



Bristol – Harbourside

History of the Site



Land Use

Harbourside is a 22.7 ha area with former dockside warehouses, gas production sites and railway yards in the centre of the historic harbour area. Major landowners are Bristol City Council, British Gas Properties, British Rail properties, Lloyds Bank, with long leaseholds to others. The site suffered from contamination, derelict structures, low residual land values, institutional ownership. A new quarter was created with mixed use including leisure facilities, apartments, offices, hotel and retail as well as public spaces and car parking.



Community

Following cessation of commercial activity in the port, the redevelopment of historic city docks took place over an extended period – 1975 onwards. As a result there have been many social issues mainly relating to:

- Loss of local employment and traditional maritime crafts;
- Creating new and diverse communities required range of housing types and tenures;
- Ensuring inclusive use of water and quayside for leisure activity;
- Minimising negative impacts of increased intensity of use; and
- Ensuring local services infrastructure keep space with development

At the outset there was little remaining community within the area - mainly poor quality 19th century housing and some post-war local authority developments. Arising from early attempts by City Council to close the city docks to navigation and implement aggressive and destructive strategic transport plans, a wider community of concerned individuals had mobilised to resist Council plans. Therefore there was already a strong community 'guardianship' established, made up of various area- specific and more general environmental interest groups –



e.g. Bristol Civic Society, Bristol Visual Environmental Group, Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society. These were augmented by quasi-professional/commercial interest groups such as City Docks Ventures. These were amongst the principal groups engaged with during the early days of regeneration in the harbour, and they played a significant role in public consultation on planning policy.



When Harbourside started in November 1993, first priority was to fully engage the land interests at the time, to agree a way of working together. At this time, such was the regular and recent history of consultation that the planning authority had a pretty good feel for the local community agenda, and this was made clear to the other land interests to ensure they got the message. Once an agreed way of working with the regeneration partners was established, and a draft development framework drawn up, this was put forward to the community to achieve a consensus on the way forward in planning terms.

Whilst there was much support for the overall aims of the Regeneration project – particularly the prospects for significant public benefits in the form of leisure and cultural facilities – concerns were expressed from some sectors about the intensity of commercial development needed to support those public benefits. This was so strongly felt that representations were made against the proposed planning policy at the Local Plan Inquiry which was coincidentally underway at the time. The objections were not sustained in the findings of the Inquiry, though minor amendments to the Local Plan were suggested as a result. It was felt that the views expressed were held by a minority interest only and that they shouldn't be allowed to hold up the regeneration process and the delivery of broader public benefits.

As the implementation of the key cultural and leisure facilities commenced there was still strong support for the project. However, as the first fully commercial components came forward on Canons Marsh, the early objections to the scale and commerciality of the scheme were raised again. Despite attempts to engage with the community and explore options, consensus was not achieved. After a second planning application failed, a fresh approach was made, with new architects/masterplanners and a more credible community engagement process began. This deliberately and pro-actively sought the involvement of a much wider community than that which had opposed the first two schemes. This was done to ensure that the debate was not dominated by a vociferous minority. Because of the sub-regional significance of the site this wider involvement was justified.

The process of allowing the community to engage directly with the scheme designers, and actively participate in the development of the design was much more successful in reaching a consensus, and a scheme could go forward which had much broader support. The developers had also made a number of key concessions to public demand and this was also recognised. By this time as well, the public cultural benefits were delivered and on-stream and there was a much fuller appreciation of the commercial imperatives driving the process. This model of community engagement was replicated, though on a slightly lesser scale in the run-up to the masterplan for Wapping Wharf. Here though, in addition to the general amenity societies there was an existing community with which to engage.



Much of that community were relatively recent and one would have expected a greater acceptance of the dynamic process of change at play in the city centre. However, this has not been the case. It is concluded that no matter what the nature of the local community, full engagement is needed from the start of the design process. There needs to be a clear indication at the outset, what is available for influence and what is fixed (and why). Even if the outcome is still not entirely to the satisfaction of the community, there is generally greater overall acceptance and less inclination to resistance if there has been a credible and transparent process of design development with some evidence of 'Effect' by the community. This also allows for a proper 'grieving process' for those who will be most impacted by the development. Regarding community benefits the policy was clear on a number of social benefits:

- Residential development would have to incorporate a percentage of 'affordable housing' (generally in the government-subsidised rented sector)
- The loss of diverse employment opportunities would be resisted in certain areas where these still survived (ship building and marine trades) and where there were opportunities for low-cost innovative employment such as in the 'creative industries'
- Access to the waterfront for the public was to be an overarching requirement;
- All commercial development to contribute to the provision of non-commercial leisure/cultural facilities;
- Development to be mixed in character and to provide for local services which would also contribute to surrounding local need (local shops, doctors surgeries, local education provision etc);
- Strong sense of historic identity to be retained in development to reinforce continuity and community connection with the area; and
- Movement links with the surrounding communities to be renewed and strengthened to facilitate the connection

Public Realm

The Harbourside Design Forum had been created in 1994 to advise the City Council on urban design and architectural matters. A design toolkit was subsequently developed to ensure consistent design. A new pedestrian bridge has been built across St Augustine's Reach, and extensive public spaces (32,640m²) have been created, including Anchor Square, Millennium Square and the Central Promenade, or refurbished like College Green. The Central Promenade has been transformed into a key public space, with water features, new trees, specially designed stone-clad seating and lighting, surrounded by planters, food kiosks and internet information screens.



Open space provision is significant, consisting of waterfront walkways, strategic routes, public squares and spaces and private and semi-private residential open space.



Architecture

Old warehouses and goods sheds have been refurbished to provide leisure or business uses. Significant new buildings include the classical Lloyds TSB regional headquarters and the award winning contemporary waterfront apartment blocks at the Point. With density considerably lower than its immediate surroundings, the development fits well into the city centre context, and, although varied, the materials and details respond to their environment.





Infrastructure

The development is well connected to nearby streets. Buses and taxis stop adjacent to key public places and a rapid waterbus service also connects the whole of Harbourside to the city centre and to Temple Meads railway station. The station is clearly signposted for pedestrians and significant refurbishment of nearby Queen Square has improved part of the route. On the southside of the harbour developments are less connected by road, although well served by waterbus.



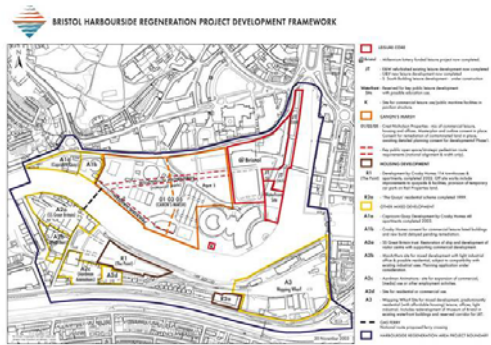
Environment

Wapping Wharf, a sub-area within Harbourside, serves to illustrate regeneration projects at different levels of development. Recent and emerging projects have the need for sustainable development agendas as their guiding principle. Earlier projects in the historic docks which were conceived and progressed during the late 1980s and 1990s were more focused on inward investment and job creation than on sustainable design principles.



Planning Process

The Harbourside Sponsors' Group was set up to promote and facilitate the regeneration of the area at a strategic level and consultants presented a development framework to the group in 1993. The Draft Local Plan identified the wider area as the City's priority regeneration area and a group of local architects was commissioned to enhance the framework's relationship with its urban context, their viability plan being approved in early 1994. Competitive procedures were used to select the design team, and the 1998 Harbourside Planning Brief was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the 1997 Local Plan. The Harbourside Design Forum had been created in 1994 to advise the City Council on urban design and architectural matters.



Construction started in 1998 and finished in 2000. In 1998 Bristol City Council confirmed Crest Nicholson as development partner for the remaining Canon’s Marsh area west of the Millenniums developments. The project has been controversial and there was a lot of local opposition concerning scale and sustainability qualities. The City Council dealt robustly with these concerns and refused the application. A revised proposal and a new round of consultation followed. The new masterplan took on board previous proposals and was accepted by local people.

Heritage

The City Council is committed to working with its partners in preserving and enhancing Bristol's historic environment. The conservation programme has developed since the 1970's, and successive grant programmes have restored many historic buildings. Through the Council's Environmental Improvement Programme and the current Townscape Heritage Initiative partnership between the City Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund and South West Regional Development Agency the redevelopment of the City Docks were started. The City Council offers guidance and advice to owners, agents, researchers and the general public on a range of conservation issues, including appropriate repair methods for historic buildings.



Conservation Areas are "areas of special architectural or historic interest." Bristol has designated 33 Conservation Areas with the aim of preserving or enhancing their character or appearance. A Conservation Advisory Panel meets monthly to assess planning applications received within Conservation Areas. This panel comprises local architects and amenity groups. Council takes action against negligent owners. For example, it recently compulsorily purchased a cemetery that had fallen into disrepair. The Council is keen to interpret the City's heritage through public art projects. The City's heritage is highlighted through award winning signage scheme – Legible City Initiative There have been a number of highly successful building reuse projects in the last 20 years e.g. warehouses related to the harbour have been reused for offices, residential, art galleries, restaurants, clubs, science museum etc.



Management

Fifteen years of partnership working between the City Council, key stakeholders, developers, businesses, operators and funders, who comprise the Bristol Harbourside Sponsor Group, has defined the focus and aspirations for the area. The Harbourside Sponsors' Group was set up to promote and facilitate the regeneration of the area at a strategic level. Emerging projects have been guided from conception through to construction by guidance in the form of a development framework and masterplan, with planning briefs for key areas, feedback from a design forum, the City Centre Strategy and feedback from consultation exercises.

