SUSTAINING REGENERATION
GRAINGER TOWN REVIEW 2010
Fred Robinson & Ian Zass-Ogilvie
SUMMARY

This report presents the findings from an independent study of Grainger Town, Newcastle upon Tyne. It reviews the achievements of the Grainger Town Project and looks at how the area has fared since that regeneration scheme formally ended in 2004. The report examines the challenges of sustaining the process of regeneration and also considers future prospects.

This study was commissioned by Newcastle City Council, English Heritage and One North East, and has been undertaken by Professor Fred Robinson and Ian Zass-Ogilvie of St Chad’s College, Durham University. It is based on a programme of interviews, examination of documentary sources and an external visual assessment of the buildings of Grainger Town.

The Grainger Town Project was an undoubted success. Economic decline was halted and the physical deterioration of the area tackled. Public sector investment, totalling £40m, created confidence and promoted change, leading to investment of £145m by the private sector. Many buildings were restored and brought back into use and much of the area’s heritage of ‘Tyneside Classical’ architecture has been secured.

The Project’s funding ran for six years, from 1997 to 2003, but some elements of the programme were completed later, including the Waterloo Square development, some of the public realm improvements and several public art pieces. However, redevelopment at Westgate House has still not been undertaken and the Waygood Gallery development remains unfinished.

By 2006, almost all the target outputs initially set for the Grainger Town Project had been met or exceeded. The successful regeneration of the area has been widely acknowledged and it has received a number of prestigious awards.

Further investment over the past few years indicates that the process of regeneration in Grainger Town has continued. There has also been very considerable development activity in the rest of Newcastle City Centre. Major developments at Eldon Square and new office schemes in the St James’s Boulevard/Gallowgate area have been undertaken. In addition, three large scale city centre schemes are planned: Silverlink’s development in the Stephenson Quarter; Science Central on the former brewery site; and the East Pilgrim Street scheme.
The study notes recent changes in institutional arrangements, particularly the establishment of NE1 (the agency implementing the new Business Improvement District) and 1NG (the City Development Company). There is no longer an agency focused solely on Grainger Town. Newcastle City Council continues to have a major role in the area and is drawing up the City Centre Action Plan, while English Heritage continues to be concerned with securing the heritage environment.

City Council data on the occupancy of business premises indicates that Grainger Town has fared relatively well. Despite the economic downturn, vacancy rates in Grainger Town decreased between 2003 and 2009 – while increasing in the rest of the city centre. Rentals have also held up reasonably well. The residential population, although still small, has continued to grow: up from an estimated 998 in 2003 to 1455 in 2009.

Improvements to the public realm – a key component of the Grainger Town programme – have generally been well maintained. Maintenance arrangements, agreed with the City Council as part of the Grainger Town Project’s Forward Strategy, are still in place. There are, however, some concerns about reinstatement of paving by contractors and maintenance of some public art works and lighting schemes.

A key element of the study is an external visual assessment of all the buildings in Grainger Town, undertaken in Autumn 2009. The overwhelming majority (97.7%) of addresses/buildings in Grainger Town were assessed as ‘good’ or ‘fair’, a very encouraging position. The English Heritage methodology to assess whether a building is ‘at risk’ combines condition with occupancy, and that approach was replicated in this study. On that basis, the majority of buildings are not deemed to be at risk, but 68 (out of 720) were assessed as being ‘vulnerable’, with 16 ‘at risk’ and just one at ‘grave risk’. Again, this is encouraging, as is the steady decrease in the number of listed buildings considered by English Heritage to be ‘at risk’.

Grainger Town is much improved but has yet to realise its full potential. In particular, there is still a considerable amount of unused and apparently unwanted space, especially on upper floors. There is also a concern that Grainger Town may not be given the attention it needs, as the focus has shifted to development in other parts of the city centre.

At present there does not appear to be a coherent vision for Grainger Town; it is hoped that the City Centre Area Action Plan, when completed, will help to remedy that. The area also needs to be more effectively promoted and enlivened by activities and events. Developers and businesses need to be encouraged to recognise and realise opportunities in Grainger Town. In addition, there are several key buildings and sites which require special attention because of their importance and prominence. For example, there is still scope to improve the visibility, environment and offer of the Grainger Market. It is clear that effective monitoring, maintenance and management arrangements are essential in ensuring that regeneration is sustained.
It is recommended that:

- attention is given to ensuring that the City Centre Area Action Plan and the strategies of other relevant agencies include a Grainger Town dimension and clear, deliverable policies.

- greater effort should be made to strengthen the ‘brand’ and promote Grainger Town as a place of historic interest with a quality environment which is full of ‘buzz’, life and activity.

- as part of the development of options for the City Centre Area Action Plan, feasibility studies should be commissioned to explore development options, including the re-use of upper floors. Public agencies need to signal their commitment to facilitating regeneration by providing advice and encouragement, promoting opportunities and solutions, and by encouraging the maintenance of buildings.

- vacancies and the condition of buildings should be regularly monitored and reported; this would most likely be a task for the City Council.

- simple initiatives to help maintain the area should be supported, including maintenance works, use of vacant shop units and improved signage.
1. Introduction

The regeneration of Grainger Town is a real success story. Grainger Town, in the historic centre of Newcastle upon Tyne, previously suffered many years of economic and physical decline. Businesses moved out, leaving vacant buildings falling into disrepair and decay. Piecemeal efforts to tackle the area’s problems failed. The turning point came in 1997, when a substantial new initiative, the Grainger Town Project, was established to promote and support the comprehensive regeneration of the area. This scheme succeeded in reviving the area by restoring confidence and attracting investment, in turn helping to save Grainger Town’s remarkable architectural heritage.

The Grainger Town Project had funding for six years, until 2003, and was finally and formally brought to an end in 2004. Now, five years on, this regeneration scheme is certainly not forgotten, but attention has largely shifted to other developments and other issues in the city centre. There is an understandable tendency to suppose that Grainger Town’s problems have been dealt with: a case of ‘job done’.

But the Grainger Town Project did not – and could not – solve all the area’s problems. Although it was very successful, it was time-limited and did not have the resources to do all that needed to be done. Indeed, when the Project came to an end it was clear that many issues still had to be tackled and that the momentum of regeneration would have to be sustained. It was also clear that the achievements of the regeneration programme, notably improvements to the physical fabric, would necessarily require long term maintenance. The Grainger Town Project has, therefore, to be seen as a stage – albeit an important stage – in a continuing process of regeneration, change and renewal.

This review looks at Grainger Town now, five years after the end of the Grainger Town Project. It considers whether the area’s regeneration has been maintained and sustained. How has Grainger Town fared – and how is it being affected by the economic downturn? What are its needs now, and what should be the priorities?

This review has been commissioned by Newcastle City Council, English Heritage and One North East. It is an independent, external study, undertaken by Professor Fred Robinson and Ian Zass-Ogilvie of St Chad’s College, Durham University. Professor Robinson conducted both the mid-term (2001) and final (2003) evaluations of the Grainger Town Project and this review builds on that earlier work. While the primary purpose is to provide policy-relevant information and analysis to the three partner agencies, it is hoped that this report will also be of use to a wider audience – there continues to be much national, and international, interest in the experience of Grainger Town.
Scope of the review

This quinquennial review aims to bring the Grainger Town ‘story’ up to date and highlight progress, challenges and developments over recent years. It also aims to identify risks and priorities, pointing to implications for policy intervention. It is a practical exercise, assessing the ‘state of play’ in Grainger Town and considering what might be done to sustain regeneration, particularly in the context of a difficult economic climate.

The review looks at:

- Physical, economic and social change and development in Grainger Town, especially over the last five years
- The state of Grainger Town now – in relation to its buildings, public realm, economic and social development.
- Efforts to maintain and take forward regeneration after the Grainger Town Project ended, including implementation of the Project’s Forward Strategy and also recent institutional developments.
- Current and future challenges and priorities – and potential responses.

While the focus is on Grainger Town itself, this review is set within a wider context. It considers the considerable changes that have taken place, or are planned to take place in the future, in the rest of Newcastle city centre, because these developments impact on Grainger Town, its activities and functions. The review also explores the institutional context which, in various ways, has implications for Grainger Town now and in the future. The review looks back, at what the Grainger Town Project achieved, what has happened since it ended, and what lessons might be learnt. But it also looks forward and considers what – if any – support or attention the area might need in order to keep it on a positive trajectory and not slip back into decline.

The review is based on semi-structured interviews and documentary material. More than 50 people were interviewed; all of them involved, in various ways, with Grainger Town (see Annex 1). They included councillors, officials, property professionals and people involved in businesses and in the community in Grainger Town. All had the opportunity to give their views and, as the study proceeded, they were asked to comment on emerging ideas and proposals. The intranet archives of The Journal and Evening Chronicle were consulted, and official documents and consultants’ reports were examined (see Annex 2). The City Council’s Gazeteer Team provided useful data on the occupation and vacancy of buildings, while English Heritage provided information on Listed Buildings. In addition, a comprehensive visual assessment of the buildings of Grainger Town was undertaken by the researchers in Autumn 2009.

The approach has been to piece together all this material, consider the evidence, and reach a balanced assessment of the area, highlighting challenges, prospects and policy issues.
The Grainger Town Project: vision and achievements

Background

The Grainger Town Project was focused on an area of about 90 acres (35 hectares) in Newcastle city centre (see Fig. 1). The Project’s designated area extended from Grey’s Monument and the Grainger Market in the north to the Central Station in the south, and from Blenheim Street/St James's Boulevard and Stowell Street in the west to Pilgrim Street in the east (Fig 1). Much of the area was developed by Richard Grainger in the 1830s, comprising impressive ‘Tyneside Classical’ buildings designed by architect John Dobson. In addition, there are medieval churches, a varied mix of old and new development and remnants of the city walls. Some 57% of the actual addresses are listed as, or as being within, ‘buildings of architectural or historic merit’. Of those, 13% are Grade I, 16% Grade II* and the remaining 71% are Grade II listed. In national terms, Grainger Town has a remarkably high proportion of Grade I and II* listed buildings.

For years, Grainger Town experienced economic decline and physical deterioration. Shops closed down as the city’s retail centre shifted northwards, to Eldon Square, in the 1970s. Office activities subsequently relocated to new business parks and the Quayside. By the mid 1990s, after at least two decades of decline, Grainger Town had an atmosphere of neglect, with fine buildings underused and decaying and a streetscape, the ‘public realm’, in poor condition.

Limited attempts were made to tackle the area’s problems, through inner city programmes and grants for building repairs and conservation. But progress was patchy and resources evidently inadequate to bring about a revival.

In 1996, English Partnerships, Newcastle City Council and English Heritage began to draw up a comprehensive, holistic strategy, which was then further developed by consultants EDAW. That strategy was the basis for the Grainger Town Project, funded for a period of six years, from 1997 to 2003. A total of £40m of public money was initially committed to the Project, principally from the Single Regeneration Budget (£11m) and English Partnerships/One North East (£25m).

Physical regeneration – involving investment in buildings and the public realm – was a key component of the regeneration strategy and much of the Project’s expenditure was used to support that. The Grainger Town Project was concerned particularly with encouraging property owners to invest in their buildings and arrest decay and decline, with support from public funding. But, in line with the EDAW Strategy, the Project also had other ‘regeneration themes’. These included enhancing employment prospects, economic development, environmental improvement, better housing conditions, initiatives of benefit to ethnic minorities, and actions to address crime and public safety issues.
Fig. 1
Grainger Town Area Map
From the start it was recognised that economic development was fundamental and that regeneration could not simply be about trying to save the architectural heritage; it was more ambitious than that. The stated vision for Grainger Town was that, by the end of the Project, the area would have become:

‘…a dynamic and competitive location in the heart of the city. Grainger Town will develop its role in the regional economy, within a high quality environment appropriate to a major European Regional Capital. Its reputation for excellence will be focused on leisure, culture and the arts, retailing, housing and entrepreneurial activity. Grainger Town will become a distinctive place, a safe and attractive location to work, live and visit’.

Implementation

The Grainger Town Partnership, constituted as a company limited by guarantee, was set up in 1997 to oversee delivery of the Project. The Partnership Board had 20 members, including representatives from the City Council, key public agencies, the private sector and local residents. Business and Residents Forums were also established, together with advisory panels concerned with particular aspects of the programme. The Project had a Delivery Team of officers, based within the area, responsible for implementing the scheme.

From the outset, the Partnership sought to build confidence, demonstrating commitment to change and to an ‘ethos of quality’. It was recognised that the development of effective relationships between the Delivery Team and the private sector would be crucial in stimulating investment. The Partnership had to give a strong signal that Grainger Town had a great deal of potential and that the area would experience a real revival. Businesses also had to be assured that the Partnership would support and facilitate their investment.

High quality improvements to the public realm helped to generate confidence; throughout Grainger Town, new pavements of Caithness stone and granite were laid, complemented by the installation of new street furniture and public art. The restoration and re-use of buildings to provide new residential, retail, leisure and office accommodation was supported by grant assistance, notably through English Partnerships’ gap funding scheme. Some of the upper floors above shops – often vacant for many years – were brought back into residential use. Major residential schemes were completed on Grainger Street and Clayton Street, including Murton House, Victoria Buildings, Central Exchange Buildings, Galen House and also at Pudding Chare. There is a mix of tenures: social and market rented, and also some owner-occupied properties.

Prominent buildings such as the old Union Rooms (empty for 22 years) and the former Wengers store were refurbished to become successful bars. On Grey Street, new offices were developed at Lloyd’s Court and derelict buildings at the southern end of the street were – eventually – restored. As confidence
grew and the market strengthened, large scale schemes were initiated, such as the refurbishment of the former Binns’ store by retailer T J Hughes, The Gate complex, developed by Land Securities on Newgate Street and, later, the large scale mixed use redevelopment at East St James' Boulevard. As well as big projects, there were smaller initiatives, such as the refurbishment of altogether 29 shop fronts, grant-aided by the Project, and also training schemes, cultural events and promotional activity.

The final evaluation produced in 2003 discussed, in some detail, how the Grainger Town Project was implemented and what it had achieved. It stressed the importance of process: effective partnerships and relationships, a shared vision, the commitment and continuity of staff and board members. The resources were substantial and the economic climate was favourable, but the manner and method of delivery certainly helped to ensure success.

Implementation of the Grainger Town Project did not, in fact, end in 2003, not least because there was an ‘overhang’ of developments which had yet to be completed. The East St James’s Boulevard scheme was still being developed, the installation of public art had some way to go and the Westgate House redevelopment was still in the pipeline (and still is today). Even so, at the end of the six years, in 2003, the Grainger Town Project had delivered most of its expected or target outputs. Some outputs had been substantially exceeded: in particular, by March 2003, over £145m of private sector investment had been secured, almost double the original target of £74m.

Forward Strategy

The Grainger Town Partnership was well aware of the need to make arrangements for the completion of projects and to ensure that regeneration would be sustained in the future. During the last two years of the Grainger Town Project the Partnership therefore developed a detailed Forward Strategy concerned with the delivery of the remaining projects and plans for exit and succession.

As part of the Forward Strategy, agreement was reached with One North East to enable funding commitments to be extended through to 2005, taking into account delays caused by EU funding issues (through the withdrawal of gap funding provisions). It was decided to dismantle the Partnership and transfer the functions and responsibilities of the Delivery Team to the City Council’s City Centre Development Team, working with One North East. There was, however, a good deal of continuity: several members of the Delivery Team, originally seconded, returned to the Council and retained some of their Grainger Town responsibilities. The Partnership Board was dissolved shortly after its final meeting held at the end of 2003. The City Centre Panel, which had been convened by the Council, was identified as essentially the successor body to the Partnership.

A major element of the Forward Strategy was the Grainger Town Charter, which is concerned with safeguarding the Project’s investment in the public
realm, including not just paving but also public art works, street furniture and creative lighting schemes. The Charter sets out the agreed maintenance responsibilities of the City Council with detailed instructions and standards. Adherence to the Charter was to be monitored by the City Centre Panel. A Grainger Town Maintenance Manual was also produced to encourage private owners to maintain their buildings and uphold standards.

The Forward Strategy was effective, providing a sound framework for completing the programme. And, although the Grainger Town Charter did not have formal legal status – it was a 'Memorandum of Understanding' – it has been adhered to and has generally ensured continued maintenance of improvements undertaken in Grainger Town.

Back in 2003 there was a strong feeling that much had been achieved and that the Project had worked remarkably well. The regeneration of Grainger Town was widely acknowledged and had already attracted several prestigious awards. But it was apparent that there was still much to do. The 2003 evaluation pointed to concerns about the Grainger Market, the Newgate Centre, traffic conflicts and the continuing problem of empty and unwanted office space. Regeneration was well underway; would it continue, or would Grainger Town again face decline?
3. Update: Grainger Town and its context 2003-09

Completing the programme

In 2003, some of the outstanding elements of the Grainger Town programme were at a reasonably advanced stage of project planning or were on site and underway. Others, however, had quite a long way to go – and a few projects have yet to be completed.

The final phase (phase six) of public realm improvements and pedestrianisation, in streets around the Grainger Market, was completed in 2005. The other significant remaining public realm scheme, at Charlotte Square, had been held up by the need to relocate an electricity substation. That scheme was undertaken in 2004, resulting in the effective restoration of the central garden of this much neglected eighteenth century square – a forgotten gem, pre-dating Grainger’s buildings.

The remaining public art pieces were gradually put in place, culminating in the much-delayed Chinese Ceremonial Arch, installed in Stowell Street in 2005. Creative lighting schemes, brought into the Grainger Town programme at a fairly late stage, were installed to enhance key landmarks and streetscapes. By the end of 2003, the Roman Catholic Cathedral, St John’s and St Andrew’s churches had been lit, and lighting schemes for buildings in Grey Street were completed in 2004.

The restoration and reconstruction of decaying buildings at 2-12 Grey Street/21 Mosley Street had been one of the Grainger Town Partnership’s most difficult projects – it was a complex and long-running saga. Finally, in 2005, work was completed and these buildings restored as a boutique hotel. On Westgate Road, another key project, the redevelopment of the former Cannon Cinema site by Blueroom Properties, to provide 31 new ‘loft-style’ apartments, was completed in 2005.

By far the biggest outstanding scheme, the mixed use development at Waterloo Square, East St James’s Boulevard, required a Compulsory Purchase Order for a substantial part of the site, and that was only finally confirmed in November 2003. The new Dance City building, a key part of that scheme, was finished in Autumn 2005 and the Holiday Inn Express hotel and the City Council’s multi-storey car park opened in 2006. Another component of the scheme, the conversion of the art deco Alfred Wilson House (formerly Rockshots night club) to create apartments, known as Central Lofts, was also completed in 2006.

Probably the most frustrating scheme has been the redevelopment of Westgate House. This brutal and much-loathed office block was bought by One North East, on behalf of the Grainger Town Partnership, in 2000. The aim was to facilitate redevelopment of this site, together with the adjacent Norwich Union House. Demolition of Westgate House was delayed for years, and was finally achieved in February 2007. But Norwich Union House remains and a proposed scheme by developer Centreland has yet to be taken forward.
Another development, the Waygood Gallery, has experienced delays. This innovative project involves conversion and development of a former print works (Wards Buildings) on High Bridge, to create artists' studios and gallery space. Originally intended to open in 2005, building work only started in 2008 and is unfinished.

Table 1 shows actual outputs as at 2003 and estimates for 2006. Unfortunately, actual outputs achieved do not appear to have been monitored, so it is necessary to rely on estimates (based on suitably adjusted 2003 forecasts). With the exception of training outputs, the Grainger Town Project met or exceeded all the scheme's initial targets. The completion of developments at East St James's Boulevard was the main source of additional outputs after 2003, particularly important in helping to bring the number of new homes up to the target. It is clear from the figures that the Project performed very well, especially in terms of private investment and the number of buildings brought back into use – altogether 131 by 2006.

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<th>Table 1: Grainger Town Project outputs</th>
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<td>Lifetime Target</td>
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<td>Jobs created</td>
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<td>New homes (residential units)</td>
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<td>Buildings brought back into use</td>
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<td>Private investment attracted</td>
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*Source: Grainger Town Partnership Board, 20 June 2003 and 19 December 2003*

‘Lifetime targets’ are the outputs which were expected to be achieved by the end of the six years (1997-2003) of the SRB-funded Grainger Town Project. Because of the ‘overhang’ of developments taking place, One North East agreed that the final position would be outputs achieved to March 2006. The overall performance is therefore measured by outputs achieved by March 2006, which may be compared against the benchmark lifetime targets.

Note that estimates for 2006 presented here are based on forecasts for 2006, minus outputs forecast for the Westgate House and Waygood developments which have not been completed.
The regeneration of Grainger Town continues to have a relatively high public profile. Grainger Town has been an important part of efforts to promote the city, for example in the Capital of Culture 2008 bid and in the marketing of NewcastleGateshead. The Project also continued to win awards, bringing national and international recognition of its achievements. In 2004 Grainger Town received the Royal Town Planning Institute’s highest accolade, the Silver Jubilee Cup, the EU Prize for Cultural Heritage, and the prestigious Europa Nostra prize for Cultural Landscapes. Grainger Town was named ‘Great Neighbourhood 2008’ by the Academy of Urbanism – ahead of Temple Bar, Dublin and London’s Soho. Most recently, in 2009, Grey Street won the ‘best street’ award conferred by the Academy of Urbanism.

**Other developments in Grainger Town**

As well as completion of the planned programme, Grainger Town has seen additional changes in recent years, indicating at least some momentum carrying regeneration forward.

Grainger Market – which had not had much direct benefit from the Grainger Town Project – was repaired and refurbished by the City Council in 2004. Although costing over £3m, it was a limited programme of work, but nonetheless has helped to improve and develop the market. The Tyneside Cinema has been comprehensively refurbished, and the Theatre Royal has also benefited from improvements (and a substantial revamp and restoration is now planned to coincide with its 175th anniversary in 2012).

Examination of Planning Approvals data held by the City Council’s Gazetteer Team shows that the main change in Grainger Town over the past five years has been the development of further residential units, additional to those which were part of the Project’s programme. The conversion of older buildings – mostly empty office accommodation above shops – has continued, mostly in the southern and western sections of Grainger Town where property values are lower (eg in Clayton Street, Westgate Road, Bewick Street and Waterloo Street). There have also been some conversions from offices, banks or retail units into bars, notably around Mosley Street/Collingwood Street. Near the Central Station, the former Hertz car hire building has been developed as offices and railway arches at Westgate Road and Forth Street are being converted for retail and office use. Plans have recently been put forward for the refurbishment of Zurich House on Fenkle Street, to provide a boutique hotel. The Newgate Centre remains under-occupied and may be redeveloped; a proposal for a leisure and retail scheme has recently been submitted.

Developments in the area provide evidence of continuing regeneration, but there is still a great deal of vacant space in Grainger Town, especially on upper floors.
Developments in the rest of the city centre

In recent years there has been very considerable development activity in the rest of Newcastle city centre – and much more is planned, but is evidently being affected by the current economic downturn.

The biggest new development, adjacent to Grainger Town, is at Eldon Square. Capital Shopping Centres, in partnership with the City Council, has undertaken an extensive (£170m) remodelling scheme, which includes the development of the new St George’s Way and a new bus station to replace the dated 1970s underground bus concourse. The scheme also allowed for some environmental improvements in Old Eldon Square, including better pedestrian access, improved public realm and outward-facing cafés and restaurants (completed in 2008). Redevelopment of the southern part of the Eldon Square complex, between Newgate Street and upper Clayton Street, was completed in February 2010. That has involved large scale demolition (including demolition of the Greenmarket and the multi storey car park) and construction of a new mall, St Andrew’s Way, anchored by a new Debenham’s department store. Demand for space has been strong, despite the economic climate, and the new mall is approximately 90% let.

The western edge of the city centre (part of the extensive ‘Discovery Quarter’) has also seen a considerable amount of recent development, in addition to the schemes which were promoted by the Grainger Town Project. St James’s Boulevard, the new inner relief road, has provided a focus and opened up sites for office development, including St James’ Gate on the old cattle market site, Hanro’s Citygate scheme, City Quadrant, The Cube at Barrack Road, and new office blocks at Gallowgate (Time Central and Wellbar Central). This area has effectively become the successor to the Quayside as the latest new office ‘quarter’ of the city and has scope for further developments.

In the northern part of the city centre, the Hancock Museum has been totally transformed to become the Great North Museum, while the City Library has been completely redeveloped via a PFI scheme. Both developments were finished in 2009. The eastern edge of the city centre is the focus for investment by Northumbria University, including the new City Campus East at Manors and large blocks of student accommodation.

These developments have made important contributions to the city centre’s retail and leisure offer. In addition, three large scale schemes are planned which have the potential to expand the urban core significantly. These are: Silverlink’s development in the Stephenson Quarter; Science Central on the former brewery site; and East Pilgrim Street.

The Stephenson Quarter is the name which has been given to the extensive area of land behind Central Station, so named because Robert Stephenson’s locomotive works were here, at South Street. Although the railway serves as a barrier, some development has already taken place in this area, notably the conversion of the old Turnbull Building into luxury apartments and the
successful Central Square office development. But much of the area is unused, some of it effectively derelict. Developer Silverlink obtained detailed planning permission in 2008 for a very substantial (£200m) scheme covering 10 acres, comprising offices, hotels, apartments, shops, an exhibition centre, an art/business centre and new public squares. Silverlink now have vacant possession of nearly all the site and construction of an hotel is planned to start in 2010.

The second of these major planned developments is ‘Science Central’ on the former Scottish & Newcastle Brewery site at Gallowgate. This scheme, promoted by the City Council, Newcastle University and One North East, was conceived as the physical development ‘hub’ of the Newcastle Science City project - Newcastle is one of six cities which were given Science City designation by the Government in 2004. A mixed use scheme is planned, to include science and business facilities, houses, student flats, restaurants, an hotel and shops. This big (24 acre) site has now largely been cleared and 1NG (the new City Development Company) and the City Council are now working with partners Newcastle University and One North East to develop proposals for the site. It is expected that a planning application will be submitted in late 2010 and that a first phase of development will begin in 2011. On the eastern edge of the Science Central site, near St James’s Park, the former Scottish and Newcastle Breweries office block is to be converted into an hotel, and a new building is under construction to accommodate Newcastle University Business School.

The third big development opportunity is East Pilgrim Street, just outside the former Grainger Town Project area (the Project’s official boundary ran down the middle of Pilgrim Street). It is a large development opportunity which includes historic buildings of civic importance, such as the vacant Fire Station, the Magistrates’ Court, Carliol House, and the Laing Art Gallery, together with dilapidated and decaying buildings (eg the empty Bank of England office block), and sites used for car parking. It is considered by the City Council to be one of the most strategically important regeneration opportunities in the north of England. The Council has recently published Interim Planning Guidance for the area. The Guidance seeks to promote retail-led development in the context of a mixed-use quarter of the city centre. A spatial framework and a preferred option for the area have been set out and early development is being promoted as a first phase by the City Council in partnership with 1NG and the landowners, Brookfield.

Looking ahead, there is a very large area of 35-40 acres with potential for development, at Forth Yard, to the west of Silverlink’s site. But this area, which includes the site of the former leadworks, is going to be difficult to tackle and much of it could well remain undeveloped for many years. The area has previously been put forward as a location for a new Convention Centre, but that no longer seems a realistic option (Gateshead Quays has now been identified as a possible site).
Institutional change

Recently there have been some significant changes in institutional arrangements, notably the establishment of NE1 (the agency implementing the new Business Improvement District) and 1NG (the City Development Company). Both have an impact on city centre regeneration and development. In addition, there are many other agencies concerned with the city centre, with differing geographical remits. At the time of the Grainger Town Project there were, essentially, two key institutions focused on the regeneration of Grainger Town: Newcastle City Council and the Grainger Town Partnership. Now, the situation is more complicated, and there is no longer an agency focused solely on Grainger Town.

Newcastle City Council obviously has a major role in the city centre. It services and maintains the city centre; it has substantial property holdings (including joint ownership of Eldon Square); and through the planning system the Council regulates and manages development and promotes conservation and enhancement of the city’s heritage. Drawing on national planning guidance and the Regional Spatial Strategy, the City Council is promoting growth of the city centre as the ‘regional capital’ with reference also to considerations of accessibility and sustainability. The 2006 City Centre Action Plan Key Issues and Development Options report considered how growth might be accommodated, and the emerging evidence for the Core Strategy identifies the need significantly to expand and diversify the city centre’s economy by developing policies to promote the development of strategic sites and accelerate regeneration of the city centre.

NE1 has been established to support the management and regeneration of the city centre. Its origins go back to 2001, when the City Centre Panel was set up by the City Council. This was an advisory group which was intended to develop and eventually manage and monitor the Council’s City Centre Action Plan and comment on development proposals and city centre issues. When the Grainger Town Partnership was dissolved, the Panel took on the role of monitoring maintenance arrangements under the Partnership’s Forward Plan; it was the successor to the Grainger Town Partnership but without resources, and only advisory.

Subsequently, the Panel became the City Centre Partnership and promoted a proposal for a Business Improvement District (BID) covering the whole city centre. Local businesses voted in favour of a BID and it started up in April 2009 – the 90th BID in the UK. Businesses – seen as the catalyst for a successful city centre – pay a levy of 1% on their Rateable Value which is then spent on their agreed priorities. NE1 (sometimes referred to as the BIDCO) is currently supporting several initiatives, including additional street cleaning, a team of street wardens and a ‘Get into Newcastle’ marketing campaign, including TV advertising. It is also looking at ways of improving the ‘legibility’ of the city centre, possibly enhancing the Central Station area, developing new public spaces (‘pocket parks’) and promoting public events. And NE1 is keen to promote activity in the early evening, bridging the 5pm to 8pm gap between the daytime and night-time economies.
The budget from the levy is about £1.5m and the BID runs for an initial five year term. NE1 is an independent company, business-led, with a board of 17 people representing major organisations and interests in the city centre. The BID has over 1200 members and this is the biggest BID area in the country. But with its limited budget, the accent is on modest, deliverable initiatives. It is hoped, however, that like other BID schemes elsewhere, NE1 will be able to lever in more resources.

1NG is a City Development Company (hence, referred to as the CDC) which is intended to facilitate economic development and regeneration projects, in line with priorities set out in an Economic Masterplan. 1NG was promoted by Newcastle and Gateshead Councils, together with One North East, and (unlike NE1) covers both Newcastle and Gateshead. 1NG, chaired by Lord Falconer, is an independent, private sector led company which includes public sector representation. Core funding, totalling £1.5m a year for three years, has been committed by the three partner organisations and, in addition to that, it is expected that One North East will provide its Single Programme funding to support specific development projects.

Like NE1, 1NG was established in 2009. It has begun to identify a handful of major projects in the urban core of NewcastleGateshead which will be the focus of its activity. In Newcastle, these projects include Science Central, the Ouseburn and East Pilgrim Street, with Science Central as the chief priority for 1NG. The organisation’s role is a facilitative one, covering interventions such as land assembly, planning and design, commercial negotiation and project management. Consultants Shared Intelligence have recently produced the Economic Masterplan (called ‘1PLAN’) which provides a long-term vision for the ‘twin cities’ and this will shape the organisation’s work, but the economic climate has evidently affected 1NG’s opportunities for intervention and action.

There are several other groups and institutions which are involved in managing, developing and discussing the city centre. The City Centre Business Forum, which started as Grainger Town’s Business Forum, is still operating. It gives a voice to smaller businesses (which do not pay a BID levy) and is a useful mechanism for dialogue between businesses and the City Council. There is also a Chamber of Commerce, which obviously has an interest in the city centre, and the City Centre Manager’s Steering Group. The Newcastle Partnership (the Local Strategic Partnership) can also be involved in city centre issues. There are city region structures, including NGI (Newcastle Gateshead Initiative), which undertakes destination marketing and promotion of the area. And there are regional structures too, notably the Regional Development Agency, One North East.

As far as the historic core is concerned, English Heritage is a key organisation, involved especially in protecting listed buildings, ancient monuments and, more broadly, the heritage environment. English Heritage’s core role is to serve as the government’s advisor on the historic environment. In Grainger Town, Newcastle has the largest concentration of Listed Georgian buildings apart from London and Bath; it also has ancient monuments such as
the city walls, the castle and churches, and the Roman Wall – a UNESCO World Heritage site. English Heritage was a key partner in the Grainger Town Project, implementing a Conservation Area Partnership and, subsequently, a Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme. English Heritage continues to promote Grainger Town as an example of good practice and successful heritage-based regeneration. Although English Heritage is now much less active as a funder in Grainger Town than it was during the time of the Grainger Town Project, it still supports work on Grade I and II* listed buildings at risk and scheduled monuments.

There is a **Conservation Advisory Committee**, a non-executive committee, convened by the City Council, comprising representatives from various conservation organisations. The committee considers strategic conservation issues across the city. The **Newcastle Conservation Advisory Panel** is convened by the North of England Civic Trust on behalf of the Council and is made up of representatives from various conservation organisations. The panel considers and comments on planning applications which have an impact on the historic environment.

Ideas are being generated, many people and interests are involved, and strategies are being developed in this complex policy landscape. It is intended that the City Centre Area Action Plan will provide clear direction on planning policy for the city centre, setting out site-specific policies for key sites, including delivery plans. Although work has started on the Action Plan and there will be consultation on 'preferred options' in 2010, the Plan is not, however, likely to be adopted until 2013.
4. Grainger Town now: assessment

Regeneration and revival

It is worth emphasising again how much Grainger Town has changed over the past decade or so. It is no longer a neglected, declining part of the city. Grainger Town may still have problems, but today it is much busier than it used to be; it is vibrant and cherished as the lively core of a busy, successful and compact city centre – a very important part of Newcastle’s heritage. A decade ago it would have required some imagination to think of Grainger Town as a place where street cafés could work and a place which visitors to the city would be keen not to miss. The transformation may not be as great or dramatic as the Quayside, but is, nevertheless impressive. Grainger Town has not gone back to being the commercial heart of Newcastle, as it had been in the past, but it has experienced considerable revival.

Only limited data is available to assess the economic vitality of Grainger Town. There is no comprehensive data on employment, but the City Council’s Gazetteer Team does have information on city centre properties, including use and occupancy.

The data shows that the number of occupied business premises in Grainger Town has increased since 2003, growing by 9% over the last six years (Table 2). Over the same period, the rest of the city centre had a 5.3% decrease in the number of occupied business premises. These figures suggest Grainger Town has done well and seen business growth, with a net increase over the period despite the economic downturn. Indications are that Grainger Town has done better than the rest of the city centre. Continuing regeneration appears to have strengthened its economic role within the city centre. Although there is not comprehensive data on employment or floorspace, it is reasonable to assume that comparison between the two areas has some validity – bearing in mind the likelihood of considerable differences in the mix of businesses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grainger Town</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>1024</td>
<td>+9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of city centre</td>
<td>1462</td>
<td>1385</td>
<td>-5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Centre total</td>
<td>2401</td>
<td>2409</td>
<td>+0.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Newcastle City Council’s Gazetteer Team; data for March 2003 and August 2009

Note: The ‘rest of city centre’ figure is affected by the redevelopment of the southern section of Eldon Square, resulting in a (temporary) reduction in business premises. But there was growth elsewhere, and the overall impact on the trends reported here is estimated to be small.
Examination of the data for each street in Grainger Town shows that the main areas of growth in the numbers of occupied business premises have been: Grainger Street, Newgate Street and Charlotte Square. In Grainger Street, the number of occupied business premises increased from 173 in 2003 to 198 in 2009.

Data on business vacancy rates, also from the City Council’s Gazetteer Team, similarly indicates that Grainger Town has performed relatively well in recent years (Table 3). Between 2003 and 2009, the vacancy rate in Grainger Town decreased from 26.1% to 23.3%. In the rest of the city centre, the vacancy rate increased, from 22.5% to 25.1%. In 2003, Grainger Town had a higher proportion of vacant business premises than in the rest of the city centre. By 2009, the position had been reversed. Again, these figures are, at best, indicative and have to be treated with caution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Proportion of business premises vacant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grainger Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of city centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Centre total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Newcastle City Council’s Gazetteer Team; data for March 2003 and August 2009

The main decreases in vacancies between 2003 and 2009 were in Grainger Street (down from 73 to 24) and Newgate Street (down from 28 to 12 vacancies). The biggest increases in vacancies were in Clayton Street/Clayton Street West, up from 9 (out of 81 business premises) in 2003, to 26 vacancies (out of 94) in 2009. There was a significant increase in nearby Pink Lane as well (up from 16 to 28 vacancies).

Rental values can provide further insight, but current volatile conditions in property markets mean that it is very difficult to establish rental values. Much is negotiable – such as rent-free periods – and there are fewer transactions. However, local agents active in Newcastle have provided their opinion of current (September 2009) retail and office rentals, based on recent lettings and properties on the market. These can be compared with earlier data presented in the 2003 Grainger Town Project evaluation report.

Overall, Grainger Town rentals appear to have held up reasonably well since 2003 (Table 4). Clayton Street, a secondary location, has seen rents rising, notably in the northern part of the street, associated with the new Eldon Square development now nearing completion. Property agents note that rents in Market Street may need to fall further to secure new lettings and that the
Improvement in Clayton Street may be confined to just the area of new development. But agents urge caution in assessing rental values at present: in current market conditions, there is no clear pattern.

Rental values for refurbished offices on Grey Street have remained steady, at an estimated £17.50 per sq ft, allowing for incentives. This is the prime city centre office location. It has performed well against modern offices on the edge of the city centre, where the best rent achievable is estimated at £15 per sq ft, given a very competitive market and availability of rent free periods on out-of-town business parks.

Table 4:
Rental values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retail rental values: rent £/sq ft ITZA (£/m² ITZA in brackets)</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grainger St, north of Market St</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>150-165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1076)</td>
<td>(1722)</td>
<td>(1615-1774)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clayton St</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(323)</td>
<td>(430)</td>
<td>(323-538)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office rental values</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refurbished offices, Grey St</td>
<td>10.50</td>
<td>17.50</td>
<td>17.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(113)</td>
<td>(188)</td>
<td>(188)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern offices, edge of city centre</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17.50</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(140)</td>
<td>(188)</td>
<td>(161)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Grainger Town Project final evaluation (Robinson, 2003, p.14); local agents and Newcastle City Council.

Note that rents in Grainger Street vary with proximity to Grey's Monument; hence, a range is given for 2009 data.

ITZA means ‘In Terms of Zone A’, i.e. with reference to rental value of the prime Zone A retail floor-space (generally the first 20ft of the depth of the shop space).

An important aspect of Grainger Town’s revival has been the growth in the area’s residential population. Through the process of regeneration, Grainger Town has shared in the renewed interest in city centre living, a feature not just of Newcastle but also of other British cities. Much of the residential growth in the city centre has taken place on the Quayside and on the city centre periphery, but Grainger Town has also seen growth, both through conversions of upper floors and new build, the latter notably in the East St James’s
Boulevard development. The total number of residential units in Grainger Town grew from 998 in 2003 to 1455 in 2009 (data from the City Council's Gazetteer Team). Grainger Town’s residential population in 1997 was an estimated 851. By 2003 that had grown to 1,077. The population has carried on growing since the end of the Grainger Town Project, rising to 1,900 in 2009 (population estimates from Newcastle City Council’s Policy & Research Services). It is still a fairly small total population, but this 76% growth since 2003 represents a further important contribution to Grainger Town’s revival as a place to live – as well as a place to work, shop and visit. There is now an established residential population in Grainger Town; further growth could help secure the re-use of upper floors.

**Public realm**

Improvements to the public realm – such a key component of the Grainger Town regeneration programme – have generally been well maintained. There are some concerns, but on the whole the public realm works undertaken by the Grainger Town Project are still in good condition; that is the consensus view of those consulted for this study, and is generally borne out by visual assessment.

The Grainger Town Charter, a Memorandum of Understanding between the Grainger Town Partnership and the City Council, was agreed in 2003. That remains in force and is still observed and being implemented. It covers cleaning, maintenance, re-instatement and monitoring of streets and pavements, street furniture, public art and creative lighting, setting out responsibilities, standards and maintenance regimes. It is generally held to be a good model, and it works.

The Caithness stone flooring has proved to be durable and is reported to have required less maintenance than the previous sandstone flags. There has been some damage, for example resulting from the lifting of the corners of stone flags using pickaxes, and inadequate re-instatement after work by utility providers. But those difficulties have reduced over time and may be overcome by effective supervision of contractors. In some places, grouting is due for replacement.

There is some concern about the section of Blackett Street alongside Grey’s Monument, where the roadway is heavily used by buses (120 an hour at peak) and by pedestrians crossing. The innovative surface treatment, of blockwork and setts was intended to give equal priority to pedestrians and bus traffic. However, it is understood that the surface kept breaking up, not least because of the flexing of the Metro tunnel beneath it. The Council’s engineers (Technical Consultancy) have had this replaced with an ordinary black top treatment which is intended to be a temporary solution. It does compromise the idea of dual priority and the aesthetic integrity of the floorscape in a very prominent location – and relates to the basic problem of bus movements through this busy pedestrianised area.
The public art has survived well. Each artwork has a schedule of instructions for cleaning and maintenance and that is adhered to. Dirt gets removed, and repairs are undertaken to pieces damaged by weathering and occasional vandalism or accidents. The Council keeps a stock of spare parts for repairs and has established systems for ordering additional parts. Special treatments, such as waxing, are carried out to conserve some art works. The main problems are the items of street furniture which are, in effect, works of art, notably the bins and benches. The bins are not particularly durable and can easily be damaged by vehicle impacts; that is a problem especially around the Monument area. Benches get chipped or broken. The glass ‘cubes’ featuring Earl Grey have been problematic; these pieces have been affected by water seepage and may be relocated. There is concern about the cost of eventually re-painting the Chinese Arch. But, overall, the public art is in good condition and its maintenance well-managed.

The creative lighting schemes need periodic maintenance and remedial works. A baseline condition survey carried out in 2008 pointed to a variety of problems such as the need to replace bulbs and repair damage. The lighting of public buildings and monuments is the responsibility of the City Council and work is done when necessary. However, the maintenance of some lighting schemes (including the churches) is the responsibility of the private owners of these buildings, but that is not an enforceable requirement. Not all owners are financially able or willing to maintain these schemes and attempts are being made by Council officers to address that issue.

There is a City Council budget of £60,000 a year to cover maintenance of the Grainger Town public art, street furniture and lighting (and also the ‘Blue Carpet’ outside the Laing Gallery). This appears to be adequate, although an incident causing major damage could seriously overstretch resources. Council staff seem genuinely committed to upholding standards in Grainger Town, identifying and remedying problems and conducting regular inspections, and the high quality of the public realm has been sustained.

**Buildings**

The researchers undertook a visual assessment of the buildings in Grainger Town in Autumn 2009. It should be stressed that this was a visual assessment of the outside of each individual property or address (some addresses being those of single buildings, others being amongst several addresses in larger buildings); the interiors were not inspected or assessed. The City Council provided maps, address lists and business vacancy data, and the approach adopted was essentially that used by English Heritage when identifying buildings at risk.

Every building was assessed in terms of its apparent condition using the following English Heritage categorisation:

- **Good** means structurally sound, weathertight and with no significant repairs needed.
Fair means a building which is structurally sound but in need of minor repair or showing signs of a lack of general maintenance.

Poor means a building with deteriorating masonry and/or a leaking roof and/or defective rainwater goods, usually accompanied by rot outbreaks within and general deterioration of most elements of the building fabric, including external joinery; or where there has been a fire or other disaster which has affected part of the building.

Very bad means a building where there has been structural failure or where there are clear signs of structural instability; (where applicable) there has been loss of significant areas of the roof covering, leading to major deterioration of the interior, or where there has been a major fire of disaster affecting most of the building.

It is worth noting that this categorisation is quite demanding, such that to be assessed as ‘fair’, rather than ‘good’, a building only has to require ‘minor repairs’ or ‘show signs of a lack of general maintenance’.

The overwhelming majority of addresses/buildings in Grainger Town were assessed as either ‘good’ or ‘fair’ (Table 5). Three-quarters were assessed as ‘good’; including, of course, new buildings but also many older properties. Altogether, 97.7% were classed as ‘good’ or ‘fair’, a very encouraging position. Out of 720 properties, only 16 were ‘poor’, and 1 ‘very bad’. These are found in various streets, with not much of a pattern (they include 2 in Clayton Street, 3 in Pilgrim Street, 2 in Westgate Road, 2 in High Bridge, 2 in Rutherford Street).

| Table 5: Condition of buildings in Grainger Town 2009 |
|-----------------|--------|------|
| No              | %      |
| Good            | 543    | 75.5 |
| Fair            | 160    | 22.2 |
| Poor            | 16     | 2.2  |
| Very bad        | 1      | 0.1  |
| Total           | 720    | 100  |

Source: visual assessment survey, Autumn 2009

The English Heritage methodology to assess risks combines condition with occupancy to establish whether a building is ‘at risk’ and that was replicated in this exercise. For this study, data on business vacancy was provided by the City Council’s Gazetteer Team.
The Risk Scale is as follows:

**Not at risk:** Good condition and occupied, partially occupied or vacant; Fair condition and occupied

**Vulnerable:** Fair condition and partially occupied or vacant; Poor condition and occupied

**At Risk:** Poor condition and partially occupied or vacant; Very Bad condition and occupied

**Grave Risk:** Very Bad condition and partially occupied

**Extreme Risk:** Very Bad condition and vacant

The distribution of buildings at risk or ‘vulnerable’ is shown in Fig. 2. There are few buildings (only 16) classed as ‘at risk’ and just one ‘at grave risk’ and none ‘at extreme risk’. But some 68 buildings are considered ‘vulnerable’. There are discernible clusters, such as at the northern end of Clayton Street and in High Bridge/Bigg Market, Collingwood Street and around the Grainger Market, but vulnerable buildings are to be found across much of Grainger Town. Grainger Street and Grey Street both stand out as having buildings in good condition.

The overall position is an encouraging one. There are a few buildings with serious problems, but not many. There is quite a number needing attention, but they may be considered ‘vulnerable’ rather than ‘at risk’. This assessment is also perhaps instructive in highlighting how a small number of buildings with serious problems, or groups of buildings affected by some disrepair, and/or some vacant upper floors may give the impression that conditions are worse than they really are. One or two very dilapidated buildings can certainly have a disproportionate impact, conveying the impression of decline and decay. A group of shabby buildings needing some attention can similarly give an unduly bad impression. The reality is that much of Grainger Town is in reasonable physical condition.

It is unfortunate that there is no earlier data of this kind, so it is not possible to make temporal comparisons and establish trends. It is to be hoped, however, that this survey might serve as a baseline and that it will be replicated in the future to measure change and see how Grainger Town is faring. The full data from this study is being provided to the City Council for future reference.

**Listed buildings on the English Heritage ‘at risk’ register**

Further evidence on the condition of buildings in the area is provided by English Heritage’s annual assessment of Grade I and II* buildings which identifies those at risk. In 2003 the following listed buildings in Grainger Town were deemed ‘at risk’:
- West side of Grainger Market: 33 – 35 Clayton Street (Grade I)
- East side of Grainger Market: 95, 117-119 Grainger Street (Grade I)
- 55-57 Westgate Road (Grade II*)
- New Tyne Theatre, Westgate Road (Grade I)
  [Also 2 Eldon Square – just outside the Grainger Town Project area]

In 2009, the following listed buildings were on the English Heritage ‘at risk’ register:

- West side of Grainger Market: 43 Clayton Street (Grade I)
- 5-13 Grey Street (Grade II*)
- Journal Tyne Theatre, Westgate Road (Grade I)
- 55-57 Westgate Road (Grade II*)
  [Also 4 Eldon Square – outside the former Grainger Town Project area]

There has been steady improvement since 2003, and the 2003 position was much better than in previous years, when much of the west and east sides of the Grainger Market were at risk, as well as a number of other II* buildings in Grainger Street.

English Heritage has provided grant aid for repairs to both the Journal Tyne Theatre and 55-57 Westgate Road, and those works are well underway.

In the visual assessment undertaken by the researchers in Autumn 2009 it was noted that amongst the 16 buildings they classed as ‘at risk’, 6 were Grade 2 listed. Amongst the 68 buildings considered as ‘vulnerable’, 6 were Grade I, a further 6 were Grade II*, 30 were Grade II and one was locally listed.
5. Challenges: sustaining the regeneration of Grainger Town

Issues and prospects

Grainger Town is much improved and is a real success story. But the area has yet to realise its full potential. The most obvious and visible manifestation of that is unused and apparently unwanted space, especially on upper floors (see Fig. 3). A quarter of business premises are vacant. That is indicative of weak demand, which results in an underused resource. It is not only a wasted asset, but also poses a threat to the architectural heritage. Vacancy of upper floors can lead to deterioration of the fabric and a spiral of decline which may ultimately cause buildings to be ‘at risk’.

There is still a need to encourage investment in Grainger Town and bring in new businesses and activity. As the Grainger Town Project recognised, the way to secure the area’s future is to demonstrate potential, get businesses keen to invest in the area, and stimulate self-sustaining regeneration. That will bring vacant buildings back into use; it will encourage new development; it will largely ensure that repairs and maintenance are done; and it will raise standards and aspirations.

Over the past five years, since the end of the Grainger Town Project, there has been some investment in the area and steady, if gradual, improvement. In a context of economic growth, Grainger Town’s regeneration was continuing.

In today’s economic climate, however, investment is much reduced and there has been a re-assessment of prospects and opportunities. On the whole, stakeholders consulted for this study did not see very much potential for investment in Grainger Town, at least in the short to medium term.

These difficult market conditions mean that relatively little development is taking place and that the additional costs and perceived problems of investing in a place such as Grainger Town have become an even greater deterrent than before. Developers and agents cited the problems and costs of converting inflexible buildings, often with poor access to upper floors and subject to stringent planning regulations. There are also problems with floorplates which prevent the creation of large open-plan offices on a single floor, or which would result in retail units which are too big, too small, or spread across several floors. The perception of some is that ‘Grainger Town’s greatest asset is also its greatest problem’. It is considered that it is usually not worth the effort and extra cost and difficulty of converting or developing buildings in Grainger Town, especially when times are uncertain, margins are tight, investment is risky and when much easier options are available. However, while it may be more costly, some are attracted to a city centre location and are prepared to convert listed buildings.
Fig. 3

Buildings in Grainger Town
Vacant or Partly Occupied

Source:
Schedule of Businesses (July 2009) and Visual Assessment Survey Autumn 2009
Some property professionals and businesses are quite optimistic about prospects for Grainger Town. They point, particularly, to the impact that the Eldon Square redevelopment could have. With a forecast 8 million shoppers a year, Debenhams and St Andrew’s Way will bring many more people into the southern and western section of Grainger Town. The additional pedestrian flow, notably from Central Station metro, could induce businesses to move into Clayton Street, for example. The opening of the Eldon Square redevelopment could give further stimulus to the redevelopment of the Newgate Centre and perhaps re-use of the upper floors of the Co-op on Newgate Street. The Grainger Market could significantly benefit from the new pedestrian flows – if it exploits the opportunity and if flows are effectively channelled by improvements in legibility and the quality of the public realm.

The major new developments on the edge of the city centre, when they go ahead, will impact on Grainger Town. The East Pilgrim Street development could have a considerable impact on Grainger Town – and that impact could well be largely positive. Re-use of buildings there and, perhaps, major retail developments, could bring people and activity into the south-eastern part of Grainger Town. Early phases could start in the next few years but the retail-led element might not be completed for another ten years or so, given the complexity of the development process. The impacts of Science Central and the Silverlink scheme may be more limited, but there would be benefit from associated uplift in the city centre economy. New office developments in these areas may make the re-use of buildings in Grainger Town even less likely, but the effect could well be marginal. Those businesses wanting a – still prestigious – Grey Street address are likely to stay in Grey Street, while those inclined to move to Science Central, the Silverlink development or, for that matter, into the St James’s Boulevard office schemes, would probably not have wanted old premises in, say, Mosley Street. They are different market niches.

There is a wider point to be made here: development that strengthens the city centre and adds to its economic vitality is likely to have spin-off benefits for Grainger Town. Grainger Town is an integral part of the city centre, and shares in its fortunes. The undoubted resilience of the city centre as a whole helps Grainger Town to weather recession.

Nevertheless, many of the people consulted for this study did express concern that the focus on developments in these other parts of the city centre overshadowed Grainger Town. The establishment of new agencies, such as NE1 and 1NG, are also believed to have shifted the focus of attention. While most felt that Grainger Town was ‘holding its own’, or, less positively, ‘treading water’, some thought it might be ‘slipping back’, often citing the closure of fashion shops on Market Street as evidence of that.

Stakeholders had been very impressed by the Grainger Town Project and, quite simply, wished that it had carried on. They missed the focus on Grainger Town. But, probably more than anything else, they missed the helpful, ‘can-do’ attitude of the Delivery Team and the fact that the Team could serve as a
one-stop shop and had the capacity to sort out problems and issues. Of course, the funding was very important, but the approach was highly valued.

Clearly, there is no going back to that, no chance of another well-funded regeneration scheme centred on Grainger Town; and there are now other parts of the city centre which need attention. But there are elements of the approach which could be replicated and could prevent Grainger Town ‘slipping back’ and, indeed, take it forward. There is a need to keep a focus on Grainger Town because it is special, vulnerable and is one of Newcastle’s most important assets. There is a need to facilitate regeneration, development and economic activity, not least because doing things in an historic environment is difficult and needs help and encouragement. And there is a need to find the capacity to deal with problems and issues – in particular, to monitor, maintain and manage. That is essential in order to secure what has been achieved and to ensure that public investment in Grainger Town is not eroded. These are the considerations which should help to identify priorities and shape the appropriate responses to take Grainger Town forward.

Priorities and responses

Focus

At present there does not appear to be a coherent vision for Grainger Town. Consideration needs to be given to the area’s possibilities, options, and future prospects, taking into account its special characteristics, challenges and vulnerabilities. There needs to be a vision of what Grainger Town should become, including consideration of tensions between residential uses and the bars and clubs. Grainger Town does not seem to be explicitly considered in the strategies of either NE1 or 1NG. However, it is intended that the City Centre Action Plan will set out clear policies for the future of Grainger Town. The ‘Topic Paper’ dealing with the area should set out clear, deliverable policies, with consultation on those policies. The challenge will be to ensure that Grainger Town’s special needs are fully recognised and specifically drawn out in proposals to plan, manage and develop the area. It is not just part of the city centre; it is one of Newcastle’s greatest assets.

Grainger Town does not need a new, separate agency; that would only serve to add further complexity and confusion to an already complicated institutional landscape. Nor does there seem to be support for such an approach. Grainger Town does not need to be singled out and accorded privileged treatment – it is not in crisis, and there are many other parts of the city which need and deserve support. But there should be clarity of vision – expressed in the City Centre Area Action Plan - to help shape Grainger Town’s future. A clear vision would help establish confidence and could encourage the private sector to invest in the area.

That vision should integrate the views of all the stakeholders, including the community and businesses, as well as the institutions. The City Centre Area Action Plan ought to give particular consideration to Grainger Town and, in
addition, set out ways of dealing with those issues which affect not only Grainger Town but also other parts of the city centre, such as traffic, car parking and conflicts between the needs of residents and the night-time economy. There is also the intention to review the Conservation Area Character Appraisal and prepare a Conservation Area Management Plan for the Central Conservation Area in 2010. These documents are expected to go some way towards identifying issues and guiding development in relation to the built heritage within the area. It is also to be hoped that Grainger Town can be explicitly considered by NE1 and 1NG within their strategies.

Over the last five years there has obviously been a decline in the prominence and ‘profile’ of Grainger Town. One indicator of that is a substantial tailing off of references to ‘Grainger Town’ in the local press, where city centre streets are now often mentioned without saying that they are in Grainger Town. Even so, the area is still well-known and well-regarded, and has continued to receive awards and accolades. Grainger Town needs to be more strongly promoted and recognised by building up the ‘brand’ and ensuring that it is a place people know about and want to visit. Newcastle should capitalise on the area’s success: at the simplest level, why not publicly display the awards Grainger Town has received? Promotional campaigns carried out by NE1 and others should have some focus on Grainger Town, and the area should be properly identified on maps and guides and by signposting. The City Council is currently producing new maps and interpretive material which will help to promote Grainger Town. The work of NE1 on the legibility of the city, including signposting, should also help strengthen the area’s identity and character.

One element that is underdeveloped in Grainger Town is animation – events and festivals in the streets. The economic climate is difficult and the area is not well-endowed with public open space, but there is scope for more liveliness, bringing people to the area and strengthening its identity. The successful Farmers’ Market demonstrates one kind of development, and more of that could be undertaken. But there are many other possibilities – one stakeholder suggested, for example, setting up a ‘Speakers Corner’. Performance arts and cultural events could work well, and the City Council, NE1, Arts Council North East and others should look at how Grainger Town can be animated to strengthen its identity and, also, its economy.

Facilitating regeneration

The Grainger Town Project’s Delivery Team was remarkably successful in raising confidence and following that through with practical support. Fundamentally, their approach was based on vision and commitment.

As well as establishing a vision focused on Grainger Town, there is a need to create a supportive environment facilitating regeneration. At the time of the Grainger Town Project, that support had to be extensive and very well resourced, simply because confidence was so low and there was so much to do – so much of the area was suffering the effects of decline. Now, much less
of the area is in difficulty but a lot of encouragement is needed to counter the economic situation.

A key issue appears to be the perception that some developers and businesses have of the regulatory environment which, they say, means that converting or developing a building in Grainger Town is especially difficult.

The City Council needs to work more closely with developers and the business community, in order to ensure that the essential regulatory framework is seen to be operating in an appropriately supportive and facilitative manner. Of course, the historic environment needs careful consideration and conservation, but without losing sight of the priority to secure, reuse and improve it. A balance has to be struck, securing use -- although not at the expense of the built heritage. The aim should be to manage change in such a way as to sustain and develop the character of Grainger Town.

In the course of the consultations for this study, it was also evident that stakeholders could also be encouraged by better information. In particular, it would be very helpful to have feasibility studies exploring opportunities – for example, for residential conversions, start-up workspaces, or certain types of niche businesses, to test and perhaps challenge perceptions. Such studies could usefully focus on the physical and planning issues, providing a clearer view of what may be done when the upturn comes. Several agencies, including the City Council, 1NG, One North East and English Heritage could be involved – that would signal a coherent, positive and supportive approach to the market.

There are several key buildings and sites which require special attention because of their importance and prominence. These include the Grainger Market, Newgate Centre, and the Westgate House site – all identified as ‘unfinished business’ in the 2003 Grainger Town Project evaluation and to these can be added the Central Station, the Lit & Phil/Bolbec Hall/Neville Hall and the Black Gate. Some initiatives have been developed or are being considered. The new Lottery bid for the ‘Old Newcastle’ project, if funded, would support the Black Gate, Castle Keep and St Nicholas’ Cathedral (all just outside the Grainger Town Project area). NE1 and other agencies are looking at options to improve the environment around the front of Central Station to create a better ‘gateway’ to the city centre (and the Transport Secretary has announced that the East Coast Company will create a new station entrance). Ideas have been discussed to refurbish the Lit & Phil group of buildings, but recently progress appears to have stalled - support from relevant agencies may be needed to help move things forward. Improvements to the public realm at St Nicholas Square are also being considered by the City Council and NE1.

Views differ on the role and problems of the Grainger Market, but there is no doubt that there is a lot of scope to improve its visibility, environment and its offer; (for an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses and potential of the market see The Retail Group’s consultancy study, 2008). There is no doubt the Market does serve its current customer base and there is no lack of demand for its retail units. Further, the market’s owners, Newcastle City Council, note that
there has been a 10% increase in footfall over the last year – a very considerable achievement in the present economic climate. Despite this, however, as one stakeholder put it, ‘the market is a fantastic asset, but it looks and feels under-invested’.

**Monitoring, maintenance and management**

Effective monitoring is a crucial requirement in sustaining regeneration. Part of that is about measuring change and progress; another part is concerned with helping to ensure that maintenance gets done.

When the Grainger Town Project was underway, outputs had to be monitored on a regular (usually quarterly) basis. Unfortunately, however, systematic monitoring was not continued after the Project ended. Nor were baselines established, which would have made it easier to track change and establish trends, and be clearer about outcomes. It is to be hoped that future regeneration programmes will instigate longer-term monitoring. As far as Grainger Town is concerned, there would certainly be merit in regular monitoring of the vacancy data and repeating the visual assessment of buildings presented in this report.

Current arrangements for monitoring the condition of public realm, arts and lighting works undertaken by the Grainger Town Project are good and appear to produce an effective response. The present arrangements, upholding the Maintenance Charter, represent good value for money in protecting the investment, and should be continued.

Finally, Grainger Town faces challenges which could be addressed by proactive management of the area. One aspect of that might be basic practical initiatives. An example could be hiring a ‘cherry picker’ to clear gutters and remove vegetation from buildings, perhaps paid for by the owners. Another aspect of proactive management is encouraging temporary use of vacant buildings, especially shop units and that is now being done by the Council as part of the Empty Shops Initiative. The Council has received £52,000 government funding and it is hoped that this programme will bring empty premises into use. Uses are likely to include not only charity shops, but also art displays and activities, and short leases to community organisations and start-up businesses. Initiatives like this might be tied to bolder thinking about encouraging the development of a craft quarter, perhaps, and also looking into the possibility of rate relief for certain kinds of businesses in parts of Grainger Town. There is a need to find creative solutions which are in tune with the particular assets that Grainger Town possesses.
6.  Next steps

There is no evidence to indicate that Grainger Town is in serious difficulty or is in imminent danger of slipping back into decline. But the progress it has made needs to be sustained and regeneration needs to continue. Grainger Town has yet to fulfil its potential, and is yet to fully attain the vision of dynamism and excellence set out by the Grainger Town Project in 1997.

This report sets out the current situation of Grainger Town. The next step is to consider what needs to be done, and who should do it. In addition to the City Council, English Heritage and One North East, the two new organisations, NE1 and 1NG, have to be involved and consider what contribution they might make.

There are legitimate concerns that Grainger Town’s special qualities and needs will not be met unless plans and strategies include an explicit focus on the area. Hence, it is recommended that attention is given to ensuring that the City Centre Area Action Plan and the strategies of other relevant agencies include a Grainger Town dimension and clear, deliverable policies. A focused discussion about Grainger Town centred upon the City Centre Action Plan will help to develop and improve dialogue between the agencies.

Promoting and ‘animating’ Grainger Town will help bring in people and business, so helping it to thrive. It is recommended that greater effort is made to strengthen the ‘brand’, and promote Grainger Town as a place of historic interest with a quality environment which is full of ‘buzz’, life and activity. Approaches to this could include brochures, maps, advertising, signage, and also arts and cultural activities. Again, this could involve many stakeholders, but especially the City Council and NE1, and also NGI and Arts Council North East.

More needs to be done to encourage the re-use of buildings, including, in particular, the re-use of upper floors. It is recommended that, as part of the development of options for the City Centre Area Action Plan, feasibility studies should be commissioned to explore development options, including the re-use of upper floors. The benefits that might be had from the new Business Premises Renovation Allowance could usefully be examined. The main requirement is for the public agencies to signal their commitment to facilitating regeneration – an approach that certainly worked well for the Grainger Town Project. Public agencies – notably the City Council and English Heritage – should advise and encourage, promote opportunities and solutions and, where possible, offer incentives to support maintenance of Grainger Town’s buildings. The agencies could also look at the feasibility of providing cost-effective maintenance services to encourage owners of buildings to undertake maintenance work on a regular basis.

It is difficult to assess the state of Grainger Town without good quantitative data. It is therefore hard to establish trends, determine priorities or counter incorrect perceptions. Consequently, it is recommended that, at the least, vacancies and the condition of buildings should be regularly monitored and
reported. This would most likely be a task for the City Council and should not be costly.

It is also recommended that the City Council should continue its commitment to the Grainger Town Charter, ensuring that staff resources are available and that the budget for maintenance works is retained. This is essential to protect public realm investment and ensure that Grainger Town has a high quality environment.

Management of the city centre should be sensitive to the special needs of Grainger Town. It is recommended that simple initiatives to help maintain the area be supported, including maintenance works, use of vacant shop units and improved signage. Consideration also needs to be given to making further improvements to the Grainger Market and to ensure that the market benefits as fully as possible from the additional pedestrian flows generated by the new Eldon Square developments.

Grainger Town can stay on track and its regeneration can continue - even in a difficult economic climate.
## Annex 1

### Individuals consulted

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position/Institution</th>
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Acknowledgements

The researchers have been very impressed by the interest and enthusiasm of all those people consulted, and are most grateful for all their help and advice.
Appendix 2

Documents consulted


Newcastle Science City (2008) Scientia08 - Showcasing science and innovation. Newcastle Science Co. Ltd.


