Conservation and Regeneration: Complementary or Conflicting Processes? The Case of Grainger Town, Newcastle upon Tyne

John Pendlebury
Centre for Research in European Urban Environments
School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape,
University of Newcastle,
Newcastle upon Tyne,
NE1 7RU.

+44 (0) 191 222 6810
j.r.pendlebury@ncl.ac.uk
Conservation and Regeneration: Complementary or Conflicting Processes?

The Case of Grainger Town, Newcastle upon Tyne

Introduction

Conservation and regeneration have, in the last two decades, often come to be presented as largely complementary processes. For example, historic buildings have been helpful in many flagship property regeneration projects through adding quality and place-distinctiveness to schemes, factors which have been of increasing importance during a period when ‘culture-led regeneration’ has become progressively more fashionable. Conservation bodies, in turn, have generally embraced these relatively new economic and social roles for the historic environment, which are quite different from the rather narrow cultural role conservation once assumed. Indeed the heritage sector has become key in the promotion of the ‘conservation-led regeneration’ or ‘regeneration through conservation’ agenda (for example, English Heritage, 1997; 1998; SAVE Britain’s Heritage, 1998). However, the projection of conservation and regeneration as being essentially synergistic belies areas of underlying tension. First, it ignores the different conceptions of what constitutes valid conservation that may be held between conservationists and urban-regenerators and place-marketers, using heritage as a promotional tool. Thus, though total demolition of listed buildings is currently rare (Pendlebury, 2000) transformations of historic buildings might take place as part of regeneration processes that make conservationists deeply uncomfortable. Second, it ignores enduring scepticism in the property sector over the importance placed upon conservation policy objectives. Though pragmatically the property sector has had to work within a planning system
that has given significant weight to conservation objectives it is evident that there is an on-going lobby for some relaxation to this system (for example, Lord Rogers, MacCormac, & Coleman, 1999; Nelson, 1999; Welsh, 1999).

This article briefly explores the development of the relationship between conservation and regeneration from a conservation perspective, and specifically the role of English Heritage, before focusing on a case study of the Grainger Town area of Newcastle upon Tyne. Grainger Town is a part of the city centre of major historic importance and subject to a multi-agency regeneration initiative. It is one of the flagship projects of English Heritage in terms of regeneration and partnership working (English Heritage, 1998, 1999). Using documentary material and interviews with a wide-range of stakeholders in the area, the article explores the degree to which conservation and regeneration have been perceived as complementary objectives in Grainger Town. Interviews quoted were carried out as part of the ESRC funded project ‘Urban Governance, Institutional Capacity and Regenerating City Centres’.

**The Commodification of Heritage**

‘Modern’ approaches to conservation in the UK derive from the moralistic and didactic nineteenth century writings of John Ruskin and William Morris. Clear principles of intervention were evolved, which remain orthodox in architectural conservation. Stress is placed on the sanctity of authentic historic fabric and the custodianship of buildings for future generations. Thus, prior to the 1960s the preservation of historic buildings was largely considered in terms of a moral cultural imperative, important in itself, rather than in terms of any wider economic or social
utility those structures might have. Following Ruskin and Morris, the subsequent
history of conservation activity was for many years principally as a campaigning
movement, lobbying to protect individual buildings and to achieve legislative reform.
This developed momentum as a reaction to the transformation of British cities by
modernist planning in the 1960s and developers and development-minded local
authorities were generally regarded as the conservationists’ enemy. In turn, old
buildings were often regarded by local authorities as an obstacle rather than an aid to
regeneration.

However, in the 1970s conservation was established as a significant policy objective
within the planning system. Furthermore, though primary legislation changed little
during the period of British Conservative governments of 1979-1997, a period usually
associated with a laissez-faire approach, this strengthening of the policy significance
of conservation continued (Pendlebury, 2000). So not only was conservation largely
exempted from deregulatory initiatives, national policy guidance increasingly
emphasised its importance. This was paralleled by the development of new roles for
the historic environment. From the 1970s conservation pressure groups such as SAVE
Britain’s Heritage (SAVE, 1978) had been articulating the economic case for
conservation. The economic function of conservation became more explicit in the
1980s and part of government policy. One of the controversial government initiatives
in the early days of the Thatcher governments was an increased emphasis on making
the management of historic properties held in care by the government more
businesslike (Delafons, 1997; Wright, 1985). In government planning policy the
economic role of conservation emerged in Circular 8/87 (Department of the
Environment, 1987), which argued that conservation and regeneration are essentially
complementary. Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (Department of the Environment & Department of National Heritage, 1994), in turn, went further than previous guidance on advocating a creative approach to finding new uses for historic buildings.

Historic buildings were often prominent in property-led urban regeneration initiatives of the period, such as the restoration and reuse of the Albert Dock in Liverpool, a large complex of Grade 1 listed warehouses, which was the Merseyside Development Corporation’s flagship scheme. Less high profile schemes such as the Civic Trust assisted regeneration of the small town of Wirksworth in Derbyshire also proliferated. The significance of quality historic environments has become increasingly evident as part of place-marketing/city image initiatives as urban areas have sought to use cultural policy as a strategy of urban regeneration (Bianchini & Parkinson, 1993; Ward, 1998). The historic environment has become an integral part of conceptions of the consumer society, derided by Hewison (1987) and considered by Urry (1995: 21) to be ‘stage-sets within which consumption can take place’.

**The Role of English Heritage**

Thus, during the 1970s, 80s and 90s, the conservation planning system developed, matured and tightened. At the same time the extent of the protected historic environment and the popularity of ‘heritage’ led conservation into new more economically instrumental relationships. The interface between these two processes was not without some tension, but on the whole the conservation system has proved to be extremely robust. A key body in mediating and promoting this agenda has been
English Heritage. It was created in 1984, assuming responsibilities from the Department of the Environment and various other advisory bodies.

Throughout the course of the 1990s English Heritage became steadily more engaged with the urban regeneration agenda. For example, it reoriented its historic area funding regimes. Its grant schemes traditionally focused on the highest-quality historic environments, regardless of the economic conditions in an area. The introduction of Conservation Area Partnerships in 1994/95, for which Grainger Town was a pilot, represented a shift towards a more problem-solving targeted approach. The English Heritage area funding scheme Heritage Economic Regeneration Schemes (HERS), launched in 1999, is explicitly targeted at the most deprived areas as defined by DTLR indices. Only one of the five objectives for the programme is focused on English Heritage’s traditional concern, the conservation of historic fabric. In 1999 it also introduced an Urban Panel to its governance structure, a specific reflection of the importance of urban regeneration to its activities (Beacham, 2001).

English Heritage’s focus on regeneration is, in part at least, part of a process of better positioning itself in relation to government policy. English Heritage, in its early years especially, often had an image of a patrician and obstructive London-based body, echoes of which were evident in the interviews undertaken in Grainger Town discussed below. It has pursued a strategy of decentralising staff from London to regional offices that partly stems from a perception of the new significance of regional levels of governance and Regional Development Agencies in particular (English Heritage, 1999). It has increasingly sought to link conservation with wider social and economic benefits; in particular regeneration but also, for example, issues of
sustainability and excellence in new architectural design (English Heritage 1997; Pearman, 1999). The need for such repositioning received new impetus with the shift from a Conservative to a modernising Labour Government in 1997, and the perceived threats associated with this change. For example, in its Prospectus the government-commissioned Urban Task Force (UTF) made reference to historic buildings being a restraint on regeneration (Urban Task Force, 1998). This provoked an immediate and well-organised response from both English Heritage and other conservation groups (English Heritage, 1998; SAVE Britain's Heritage, 1998) and the final report of the UTF was noticeably more positive about the historic environment (Urban Task Force, 1999). This also illustrates that the repositioning of the role of conservation is not confined to English Heritage. There are many examples of local authorities and other agencies such as amenity bodies and pressure groups using the same rhetoric. So, for example, Birmingham City Council’s conservation strategy is entitled ‘Regeneration Through Conservation’ (Birmingham City Council, 1999).

The Conservation and Regeneration of Grainger Town, Newcastle upon Tyne

The remainder of this article focuses on the degree to which conservation and regeneration objectives have been perceived by a range of interests as compatible in Grainger Town. A key issue is the underlying vision that differing and competing interests have for the area. These, and the unresolved tensions that remain between them, are examined below. The study is based upon extensive documentary material and a series of stakeholder interviews. Thirty stakeholders in the Grainger Town area were interviewed between January 1999 and March 2000. They were selected after mapping stakeholder involvement in the area in early 1999 (figure 1). They comprised
a wide range of people including officers from the Grainger Town Partnership (GTP) team (see below), local authority members and officers, representatives of the other key partners involved in the project, property owners and developers, property surveyors, retailers, residents and conservation interests. Some within this group were centrally involved within the GTP and its mission, whereas others were interviewed because they had a stake in the area rather than directly in the project as such. As such two interviewees from the same broad interest group, for example property surveyors, might be centrally involved in the project or conversely have little day-to-day contact².

Before examining contemporary attitudes in Grainger Town it is necessary to provide some context on the history of the area and the development of the current Grainger Town Partnership.

Grainger Town from the 1820s to 1996

Grainger Town is a label developed in the early 1990s by the City Council for a large part of the historic core of Newcastle upon Tyne. Most of the area lies within the City Council’s Central Conservation Area and a high proportion of the buildings are additionally protected by listed building status, many at high grades. The name derives from Richard Grainger, a speculative developer of the 1820s, 30s and 40s, who was responsible for a phenomenal amount of development in Newcastle at that time, including the planned commercial centre that forms the heart of the area. This comprises three major city streets which form a hierarchy with Grey Street the grandest, Grainger Street the intermediate and Clayton Street the most modest. There
are also a number of secondary streets and some major public buildings, including a theatre and a covered market. The two principal streets, Grey Street and Grainger Street, radiate from a column, Grey's Monument, which has become the symbolic centre of the city. In practice the area defined as Grainger Town extends more extensively than these streets and much of the area has little or nothing to do with the developments of Richard Grainger.

The label Grainger Town was developed as part of an effort to revive and revitalise the area. Though the area is characterised by many very high-quality historic buildings, it was realised that this part of the city centre was facing major problems. The primary retail area of the city centre had moved north, consolidated by the construction of the Council-promoted Eldon Square shopping centre in the early 1970s. To the south, the historic Quayside area by the River Tyne had been regenerated with the assistance of substantial public sector investment from the central government created regeneration agency, the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation, and had absorbed much of the demand for growth for leisure uses such as restaurants and pubs. A substantial proportion of office uses had also drifted away from the city centre to a variety of business parks. Thus a combination of the changing geography of the city together with a decentralisation of functions from the city centre, had left large swathes of the middle section of the city suffering from such problems as high vacancy rates (especially of upper floors) and poor building condition.

The Grainger Town Project developed through a series of stages. Its origins were conservation-based. Initially it was primarily a partnership between the City Council
and English Heritage, with some input from the central government Department of the Environment and a Confederation of British Industry-driven private sector grouping aimed at marketing Newcastle as an investment location, ‘The Newcastle Initiative’. This group commissioned a study of the area (The Conservation Practice and others, 1992) which sought to define a ‘conservation-based strategy’, in essence a planning framework for the area, though it did also propose a ‘Regeneration Project’ with a project officer in a mobilising and co-ordinating role. Funding schemes, such as Conservation Area Partnership, were introduced, though it was clear that this level of public funding was far too small to resolve the major problems the area was facing. In order to mobilise a wider range of partners and to attract more substantial funding a second study of Grainger Town was commissioned in 1996 (EDAW, 1996). Key amongst the other stakeholders brought in at this stage were the regeneration agency, English Partnerships.

The EDAW report led to the creation of the Grainger Town Project as an ‘arms-length’ agency, the Grainger Town Partnership (GTP), constituted as a company, with a multidisciplinary team of officers and a Board that is drawn from the City Council, the major funders and other stakeholders in the area. There is also a series of Panels and Fora representing residents, business, arts and culture and urban design issues (though not conservation specifically). GTP has a life of six years (starting 1997/98), dictated by the funding regimes that have provided substantial capital resources to aid in the implementation of this goal, though planning and development control responsibilities remain with the City Council (for a fuller description of GTP see Healey, Magalhaes, Madanipour, & Pendlebury, 2001; Lovie, 2001).
The EDAW study, ‘Grainger Town Regeneration Strategy’ has served as a defining vision for those at the heart of the regeneration of Grainger Town. However, this paper shows that this vision, or the vision when practically implemented, is not shared by all the stakeholders in the area. Few deny that the area has a significant heritage worthy of retention, or that the area needs to economically function in contemporary terms, but their interpretations of what this means vary dramatically. This is explored below in terms of the core Grainger Town vision, the dissenting conservation perspective and the dissenting property sector perspective.

The ‘Historic Urban Quarter’: The Grainger Town Partnership vision.

Though the EDAW report led to a shift in the emphasis of The Grainger Town Project from its conservation roots to a broader economic development approach, the heritage of the area still formed a fundamental underpinning of the strategy. For example, ‘The quality and character of its buildings and townscape suggest that Grainger Town has a place in the front rank of historic urban quarters of city centres in the UK’ (EDAW, 1996: 36) and ‘Fundamentally, we propose to strengthen and develop Grainger Town as a mixed use, historic urban quarter’ (p38). However, heritage was now perceived as an instrument to help achieve regeneration rather than necessarily as an end itself. Newcastle was positioned in the report as in competition as an investment location with other cities nationally and at a European level, with the quality of the heritage of the area regarded as a potential comparative advantage in achieving success. Within this framework Grainger Town would become a key location, with a rich mixture of uses and a high quality public domain. Extensive aspirational references were made to the quality and vibrancy of mixed-use areas in continental cities. Crucially, these aims
were seen as compatible with the conservation designations and concomitant policy covering much of the area.

Thus faith in the compatibility of conservation and regeneration is a central underpinning of the Grainger Town Partnership. Given the nature of its creation, with key partners including English Heritage and English Partnerships, it was necessary to build a consensus that responded to the objectives of both. Furthermore, any body operating in Grainger Town would have been faced by first, the reality of a conservation planning system that through the extensive listing of buildings and conservation area status places great policy weight on conservation objectives, and second, by an economic decline, evident in vacancies and poor building condition, that required solutions extending beyond building fabric and resources beyond the means of the heritage sector. GTP has been aware of the need to sell this vision, however. In its early days GTP encountered hostility and scepticism from the commercial property sector in particular. One means by which it has sought to convey its message is through promotional conferences and the publication of a ‘Heritage Handbook’ (URBED, 2000) which aims to promote Grainger Town as an investment location by associating the heritage of the area with ‘quality’.

In the interviews undertaken key actors central to the GTP made many unprompted references to the EDAW study. It was clear that the vision outlined in 1996 still served as a defining concept for those at the heart of the project. Interviewees articulated how conservation and regeneration could be achieved as part of this process. Central to this was a vision of the role and functioning of the area as a place of fine-grained mixed use. For example, ‘What we do have to do is work with the
grain of the area and to try to be prepared to accept that some buildings won’t be capable of the refurbishment and conversion to offices and then we will look for alternative uses and I think that is what has happened really within Grey Street…. So rather than if you like trying to do purely facadist schemes where we take out the rest of the building and just retain the front we said lets work with the grain and we said lets look at residential’ (GTP team member). Historic buildings were argued to carry a market-cachet and specific schemes were cited as successful examples of how the historic character of Grainger Town and modern functionality could be both creatively accommodated. A scheme on Grey Street, called Lloyds Court, was held to be ‘an example of how we managed to negotiate a scheme which did keep some of the cellular offices along the frontage buildings…. but still allow some big floor plates behind… it will be a good model of how modern requirements for office space can be accommodated within the context of the historic grain and historic buildings’ (English Heritage Officer).

Both conservation and regeneration interests were prepared to work pragmatically and accept that their views would not always predominate, though each had a tendency to feel that that in a situation of conflict it was they who had to give way. For example, ‘I think conservation is not seen as being an equal partner, I think the scales are tipped, because economic regeneration carries more clout in terms of outputs… if compromises have to be made, the powers will say that conservation is where it will happen’ (Conservation interest GTP Board member). Notwithstanding this, those at the heart of GTP reaffirmed their overall belief and commitment to the compatibility of achieving conservation and regeneration objectives in Grainger Town. However, this was far from always the case with those less central to GTP.
Historic Urban Quarter or Historic City? Conservationists concerns

The severe economic problems manifested in under-used and under-maintained buildings that led to the Grainger Town Project were well known amongst the ‘conservation community’. In Newcastle this grouping of conservation interests includes, for example, representatives from national and local amenity societies, English Heritage officers, specialist officers from the City Council and sympathetic councillors. Only some of this grouping are directly involved with GTP. The initial focus on Grainger Town as a conservation-led scheme and its link with the Council’s Conservation Areas Advisory Sub-Committee (CAASC) ensured that the project had a high profile with conservationists and the concept of a strategic effort on this key part of the historic City enjoyed much support. A conservation-led regeneration scheme would ensure not only the re-use of the buildings in the area but that works were undertaken in an appropriate way and to an appropriate standard.

However, subsequently, with the creation of GTP and the implementation of schemes, views have become much more mixed. Central to the concerns of conservationists is the impact of schemes on historic fabric and the character of the area. This is exacerbated for some by a feeling that conservation has become a marginal objective as the Grainger Town Project developed\textsuperscript{3}. Attention to conservation is now felt to be superficial and more concerned with image than authenticity, with the branding of Grainger Town as an investment location rather than the material and historical ‘truth’ of the area. This can be illustrated by reference to three issues, the use of ‘facadism’,
the degree of alteration permitted to high graded listed buildings and policy on shopfronts.

The practice of facadism, taken to mean the construction of new buildings behind retained historic facades, is fiercely criticised by many conservation interests as it is seen as removing the essential integrity of a building. Though discouraged by government guidance (Department of the Environment & Department of National Heritage, 1994), and despite the quote by the GTP officer above, it has been undertaken in Grainger Town during the life of GTP on a fairly regular basis as a ‘conservation compromise’. An early case was the refurbishment of St. Nicholas’ Buildings, which was widely presented as one of the initial successes of GTP. These are/ were a large group of nineteenth century commercial buildings and as part of the refurbishment all that was retained was the façade, despite an earlier set of permissions, following extensive negotiations with English Heritage, that retained notable internal features such as the principal staircases. Later phases of the Lloyds Court scheme, the first phase of which is referred to as an exemplar by the English Heritage officer quoted above, have been undertaken as facadism.

As contentious as full-blown facadism have been some schemes that have allowed for significant alterations to high graded listed buildings. The Grainger Market is a large grade I listed complex of covered market and street blocks, built as part of Richard Grainger’s grand scheme. In 1999 permission was granted for the addition of an additional Mansard storey to 111-115 Grainger Street, despite strong conservationist protests by Newcastle Conservation Area Panel (NCAP)^4 and individual groups. Permission was justified as part of a Living Over the Shop (LOTS)^5 scheme and on
the presence of earlier Mansard roofs on adjacent properties. Opposite this property, the grade II* 112-118 Grainger Street was subject of controversy when as part of a larger redevelopment of the block, original undamaged masonry was removed from the shop front area of the building. The objective of the developer was to achieve a visual match with surrounding new masonry, introduced as part of the larger scheme. In these cases conservationist critics have accused GTP, and the City Council in respect of its development control powers, of a negligent attitude towards surviving historic fabric and an ignorance of the architectural form of the Grainger buildings in supporting and consenting to new work.6

GTP has been keen to improve shop-fronts in the area and to facilitate this it has operated a shop-front improvement grant scheme. To support this work it commissioned a shop-front guide (URBED & Winskell, 2001). The lack of confidence in GTP is evident in reactions to the guide, which though welcomed in principle, has been criticised through Newcastle Conservation Advisory Forum (NCAF)7 for a lack of prescription. It does not set the clear parameters of acceptable shop-fronts that some conservation groups would have liked and this is held to be indicative of a wider lack of attention to achieving high quality conservation work.

**Historic Urban Quarter or Modern Functional City? Market scepticism**

Most of the interviewees from the property sector acknowledged Newcastle as a historic city and the significance of Grainger Town within this. However, nearly all had a more selective view of historical value than is embodied within the conservation designations of the area and the GTP vision. The view was repeatedly expressed that
through the planning system and its extensiveness of protection, or the actions of GTP and its efforts to achieve conservation and regeneration objectives, too much weight was given to limiting change in the area. Successful regeneration was held to require a contemporary functionality difficult or impossible with the retention of the defined historic buildings of the area. Most of the historic stock is regarded as fundamentally unfit for contemporary purposes. The other major barriers cited in marketing Grainger Town as an investment location were more generic city centre problems of car access and parking.

Thus, quite different conceptions than those of GTP officers or conservationists were expressed over the historic qualities of the area, in terms of which buildings are important and what the implications of keeping such buildings are. Grey Street was often explicitly acknowledged as of architectural merit but the more minor Grainger streets, such as Clayton Street, frequently disparaged. Commenting on the relative merits of different parts of the area, one respondent stated ‘its our view that Grainger Town is too big, and that Newcastle has got a few jewels in its crown, like Grey Street and Grey’s Monument, and perhaps the top end of Grainger Street… to make the best of the jewels in the crown they have to forego some of the less important parts, like I still believe its crazy to spend a grant of £35,000/ flat in Clayton Street to create a poor flat, when Mr. Barratt could have built a perfectly good one for £30,000…’ (Property surveyor).

Many interviewees specifically identified merit as lying exclusively in the facades of buildings. For example, ‘So whereas we have lovely ashlar fronts, behind it, its crap... It should all come down to be honest, on Grey Street and Grainger Street, save the
facades’ (Developer). These views were not restricted to the commercial property sector. Property interests in the City Council and English Partnerships sometimes expressed similar sentiments, for example, ‘the problem is one of cost, getting modern specifications and modern standards… behind glorious facades’ (Senior local authority officer). Furthermore, frustration at conservationist attitudes was sometimes expressed, ‘I can’t understand the quest to retain it when they’re starting to fall down because no-one wants to use them… I can’t understand how there’s often a mode of thought that prefers to see the vacancies and the dereliction, rather than modification’ (English Partnerships officer).

Thus the core GTP principle of the compatibility of achieving regeneration whilst maintaining the historic stock was questioned and seen to be a barrier to the economic revitalisation of the area. In particular, it was considered that this approach was bound to fail in bringing forward the space required by the market. The property-sector interviewees virtually without exception saw major problems in the reuse of the historic stock of the area. The principal theme was the desire of commercial users and institutional investors for ‘modern’, flexible, clear-plate offices. For example, ‘It is much easier to attract someone to a new office block which has been custom-built in order to accommodate modern use, with access for the disabled, with cabling for computers and the telephone system, with modern heating and lighting, and all other amenities’ (Private sector GTP Board member) and ‘the supply is totally out dated, and on a demand side, most of the demand is for larger units and most of the supply is of course geared to the small buildings with a small floorspace… and people want a more modern image than an olde image for their business’ (Property surveyor).
Further problems referred to included the low rental levels in Newcastle relative to competitor cities, the high proportion of floorspace (such as circulation space) that is considered unlettable in old buildings and the high costs of refurbishment. These further exacerbated the basic problems considered to be inherent in reusing Grainger Town’s historic stock. Some had a more fundamentally sceptical view about the fine-grained, mixed-use strategy pursued by GTP. For example, ‘I think the business of the LOTS has a very uncertain benefit… What worries me greatly is that important commercial and retail areas of the city become populated with little pockets of population… these pockets of population may act as obstructions to a real development of certain areas wholesale to make and to continue retail areas, commercial areas and so on.’ (Property owner and developer).

Thus the property sector found the GTP vision to be impractical and incompatible with achieving an essential modern functionality in order that the area can compete with alternative investment locations. Most did see a value in the historic qualities of the area, albeit from a conservationist perspective, a superficial appreciation focussed on a limited number of architectural set-pieces. However, this was far from accepting that regeneration should be ‘conservation-led’.

**Conclusion**

The role of conservation has changed markedly over the last thirty years as the historic environment has acquired a range of new functions. English Heritage and others have promoted an agenda whereby the benefits of conservation are taken to extend far beyond traditional notions of keeping historic buildings for their own
intrinsic worth. One of the roles conservation has assumed is as an agent of regeneration. Initiatives such as Grainger Town have sought to put this agenda into effect, but have also exposed tensions inherent in the implementation of such an approach.

The key partners involved in GTP such as the GTP team, Newcastle City Council, English Heritage and English Partnerships have held to a broadly shared vision of the transformation of Grainger Town that promotes major change in the area but it is premised on this occurring in retained historic fabric. Some schemes have had support from all sectors. One such is the re-use of a flamboyant nineteenth century gentlemen’s club, empty since the 1970s, by the Weatherspoons pub chain. Adjacent to this building is a brutal and intrusive 1970s office block, which GTP propose to remove in 2002 to general acclaim. Other achievements have been made, such as an improved public realm in key locations in the area. However, there are often tensions over reconciling contrasting aspirations in the area. No clear consensus exists over degrees of acceptable intervention to achieve regeneration and conservation objectives. Sustaining the partnership has required skill from GTP and a degree of pragmatism and strategic compromise and sacrifice from key partners.

By contrast those less central to the Partnership have felt less constrained in being openly critical of GTP. Conservationists were initially generally supportive. However, they have often been disappointed with the detailed results achieved. Part of this relates to compromises that have been argued to be necessary in order to achieve economic uses for buildings, for example the use of facadism. Part, though, relates to a lack of attention to issues of detail and authenticity, such as has been the case with
shop-fronts. This is especially frustrating for conservation concerns. These sort of conflicts occur in all such commercial locations but the resources of GTP were seen as an opportunity to ‘get things right’. Instead, Grainger Town has come to be seen by some as a marketing device, interested in achieving superficially acceptable results, and uninterested in ‘true’ conservation. Local conservation interests have been unable, or unwilling, to make the strategic shift in focus taken by English Heritage.

Many in the commercial sector started with negative attitudes towards the Grainger Town Partnership. Having witnessed the decline of the traditional commercial centre and the rise of new forms of modern purpose built space around the region, they were deeply sceptical about the revival of the area’s fortunes being compatible with the retention of more than a very limited amount of the historic fabric of Grainger Town. The historic image of the area was seen as a positive quality of the area to a degree, but the restrictions that go with listing and conservation area status to be entirely negative. Despite all that has been asserted about the value of historic buildings in helping place-identity, much of the property-market world remains sceptical that better and more worthwhile results can be achieved through conservation rather than more extensive redevelopment. At the time of the interviews quoted in this article, GTP officers felt that the property market was more receptive than in the early days of the project, though as described, much scepticism was still evident. However, with admittedly favourable market conditions, the evidence from the Grainger Town Project to date shows most performance targets being met and exceeded (Healey, Magalhaes, Madanipour, & Pendlebury, 2001).
A hegemonic discourse about the compatibility of regeneration and conservation and ‘conservation-led regeneration’ has been promoted in recent years, led by the heritage sector and English Heritage especially. However, as we can see in Grainger Town this is problematic and conceals on-going tensions and contestation. For some the conjunction of conservation and regeneration leads to creative and dynamic solutions (English Heritage, 1998). However, for others it can lead to the creation of sub-optimal space, as part of mediocre schemes lacking in authenticity.

Notes

1 ESRC R000222616
2 for a detailed account of methodology see Healey, Magalhaes, Madanipour, & Pendlebury (2002)
3 This was compounded by the abolition of CAASC in 1999, as part of a review of the City Council committee structure. It was replaced by a quarterly Newcastle Conservation Advisory Forum (NCAF) to discuss strategic matters. This does not discuss individual case work which many of the amenity bodies consider to be their key focus. NCAF has since been supplemented by the Newcastle Conservation Advisory Panel (NCAP) which considers individual applications. NCAP is organised by the amenity bodies independent from the Council, albeit it with recognition and some support from the City.
4 NCAP Minutes 8/7/99. See note 3 also.
5 Living Over the Shop is a specific government initiative that aims to bring unused upper floors into residential use.
6 NCAP Minutes 30/9/99. See note 3 also.

References


Figure 1. Stakeholder map of those involved in the formal arenas of the Grainger Town Partnership in early 1999 (taken from Healey, P., Magalhaes, C. de, Madanipour, A., & Pendlebury, J. (2002)).