



Fenland District Council

THE MJ
2010
Achievement Awards

Regeneration programme



100%
people
driven

MJ Awards - Regeneration Programme

Executive Summary

Summary

Fenland residents can expect to live 27 days less in every year than people who live in other areas of Cambridgeshire. The most deprived areas of Fenland can be found in the northern wards of Wisbech, some of which fall into the 10% of most deprived areas in the country. Fenland District Council is 100% committed to working with other organisations to improve the quality of life in these areas. We have taken a holistic approach to tackling the causes of deprivation in our most deprived wards concentrating on regeneration, housing, skills development, and homelessness. These projects form part of the £47 million Nene Waterfront Regeneration project in which will dramatically improve quality of life for the residents of Wisbech.

Our approach

Our approach to regenerating Wisbech has been based on local, regional and national research, all of which identify the following issues:

- Poor job opportunities and low incomes
- Low educational attainment and skills levels
- Significant health inequalities

We've got big ambitions for Wisbech – our regeneration programme proves it!

Nene Waterfront Regeneration Project

The £47 million Nene Waterfront Regeneration (NWR) Project represented a massive undertaking for a small authority. Our inspirational vision for a long-derelict area of Wisbech grew out of a £20,000 feasibility study. The council's initial investment of £1.2 million attracted a total of £10.4 million in public funds and levered in another £37 million of private sector funding. The total package was three times the council's revenue budget.

Our aim was to transform 9.5 hectares of derelict and contaminated land adjacent to the River Nene, which runs through the centre of Wisbech. The project is the largest and most expensive economic and cultural transformation to take place in the area since Cornelius Vermuyden drained the Fens more than 300 years ago.

The brownfield site had lain derelict for more than 30 years. For most of the latter half of the 20th Century until very recently, Wisbech had been in decline and the levels of deprivation in areas of the town were amongst the worst in Europe.

The NWR Project consists of a £4 million iconic Boathouse business complex with 31 units designed to attract knowledge-based businesses along with modern conference and meeting facilities for both business and community use. It was a key part of the council's wider policy to break the social and economic cycle of deprivation that had dogged Wisbech for decades.

The Fenland economy has in the past been reliant on low wage agriculture-based jobs. By creating a vibrant, modern new quarter to the town, the council knew that it would





be in a prime position to begin attracting hi-tech businesses from outside its boundaries, particularly assisting Cambridge where commercial property has become scarce and expensive, creating in effect an overspill for knowledge based business.

This has already proved to be the case. The Boathouse opened for business in November 2008 and is already at 30% occupancy, despite the recession. Knowledge-based companies, most from outside Fenland, have moved in and are now doing business with successful results. The Boathouse occupancy

level, despite the current difficult economic conditions, has already passed the forecast for the first 12 months of operation, exceeding the original target by 10%.

The NWR Project includes plans for 375 stunning waterfront homes, and despite the current difficult economic climate, FDC and its public sector funding partners have been busy carrying out the £1.8 million remediation of the site (a large proportion of which was contaminated by an old gas works) so that when economic recovery returns, the land is clean and ready for development.

As well as the Boathouse, the project includes:

- The Foyer Project - a collaborative project with social housing provider Axiom Housing to create a modern accommodation and education facility for 17 young homeless people.
- The Wisbech Yacht Harbour - 128 state-of-the-art berths have been created by installing pontoons that are able to adjust to the six metre tidal range of the River Nene, which is eight miles from The Wash. The Boathouse accommodates the newly-formed Wisbech Yacht Club. Currently 83 berths are occupied, ahead of projections with 12 related jobs created locally. Annual local spend (excluding mooring fees) from berth holders equates to over £100,000 along with £10,000 associated land borne visitor spend.
- A 75 tonne boat lift, which is attracting interest from boat building companies keen to relocate to Wisbech.
- The Nene Slipway Facility opened in January 2009 and enables 100 foot, 100 tonne boats to be winched ashore for maintenance and repair. Many large commercial vessels have booked in for maintenance checks, 441 vessels have passed through the Nene Ports since the beginning of this year.
- The Port has continued to see a healthy demand for its services and 606 ships have required overnight accommodation during this financial year alone.
- The regeneration works are further enhanced by significant improvements to the public realm and transport links, including:
 - A linear and pocket park
 - Three new public squares
 - Improvements to junctions and main roads leading to the commercial port area

- Resident parking to improve safety and eliminate the potential for congestion
- Enhanced pedestrian and cycle links around the town
- Traffic calming measures.

In the last year the NWR has led to:

- Over 150 new jobs
- 35 new knowledge based businesses
- A new marine sector
- 375 housing units
- Accommodation for vulnerable young people
- Community education initiatives
- Improved landscapes resulting in Wisbech winning the Overall Town Category for Anglia in Bloom.

Community involvement

Community forums successfully developed projects that were designed to get local people involved in regenerating the fortunes of Wisbech. We played a key role in attracting more than £50,000 to fund the projects identified by the forum.

Initially, local people were sceptical about what they believed were grandiose plans that would amount to nothing. However, following a comprehensive consultation exercise, a survey of local people revealed that 98 per cent of them expressed their support for the project and 96 per cent said they believed the project would boost the local economy.



The community forum delivered:

- A webcam so that schools could watch the construction process in real time
- 21 schools in Wisbech taking part in a giant mural project. Murals were displayed at an open air gallery on the site boards around the regeneration area and have remained a source of local pride.
- Broadband and webcams on site to enable schools to 'interview' construction workers about their jobs.
- The Nene Curriculum Project - £30,000 of funding from partners was secured to provide learning and teaching packs to meet the needs of Key Stage 3 and 'A' Level subjects. Over 700 local children have benefited from this programme and it will be mainstreamed into the local schools curriculum.
- Numerous presentations to local groups and a residents newsletter.

Housing Improvements

As well as delivering a new housing development through the NWR, we also realise the importance of existing housing conditions in the regeneration area and the impact on health and well being that poor housing can create. Therefore, we have been successful in partnership with Roddons Housing Association and Apollo contractors with a bid to EEDA to secure £1.1 million of inward investment to deliver estate and home improvements to vulnerable households living in private sector homes, predominately in the Wisbech area.

Wisbech has a higher level of private-sector unfitnes than the district-wide level. The social housing in the area has had significant investment. Following the transfer of the Council housing stock to Roddons Housing association, Roddons properties will get extras on-top of delivery of the government minimum standard of accomodation called the Decent Home Standard (DHS).

However, historically there have been a lot of Right To Buys at large discounts to vulnerable residents who have struggled to maintain the home to DHS. This gives rise to a situation of decent public sector stock and poor quality private sector accommodation on the same estate.

On this basis EERA felt that the pilot project would offer lessons for the whole region to learn from as to how best to coordinate investment into smaller-scale estate regeneration across different tenures in the future.

Skills Development

Right at the heart of our most deprived ward, Waterlees, we renovated a house for the benefit of the community, named Community House. Through this facility, our community development team provide outreach work and run courses to aid skills development in the area. This includes weight loss schemes, literacy and numeracy skills, confidence building, homework clubs, youth activities and a football league supported by the FA. Community House also has a consultancy room so more agencies can do outreach work in the area.

All of the volunteers at Community House come from the Waterlees estate and help to run community projects to their fellow residents.

Reducing homelessness

The Foyer Project

The Foyer Project, was a collaborative project with social housing provider Axiom Housing to create a beautifully-designed, modern accommodation and education facility for 17 homeless young people, several of whom have now gone on to study at university. The Foyer provides high quality bedrooms and communal living spaces for young people who sign up to commit themselves to full-time further

education for two years. Also on-site are supportive staff and educational facilities such as computer suites. This project has helped numerous young people who otherwise would have been homeless. Since opening the Foyer, has been home to seventy three young people between the ages of sixteen and twenty five.



Since opening:

- 67% of residents engage in a wide range of education
- 41% residents have studied at level NVQ level 1, with nearly half gaining a pass during their time with us.
- 53% of residents have studied at level NVQ 2 with over half gaining a pass in their time with us.
- 6% of residents have studied at level NVQ 3 with two thirds gaining a pass.
- Over two thirds of residents achieved a positive move on and greater independence.
- Although difficult in the current economic, climate 20% of our young people have found either temporary or permanent employment, others have taken advantage of the offer of work experience.

Places of Change

The Places of Change programme enables vulnerable people to look at themselves and realise that with support, encouragement and opportunity they can make positive changes to their lives.

24 resident units will accommodate a stunning Grade II listed building right in the heart of Wisbech. The project, offering a function room, community café and ICT suite, acts as a community hub and provides training and learning opportunities. The project will enable a range of community organisations to access the facilities and will build on community cohesion in what is now a multi cultural rural town. Octavia View, having attracted almost £3m of external funding is an inspirational scheme to the whole community whilst becoming a place of change for homeless people.

As a result of the economic downturn, we have also launched new initiatives to prevent homelessness in the district including:

The Court Desk Service

The Council bid to CLG for funding to set up a Court Desk Service for Fenland. This was a new service and with £10k working in partnership with our CAB have successfully achieved 119 preventions via this scheme, saving the local tax payer thousands of pounds in temporary accommodation. Last year we received double our funding to continue this initiative and make a difference to peoples lives in Fenland by keeping families together, addressing debt and providing a positive way forward.

Mortgage Rescue Scheme

We were keen to make a difference for the people of Fenland and became one of the first to launch a mortgage rescue scheme. Over 100 people have contacted our team for housing advice as a result.

Through these projects we have prevented 176 families from becoming homeless in the past year.

Conclusion

Our holistic, ambitious approach to regeneration in Wisbech is resulting in real outcomes for local people and helping residents to break out of the cycle of deprivation. This project has already:

- Created new, skilled jobs for local people
- Attracted business to set up in the district
- Provided homes for vulnerable people
- Improved housing conditions

