have been successful in obtaining £53M Government funding through its Future High Streets Fund and Town Deal programmes.

Outcomes for People and Communities

The Auckland Project has invested over £200M into the local economy, over the last 10 years. This investment has been a combination of both private and public investment. The National Heritage Lottery Fund was a major contributor to the restoration of Auckland Castle as it formed part of their national awards programme. The Auckland Project used a number of local contractors on the work to restore the

Castle, which contributed to its Social Value and provided an economic benefit to the local economy. The wider town centre has also seen major investment by the Council in the public realm in the Market Place, which now provides level access throughout and provides a clearly defined space for events and local markets to animate the Market Place.

This financial investment will also create a range of direct and indirect benefits to the local economy, once the attraction opens. The Auckland Project will create a number of new FTE jobs to service the visitor attraction and they have been working closely with local Further Education providers to ensure that local people have the skills set to access these new job opportunities. Similarly, the influx of new visitors to the town will create additional FTE opportunities in businesses that occupy space in the town centre.

As stated above, the restoration of Auckland Castle has acted as a catalyst for wider town centre regeneration. Bishop Auckland has been successful in obtaining Government funding through its Town Deal programme. As part of the wider economic work, we have undertaken to prepare for the Future High Streets Programme and Town Investment Plan programme, we commissioned consultants to quantify the economic benefits that would materialise following the proposed investment in Bishop Auckland.

For the FHSF programme, Lichfields estimated that there could be £39.8M uplift in expenditure per annum in the town based on the proposed interventions and that this could generate an additional 507 FTEs in the town centre (112 direct and 395 indirect). The Town Investment Plan programme is further expected to generate over £240M of expenditure per annum in the local economy and generate over 3,000 new jobs.

Planning Contribution

Planning within Durham County Council has had a very important role in providing strong and effective leadership on the work being undertaken in Bishop Auckland. Senior officers were instrumental in getting the Historic England's Urban Panel to visit the town in 2014 to provide a strategic overview and detailed advice of how the Town could develop as a new visitor attraction. The Urban Panel highlighted that partnership working was very importance to the future of the town and recommended that strong governance procedures were introduced.

This work led to the creation of a new Bishop Auckland Regeneration Partnership Board in 2017, independently chaired by the Bishop of Durham. The Regeneration team in the Council provide the secretariate to the Board and both the Head of Service for Development and Housing and the Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration are members of this Board. Other members of the Board include The Auckland Project, Eleven Arches, Durham University, the local Enterprise Agency, the local FE College and Historic England.

This partnership approach to regeneration led to the preparation of the Town Centre Masterplan, the Heritage Action Zone designation, and the submission of the Future High Streets Fund. Members of the Regeneration Partnership Board are also on the Stronger Towns Board, which submitted the Town Investment Plan to Government.

Throughout the last ten years, the Council has provided clear advice and guidance to The Auckland Project. This working relationship ensured a smooth process for the submission and determination of the Planning and Listed Building Consent applications. Planning and Design and Conservation Officers have worked in greater depth and detail during the construction period to work through emerging issues such as the construction works exposed unknown building elements (kitchen servery). Officers worked with The Auckland Project and their contractors in an open and transparent manner to agree a strategy for dealing with the emerging issues and ensuring that the planning process responded positively to them. Construction delays were kept to a minimum which helped ensure the project was delivered in a timely manner.

Outcomes for climate action

As part of the delivery of these proposals and within the constraints imposed by the significance of the buildings/archaeology across the site a new strategy for mechanical and electrical services distribution across the site was required. These works were required not only to address the outdated infrastructure but to reduce energy requirements and improve the environmental performance of the buildings. Planning and Design and Conservation entered in to detailed advice on these elements which had the capacity to seriously influence the successful outcomes of the project and add to the long-term sustainability of the operation. The works included the stripping out of redundant M&E services, most notably within the former medieval kitchen and Red Stair, and the relocation of central boilers and plant spaces to a stand-alone Energy Centre facility, to be erected within the service yard adjacent to the College Buildings. This approach required considerable design refinement to reinstate the fourth side of an historic quadrangle for a functional building. The Energy Centre has allowed for new high-performance, efficient boilers to be installed moving away from the use of oil. Of great significance and to avoid further interventions in the historic environment the Energy Centre has been futureproofed to allow for new infrastructure associated with the anticipated geothermal energy network.

A full refurbishment of existing services within the castle buildings has been undertaken. Strategies for providing internal services have been developed with reference to the findings of archaeological opening up works undertaken prior to the project and seek to cause least detriment to the historic fabric of the building. Important strategic decisions with regards to climate action include:

- Centralised location of plant within new Energy Centre. Below ground distribution to local plant rooms, and provision for future expansion to Walled Garden, College and Welcome Building.
- Heating and electrical distribution within floor ducts in the State Rooms, to replace wall mounted radiators which have had a detrimental effect upon historic paintings.
- Installation of UV film, blinds and curtains to State Room windows in order to mitigate direct daylight and excessive heat loss.
- Ventilation and electrical distribution within new floor duct cast into limecrete slab and stone flag floor within existing Scotland Wing. This option has been developed in order to resolve failed tanking details within existing walls / floor, remove the extent of services required within the vault and provide the highest standard of environmental conditioning for exhibits.
- Refurbishment of all historic windows to reduce heat loss from the building utilising the skills of traditional joinery companies.
- Establishment of on-site waste sorting facilities to ensure recycling is maximised and food waste is separated for composting and use by the garden and estates team across the site.
- With the exception of service and delivery buildings all on-site parking and traffic movement has been removed from site to improve the visitor experience and air quality. This is offset by the provision of a shuttle service to the site.

Outcome and sustainable development

The restoration of Auckland Castle has local, regional, national, and international significance given the age of the buildings. Funding to restore the Grade I building was secured from the owner, The Auckland Project, the Heritage Lottery Fund and other.

There are significant long-term public benefits attached to this restoration project. The future use of the building as the anchor to the new visitor attraction by The Auckland Project will provide a sustainable, long-term viable use for the heritage asset. The new visitor attraction has significant economic value to the regeneration of Bishop Auckland, new jobs opportunities will be created by The Auckland Project and other business owners, the local community will have the opportunity to acquire new skills and it will provide increased volunteering opportunities. Opportunities in further education will be enhanced through the new faculty being established in the town by Durham University.

We have also sought to work within and help deliver on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We believe that the relevant goals are:

- No 4 Quality Education;
 - No 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth;
 - No 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure;
 - No 10 Reduced Inequalities;
 - No 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities;
 - No 12 Responsible Consumption and Production;
 - No 17 Partnerships for the Goals
- In addition, recycled or reclaimed materials from local sources have been used and new materials have been sourced regionally wherever possible

Community Engagement

Throughout the design process, The Auckland Project have held a series of public consultation and business briefing events supported by the local planning authority. The design evolution, especially that of the new Faith Museum Extension was brought to life by the production of a series of architectural models allowing those with less confidence in commenting on architectural plans to better engage. The Auckland Project have also used social media feeds and business emails to keep the local community informed and involved in the development process. The initial engagement sessions gave the local community an opportunity to feed into the design process and focus on how the end use of the buildings could maximise benefits in relation to the wider regeneration activities in the town for local residents and businesses, as well as anticipated visitors. Designing in a long-term education presence for the delivery of face-to-face activities as well as remote online facilities was a key objective of the development process. The education delivery around the reopening of the Castle post Covid and the offer that will come from the new Faith Museum has already commenced in order to build interest and involvement.

Following the conclusion of the design process, a community engagement and heritage skills programme was developed to engage people in the delivery of the project and develop an understanding of the challenges involved and the heritage significance of the buildings. This has involved the delivery of Heritage Days involving specialists as well as members of the public, widely advertised on websites and social media including the Council, Historic England and Visit County Durham. One of the Heritage Days focussed specifically on the role of heritage assets in the planning process and the protection afforded to them with others focussing on traditional skills including taster sessions allied to meet the expert talks all aimed at increasing understanding amongst not only those with a long term heritage interest but those who have traditionally felt the castle complex was not for the likes of them. Guided tours when practical were offered including small hard hat tours, some associated with Heritage Open Days, have been undertaken throughout. The history of the site as a private residence has long excluded the local population and much work has been undertaken during the design and delivery process to explain to people that the buildings are being returned to the public.

The volunteer visitor experience guides have all been trained in the history of the design and development phase of the restoration and are able to share with confidence the planning journey including the challenges which have been faced.

Leading Practice

The complexities of this brief lay not only in conserving the heritage significance of the site but balancing this with a repurposing of buildings and spaces to create a world class visitor attraction which had historically not welcomed the public in. This was combined with creating environmental and security standard befitting of such an establishment and achieving all government-imposed loan conditions.

The success of the project was based on the collaborative Development Team approach during the pre-application process between the client (The Auckland Project); the design team (led by Purcell and Niall

McLaughlin Architects). The historic restoration being led by Purcell and the new build Faith Museum being led by NM Architects, the local planning authority (Durham County Council); and the statutory body (Historic England). At these meetings over 18 months, all parties discussed and challenged emerging design proposals in an open, inclusive and creative manner which ensured that the final design was a sensitive response to the restoration of this hugely significant building constrained in the heart of the Conservation Area and Registered Park and Garden allowing for a huge uplift in visitor numbers and associated facilities which go with this. Workshop approached to understanding how the building would be used as well as how it would look allowed visitor flows and services to be fully integrated into the design process.

The design and specification of the works is based upon a detailed historical appraisal of the site and takes account of the development of the wider castle estate to secure linkages and circulation routes whilst respecting the site context. This historical appraisal has informed the design of the external elevations and building interventions and has been responsive to the identification of historic artefacts and decorative features.

Through the Development Team, we put in place several project management principles to ensure that the project ran smoothly were developed. These could be used as a model of best practice elsewhere such as:

- Engaging with Historic England at the outset and including them in face-to-face design workshops.
- Developing an agreed approach to pre-application discussions which ensured everyone went on the journey from start to finish.
- Establishing a collaborative Development Team approach to develop the project through its lifecycle.
- Engaging and working with the local community through the dedicated Community Engagement Team at The Auckland Project.
- Encouraging the local community to view and comment on design models.
- Developing a detailed understanding of the heritage, ecological, highways and environmental constraints of the site including an ongoing research framework as the fabric of the building was unveiled and demanded a change in design or implementation.
- The preparation of a lessons learnt log, which will be used to help other projects across the County.

Does the scheme or project have particular significance to the region?

Auckland Castle is internationally significant, and it is synonymous with the power of the Prince Bishops in the north of England. The oldest surviving part of the Castle is the hall (now the Chapel) which was constructed around 1190 by Bishop Hugh du Puiset). The Bishops of Durham ruled with temporal powers and a military force during the 11th-16th Centuries. These unusual privileges were bestowed by the Crown in return for defending the Scottish border. Despite the bishops' military role, Auckland is not a true Castle and it never had a military function. It is an episcopal palace. After the Civil War and subsequent Restoration, the Bishops of Durham remodelled the buildings in the Castle complex in the 1700s when the Dining Room was created. This is where the Zurbaran paintings are hung. Very little changed in the Castle during the 19th and 20th Century. The restoration of Auckland Castle is the first major intervention for around 200 years.

The restored Auckland Castle anchors the new visitor destination in Bishop Auckland and will be the catalyst to the wider regeneration of the Market Town and the surrounding area. As stated above, Bishop Auckland has been successful in obtaining Government funding through its Town Deal programme.

Over the next decade, the potential economic value of the projects within the Town Deal programme could be over £280M of expenditure in the local economy per annum and generate over 3,500 new jobs. As set out in the Town Investment Plan, as a result of these interventions the vision is to supercharge the County's visitor economy.