

Londonderry – A Northern Ireland Case Study.



1. Historical Background.

The walled city of Londonderry is located in the North West of Northern Ireland on the border with County Donegal in the Irish Republic. It owes its origins to a monastic settlement of the 6th century. The monastery became very influential during the early middle ages as the main house of the Columban Order. This group sent missionaries across Europe but was particularly important in the conversion of Scotland.

Derry or Doire in the Gaelic means oak grove and was a small defensible island located at the end of Lough Foyle. Thus it was well placed for trade and communication.

Only fragments and place names of the medieval city survive for the island became the site of the largest plantation city in Ulster and the focus of English colonial endeavour in Ireland in the early seventeenth century. The last walled city in Europe was created around an ideal plan of a central square and a grid of streets. Colonisation of the city and surrounding county was carried out by the 'City of London' ie merchant investors persuaded by the King to become involved. A company – The Honourable the Irish Society was set up and the city was renamed Londonderry to celebrate this link. The approach was a precursor to the creation of larger British colonial companies such as the East India Company and was carried out at the same time as the colonisation of America.

The city became famous across Europe for the 108 day siege in 1689. The catholic King James II of England had been deposed in the 'Glorious

The Socio Economic Impact of Heritage Investment (1).

Revolution' of the year before and the Protestant King William and his wife Mary had been made joint regents. James intended to use his kingdom of Ireland which had remained loyal to regain his throne and landed in County Cork with a European Army. After some prevarication the garrison of Londonderry declared loyalty to King William and a siege ensued. Relief ships from England broke a boom across the river and ended the siege on August 12th. James was defeated a year later at the Battle of the Boyne in County Meath.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century the city became a prosperous emigration port and a world centre for shirt manufacturing. After World War One decline set in.

In World War 2 the city played a major part in the Battle of the Atlantic as the westernmost UK base for convoy escort vessels. 30,000 service personnel were located in a city of around 60,000 people.

In the 1970's the city became famous again due to its involvement in Northern Ireland's Troubles. The city was the setting for major marches and confrontations and there were many bombs and much strife over a thirty year period.

Since the mid 1980's the city has been restored and rebuilt and still retains much beauty. Though its history continues to be influential in its politics this is now also perceived as an asset and a potential major catalyst for economic regeneration.



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2. Heritage Investment.

Since the ceasefires of 1995 visitor numbers to the city have more than doubled and are continuing to grow. Investment in a local airport by the council has helped to facilitate this increase by introducing low cost airlines. Significant numbers of jobs are being created.

The City Council has worked closely with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to build upon this success. The 'Walled City' has been declared one of six 'Signature Destination Projects' in Northern Ireland. This initiative focuses money on the tourist product offered in these areas in an effort to increase international awareness of discrete destinations. European Union funds as well as Government Regeneration funds are being used to support the scheme.

The focus of the project is the city walls. These are still in the ownership of the Honourable the Irish Society (now a charitable trust) but have been maintained by the State since 1955. The Environment and Heritage Service (the predecessor of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency) carried out major renovations from 1995 as the structures have become open to public access once again and were divested of the security infrastructure of the 'Troubles'. The Agency invested around £70,000 annually in this work.

The current scheme builds upon this investment by improving signage, lighting and associated events. 32 cannon have also been restored by the City Council and mounted upon historically accurate cradles.



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Crucially the walls are being used to become the focus for related historical interpretation and improvement works. A ring of small museums telling different parts of the city's history have been created in buildings nearby. Six key historic buildings have been identified for repair works and will be opened to tourists. This investment will bring forward schemes that can avail of other grant assistance such as NIEA's Historic Building Grant Scheme. Also within the walled city the Townscape Heritage Initiative of the UK Heritage Lottery Fund is restoring other historic buildings (also with NIEA assistance) and is adding to the regenerative process. Public improvement works have also been carried out to the streets within the walls and will be commencing in the civic square just outside it. Many agencies are involved in this work and efforts are being coordinated by the City Council and a regeneration company created for the city called 'Ilex'



Together all of this investment represents a significant vote of confidence in the concept of heritage as a catalyst for economic regeneration. It remains to be seen just what the tangible results of this process will be for Londonderry but those promoting the regeneration and economic development of the city are clear on its importance. In a global marketplace it is important that the character and quality of a place is maintained. It is also vital to realise the potential of tourism.

3. Future.

The City Council now proposes to bid for World Heritage Status for the Walled City. This will draw not only upon the beauty of the city and its architecture but upon the wider social story of division and peacemaking that it represents. Highlighting the interest of the walled city to a wider audience is of course a principle aim.

On the other side of the river a second walled complex has recently been rediscovered. This is inside a military barracks recently vacated by the Army

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as troop numbers have reduced. The site has superb views to the walled city opposite and Ilex has been tasked with its redevelopment. Heritage will also be a key theme on this site. The parade ground and associated buildings will be restored as the focus of its masterplan for regeneration.

4. Summary of Heritage Investment in Londonderry since 1996.

City walls restoration: Investment by EHS since 1997: **£1/2million** (including dedicated staff time).

Improvement works to the public realm inside the walled city (stone paving, lighting and street furniture) by Department of Regional Development 1999 - 2003: **£2million**.

Grant Aid of **£872,382** by NIEA for the restoration of 32 listed buildings in the city.

Townscape Heritage Initiative investment of **£1million** in the restoration of 30 properties in or near the walled city.

Council investment of **£300,000** in the restoration of Canons.

Council investment of **£750,000** in the restoration of a listed Fire station adjacent to the walls.

The Signature Destination Project:

Phase 1 2004 -2007 **£4.5million.**

Conservation and Management Plans for the City Walls
Visitor Signage and Interpretation
Tower Museum Refurbishment
Exhibitions at satellite centres

Phase 2 2007- 2010 **£9.1million.**

Lighting project for the city
Restoration of 6 listed historic buildings
Culture and animation support
Environmental Improvement of Guildhall Square.

Total public sector investment: £19.5million

All of this public investment has leveraged significant matching private sector investment by owners and communities.

Estimation of Private Sector Investment.

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Tangible matching funding for building improvement works is a clear example of private sector involvement in the scheme. The NIEA grant was for 20% of repair works to buildings. This is a simple leverage of £4,361,910 for the £872,382 of grant which we have paid out. However as most schemes involve some form of extension as well the figure may be nearer £5million.

Many schemes will be supported through other funding schemes as well and particularly for the main signature projects the proportion of true private sector investment will be much smaller.

The project is mainly about encouraging more intangible investment. Regeneration and quality presentation and interpretation of the heritage asset will generate more tourism and affect quality of life indicators which are becoming increasingly important in attracting inward investment. Two five star hotels opened in the city in 2002 is a reflection of the increased confidence which the project seeks to build upon. Cultural Heritage Tourism according to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board is the most rapidly expanding part of the tourism market in Europe.

The concentration of effort on the relatively small walled city is expected to have a catalytic effect not only upon tourism industries but upon business confidence as well. A number of redevelopments are currently taking place and have taken place in recent years within the walled core which are not heritage based but which are more viable because of the surrounding improvements. A figure for this work has not yet been compiled.

Evaluation

The Signature Project has been the subject of detailed economic evaluation and justification as it has progressed. The project benefits will be considered in detail following the final phase. Though a true estimation of the full economic impact of the works will be difficult to achieve part of this evaluation will look at the development of the city using a number of indicators. These will include wider records such as visitor numbers, dwell time, small business confidence, types and quantity of inward investment as well as tangible regeneration in the city relative to conditions at the start of the project. This data when available will be of benefit to the consideration of similar schemes elsewhere.