

URBAN IMPROVEMENT: RENEWAL AND EVOLUTION – TWO CASE STUDIES

Almost 80% of the UK's population live in towns and cities. These urban areas represent unique environments, with both opportunities and challenges. By necessity they must evolve and develop to meet today's socio-economic, environmental and technological circumstances. Inner cities in particular demand special attention. Too often maligned, inner city areas have long been recognised as facing some of the nation's most severe socio-economic and environmental problems – the so-called **multiple deprivation**, considered by successive governments as a major cause for concern.

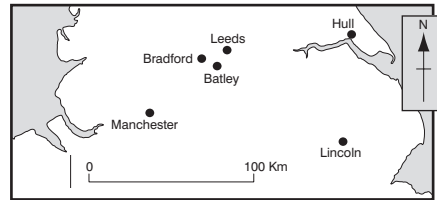
Inner Cities

Despite the familiarity of the term, the geographical delimitation of the inner city remains vague. Its characteristics, however, are well established, if not in some small part as a result of government rhetoric. Margaret Thatcher, immediately after her 1987 general election victory, referred indelicately to the work that needed to be done in 'those inner cities'. Governments change, but inner city multiple deprivation continues – a mixing pot of socio-economic and environmental difficulties.

Yet, the defined geographical area of the inner city remains unclear. Indeed, some would argue it is this very failure to clearly identify their geographical extent that has led to the continuation of many problems today. It is widely accepted that the inner city is an area close to the central business district (CBD), traditionally associated with poor housing and manufacturing industry. Indeed, to satisfy the dynamic, changing nature of UK urban areas today, it is defined here as the area immediately surrounding or adjacent to the CBD – a zone of renewal and evolution, rather than simply and vaguely 'transition'.

This **Geofile** illustrates current UK examples of inner city renewal and evolution by reference to two complementary case studies – 'traditional' deindustrialised multiple deprivation and a more contemporary transition to a 21st century emphasis

Figure 1: Location map of study areas



on urban **sustainability**. These should be viewed in the context of changing governmental approaches to urban regeneration (see **Geofile** no. 336).

Batley City Challenge (1993–98)

Strategically located within the West Yorkshire conurbation, Batley lies near to the cities of Leeds and Bradford and just north of Dewsbury (Figures 1 and 2). The City Challenge area covered 550 hectares, 20,000 people and 7,000 dwellings. It included all the ingredients necessary to precipitate change, including close proximity to the region's motorway network and access to the trans-Pennine railway. In addition, significant economic opportunities existed within the town centre, the old commercial quarter and vacant or semi-derelict industrial sites 'ripe for development'.

'From Rags to Riches'

A board of 18 members, called Batley Action, drove the Batley City Challenge bid. This board of directors was comprised of equal numbers from the local community, private sector, Kirklees Metropolitan Council and other public sector workers. This included representatives from the Indian Muslim Welfare Society, Fox's Biscuits and West Yorkshire Health Authority.

The City Challenge bid was entitled 'From Rags to Riches':

'In the last century [1800s] Batley was the world capital of the shoddy and mungo industry – a process whereby cloth was produced from woollen waste and rags. Since then the town's economic fortunes have been steadily eroded. The challenge is to restore its former prosperity, to move from Rags to Riches.' (Batley Action)

Batley's inner city problem

Batley was symptomatic of the inner city problem. Economically, socially and environmentally, the area was multiply deprived:

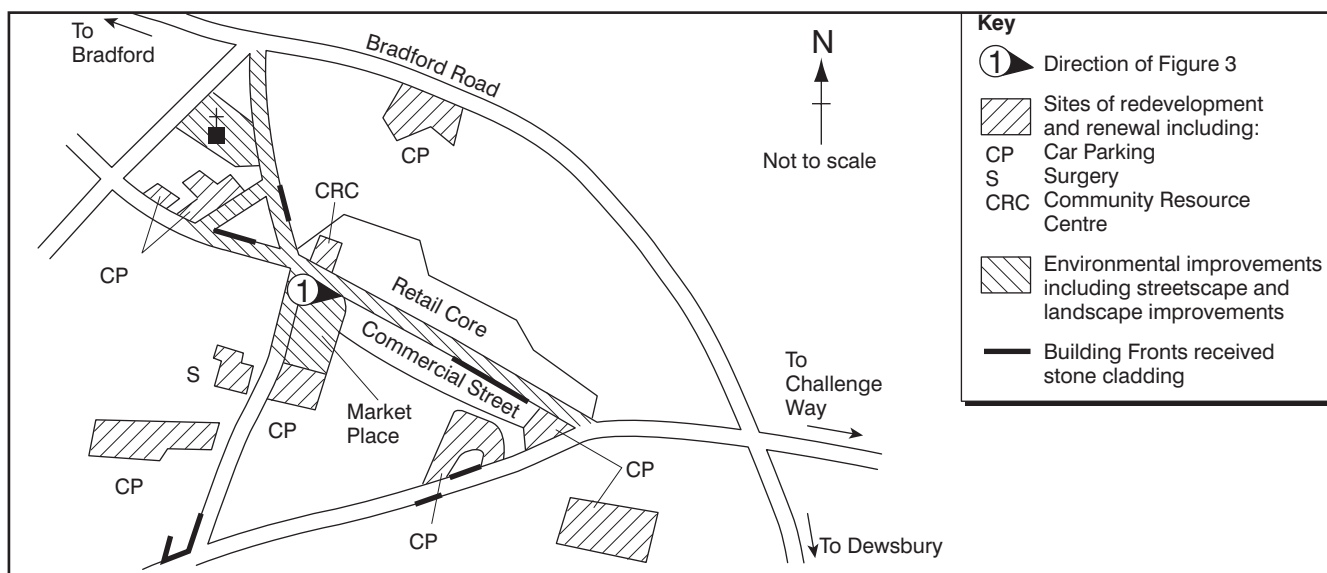
- Economic problems included congested and indirect links to the M1 and M62, an under-invested and under-used town centre, 40 vacant or under-used mills, a stagnant property market, 17.4% male unemployment and a poor skills base amongst the population.
- Socially, the area had the highest concentration of adults in Kirklees in receipt of community charge benefit, and an ageing and deteriorating Victorian housing stock. A local divide also existed in health care, with infant mortality and death rate through heart attacks, up to three times the national average. Crime rates were also high, educational attainment low and cultural activities limited.
- The environment was degraded as a result of **derelict** and contaminated land left by past industries, including textiles and coal mining. In an area of high density land usage, open space, particularly recreational, was limited.

Contrasts also existed between the Asian and White populations. 25% of households were headed by people born in the New Commonwealth or Pakistan. Only 40% of Asian males had full-time jobs compared with 70% of white males; a problem exacerbated by poor English language skills.

Batley City Challenge

City Challenge was a new approach to urban areas, yet aimed to tackle older, underlying problems that had existed for decades. Arguably, Batley deserved 'the prize' of landing a successful City Challenge bid – a total purse of £37.5m. However, City Challenge was a grant, a **lever** designed to stimulate and encourage investment from elsewhere, rather than an open cheque book of opportunity; by their nature, underlying inner-city problems tend to be endemic and require more than a spring clean of government funding to reverse an area of decline.

Figure 2: Batley Town Centre revival, 1993–98



In reality, this total equated only to around £150 for every woman, man and child a year. Regardless, in its Development Plan, Batley Action talked of ‘immense’ opportunities for revival. Work would be centred upon the **renewal and redevelopment** of housing and property; an allocation of 70% of the funding. Communication routes would also be improved and the environment made more attractive to both business and local communities. Crucially, it was hoped that such developments would enable a further £200m to be levered from other sources.

By the end of 1998, key successes of City Challenge included:

- the new Challenge Way link road to the M1, and associated road junction improvements
- a flagship Business and Technology Centre providing education, training and support to the local workforce
- nearly 500 buildings, particularly those associated with the former textile industry on **brownfield sites** renewed or redeveloped
- a Green Grant scheme established to help organisations financially, including community groups in small-scale environmental improvement projects. Buildings have been stone cleaned and green spaces created
- town centre, Market Place and Commercial Street revival projects have improved the immediate town centre of Batley. In turn, this has encouraged a mini renaissance of cultural and retail growth in the heart of the City Challenge area (Figure 2)

- retailing and tourism have increased dramatically as a consequence of the Yorkshire Mill village complex and other associated service industries, in renewed warehousing on Bradford Road
- 2,500 local authority owned homes have been renewed. This has had a positive effect on the local community, allowing residents to take a greater ownership and pride in their immediate area. Indirectly it has helped combat many associated social problems of the estates, such as crime and poor health. Many of these homes have since been bought under the 1980 Right to Buy legislation
- the community as a whole has been encouraged to work together and celebrate the diversity of faiths, cultures and religion that co-exist within the area. The ‘Batley Bash’ multicultural summer carnival is now an annual event. A Community Resource Centre opened in 1997 and is a base for multi-faith community groups and voluntary organisations.

How was it for Batley?

Despite the significant achievements noted above, the following considerations must also be noted:

- In many respects the area was ripe for change anyway. The area lies in close proximity to the junctions of both the M1 and M62. The nearby Junction 27 of the M62 had already seen rapid growth as a retail/leisure park.
- Despite retail growth in the new Yorkshire Mill village, the town

- centre of Batley has continued to suffer with competition from larger out-of-town retailers (including the White Rose Shopping Centre near Morley, Leeds). It remains only as a local service centre, selling mostly lower order, convenience goods.
- The community as a whole has benefited in a number of socio-economic and environmental areas, but many problem areas still remain. Cultural and religious differences still permeate the local society and some of the housing estates continue to suffer from multiple deprivation. Minimal funding provided by the City Challenge scheme was never going to tackle all the root causes of the area’s decline. Racial and religious intolerance and anti-social behaviour, for example, are wider concerns.
- Unemployment remains above the national average. Although many new businesses have been created, a significant proportion of these caused displacement effects elsewhere, and had short life-spans. Despite retraining initiatives, local workers continue to remain at a disadvantage as a result of language and education difficulties.

Lincoln – a city of contrasts

Lincoln is an historic cathedral and industrial city of international significance (Figure 1). It is a city of dramatic contrasts, with a medieval centre of wonderful old buildings sitting alongside large tracts of derelict and under-used land. The

Figure 3: Looking East along Commercial Street



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current Local Development Plan (adopted in August 1998) is not unusual today in adopting principles of **sustainable development** in order to improve the urban fabric by blending strategies for conservation, regeneration and growth.

The key aims of the Local Plan are to:

- improve the quality of the local environment and so quality of life – therein the physical and socio-economic health of the community
- protect and reinforce the city's special identity
- work towards a more sustainable, energy-efficient city
- expand economic opportunities for present and future generations.

The Plan recognises that some **greenfield sites** at the current urban periphery (fringe) will have to be developed. However, it has been calculated that a sizeable proportion of the anticipated housing and business needs may be met by recycling redundant land and buildings. Most of these brownfield opportunities occur within the inner city adjacent to the CBD. It is recognised that redeveloping these sites will contribute to the sustainability objectives by harnessing existing public transport, cycle and footpath networks, so reducing residents' needs to drive to work or to CBD services (see below).

Central to all this urban regeneration is an obvious recognition that protecting and enhancing Lincoln's

environmental quality will be a major asset in both retaining established businesses and attracting new economic investment. Up to 25 years ago, over half of Lincoln's workforce was employed in manufacturing – a secondary sector dominated by heavy and mechanical engineering. Since then, secondary sector jobs have more than halved, to less than 20% of the total today. As a result, a series of redundant sites and buildings, adjacent to the CBD, and along the lines of the canalised waterways and railways (which serviced Lincoln's industrial revolution) now require redevelopment. Yet despite this long-term decline in manufacturing, the number of jobs in Lincoln has continued to grow – achieved through a diversification of manufacturing via small businesses, and, predominantly, tertiary service sector growth reflecting regional and national trends. Indeed, more than four in five Lincoln jobs are now tertiary, and there are currently more women employees than men. This has been explained by jobs created in the service sector, most of which have been part-time. In short, Lincoln currently provides for over 100,000 people living in the city and a wide area around it and nearly half of the 45,500 jobs are taken by people living beyond the city boundary. Yet most of these jobs are located within or adjacent to the CBD. Consequently, even people living within the city have an appreciable distance to travel to work (and for other CBD services), resulting in commuter rush hour

congestion, pollution and energy wastage. Furthermore, as the number of commuters in the last 15 years has been increasing steadily, so have their means of travel changed. Far more people (half as many again) now travel to work by car. The use of buses has halved, travel by train is of marginal significance, and both cycling and walking to work have declined. As such, the Plan sees a concentration of CBD service provision and job opportunities as a model for the city in future to become more reliant on sustainable public transport, cycling and walking. This is to be facilitated by limiting city centre parking and ensuring that redevelopment, wherever possible, relates closely to public transport networks. By also promoting **teleworking**, car-sharing, flexitime and so on, car dependency should be reduced.

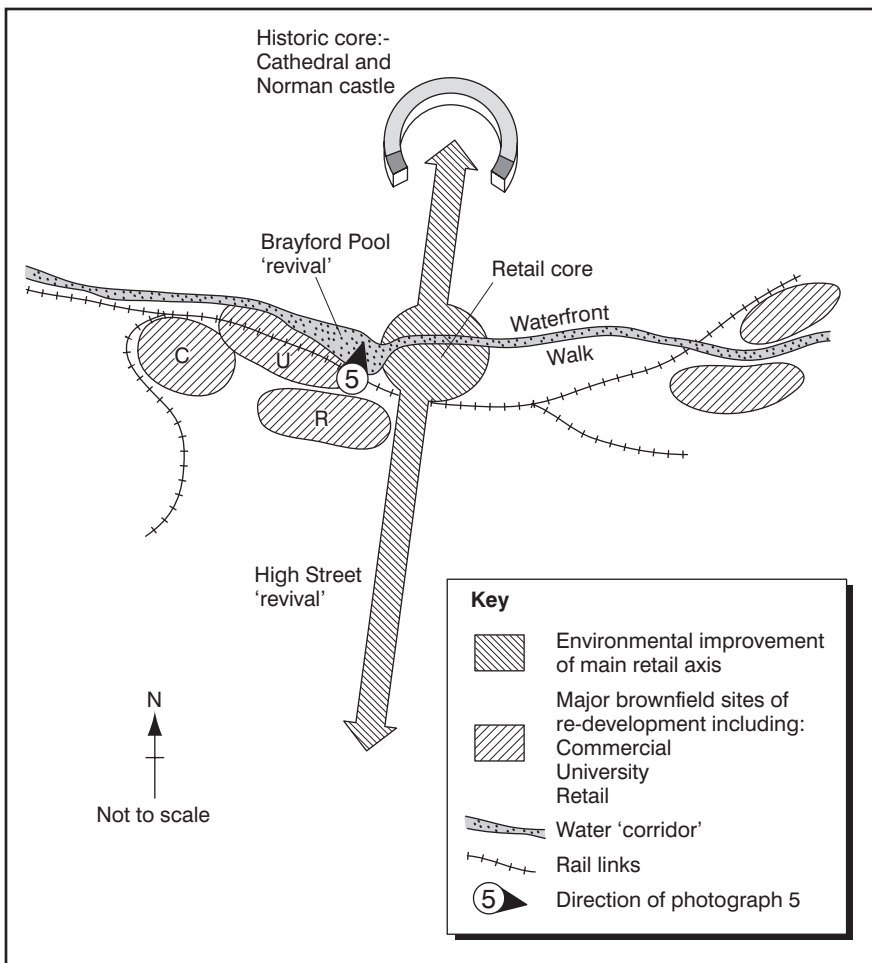
Lincoln's urban regeneration

As Lincoln both grows and adapts to socio-economic and technological changes, regeneration is recognised as one of the keys to successful, efficient and sustainable urban development. With this in mind, investment is now guided to areas where it can achieve the greatest good, whilst development is restrained in other areas. This follows the realisation in the 1990s that Lincoln had reached an evolutionary crossroads – an analogy adopted by its regeneration strategy focusing primarily on a central cross covering the heart of the city (Figure 4). The east/west axis follows the line of waterways and railways through central Lincoln – a mix of still successful heavy engineering businesses amongst older industrial premises and land. Dereliction and decay dominate it. The north/south axis follows the line of the High Street – pedestrianised successfully within the CBD, but deteriorating and degraded towards its margins. Regeneration of this central cross is regarded as paramount to meeting the key aims of the Local Plan outlined earlier. This is because:

- the CBD remains the most accessible part of the city, even without a car
- CBD land and buildings are extremely valuable resources
- an unattractive local environment discourages the most efficient use of such assets.

However, regeneration aimed at tackling social and environmental problems is also being practised in

Figure 4: Lincoln’s urban regeneration ‘crossroads’



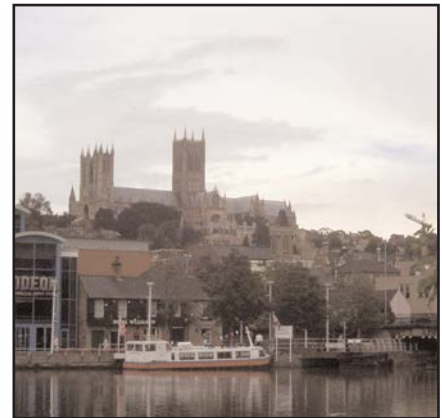
several outlying areas, including major housing estates such as St. Giles to the north and Birchwood to the south-west. Certainly, with the aid of Central Government grants and incentives, handled through a regional Single Regeneration Budget (see Office of the Deputy Prime Minister – www.odpm.gov.uk), the City Council has both planned and achieved much. The Brayford Pool revival area, for example, to the west of the CBD, has now become an attractive mixed use area. This includes marina facilities and a waterfront walk, enhanced by dramatic street sculptures, progressing eastwards across and beyond the retail core. New retail developments to the south of the CBD complement promotion of the historic core – namely the Cathedral and Norman Castle ‘visitor magnet’ – to the north. But it is the rapid expansion and consequent dramatic development of the University of Lincoln that best illustrates just how valuable brownfield sites can be as far as physical and socio-economic regeneration is concerned. The University only took its first intake of students in autumn 1996, yet a whole University District of teaching and

administrative accommodation, in addition to student housing, is now developing on redundant railway land south of Brayford Pool. The impact of this to the local economy is hugely significant, not least in creating a myriad of new jobs, but cultural and leisure opportunities too – all adding greatly to the City’s vitality.

Conclusion

Batley City Challenge and Lincoln’s current regeneration demonstrate both the potential and scope of thoughtful, successful urban improvement.

Figure 5: Brayford Pool ‘revival’ looking north towards Lincoln Cathedral



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Glossary

Brownfield sites Previously developed land now zoned for re-use.

Derelict land ‘Land so damaged by industrial or other development that it is incapable of beneficial use without treatment’ (Department for the Environment).

Greenfield sites Currently rural, often agricultural land zoned for urban development.

Levering Public money used to encourage or lever greater private investment.

Multiple deprivation A term used to describe associated problems of poverty.

Renewal Improvement of an area’s existing urban fabric.

Sustainable development Urban development planned in such a way as to reduce and minimise pollution and waste, make the most efficient use of non-renewable resources such as fuel, building materials, land and natural habitats, and safeguard and enhance both the natural and historic built environments for the benefit of future generations.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Summarise the changing approaches to urban regeneration over the last 40 years. (Include examples of named policies in your answer.)
2. What do you understand by the term **sustainable communities**? Illustrate your answer with reference to urban regeneration in Lincoln.
3. ‘Current UK policy toward urban areas involves a successful mix of renewal and evolution.’ Discuss.