

Ryde Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI)

In 2006 the Isle of Wight Council partnered with the Heritage Lottery Fund to provide funding for works of repairs and enhancements to properties and public realm within the town centre of Ryde. Owners of the historic buildings that give the town its distinctive character were assisted with grants for their repair and enhancement and important but tired areas of the public realm have been significantly improved through new design and street furniture. Vacant historic buildings have been restored and now contribute positively to the streetscape as well as providing new areas for working and living in the town centre.

Grants were offered as a percentage of the cost of the works and private owners contributed towards the cost. The grants acted as an incentive/catalyst to undertake works on buildings that had generally suffered from a lack of maintenance and investment.

Why did we do it?

Studies undertaken by Oxford Brookes University in conjunction with the Heritage Lottery Fund have shown that the restoration of the buildings within historic areas can revitalise their economies. “Pride in heritage of towns can be both a result of revitalisation and a motivator for it – but pride and confidence are almost always enhanced by physical improvements”.¹

There had been a decline in Ryde’s retail sector over the past 30 years due to a number of factors notably, changing shopping patterns, development of other retail areas on the Island and a change in Ryde’s status as a holiday destination. As a result there had been little major development in the tourism and leisure sectors and little or no investment in building repairs.

Ryde Townscape Heritage Initiative aimed to redress the balance by creating an environment in which business development derived through retail, service and tourism could fashion job creation whilst at the same time protecting and enhancing the Island’s environment and heritage for the benefit of residents and visitors.

Outcomes

The scheme is considered to have been a huge success. Nine of the grant projects have received either awards or certificates of merit from the Isle of Wight Society and this pays testament to the quality of the works completed. Importantly despite tough economic times, Ryde appears to be performing well compared to other Island destinations. When the project commenced there were over 15 vacant premises in the

¹ Evaluating the Townscape Heritage Initiative HLF 2008

town centre. Now there are almost none. This is no coincidence. Over the last 5 years 24 buildings and areas have been repaired or restored, over 3300 square metres of public realm enhanced and over 1900 square metres of vacant commercial floor space brought back into use.

The physical works of regeneration have inspired a confidence in the town and many more buildings have benefitted from investment. As grant projects were completed, many adjacent owners started to undertake works to their own properties and this effect continued. Ryde's unique selling point is its superb Regency architecture and investment in this fabric has ensured that it is looking great and drawing visitors to the town.

Raising awareness and supporting local craft skills

The complementary traditional craft training scheme run alongside the physical repairs and enhancements has made this Townscape Heritage Initiative far more than just a grant scheme. A wide range of training events were held for the public, professionals and contractors including the use of lime mortar, stone, brick, lime renders and plasters in building repairs. This has helped raise awareness of the value of the historic environment by engaging with the local community and those working in the historic building sector. There have been over 170 beneficiaries and this has helped sustain sufficient local professional and craftspeople who use the traditional building techniques and materials in their work.



Above: Ray Moseley and Kevin Stubbs from Bursledon Brickworks demonstrating the use of lime mortar in building repairs

A history of helping

The Isle of Wight Council recognise that *Heritage Conservation* can help regenerate towns by contributing to distinctive high quality town centre environments for residents and visitors. In the past 12 years the Isle of Wight Council has operated 7 schemes with Partners such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage and from this over 270 properties have benefited from grants and 3 public realm areas have been enhanced.

5 Case Studies

177 High Street, 10-13 Esplanade, 13 Union Road, Royal Victoria Arcade, Union Street & St Thomas' Square & Churchyard are considered in more detail below.

177 High Street:

The Hose Rhodes Dickson building had a new shop front installed as well as the upper floor bay window being restored to its former appearance. No historical evidence was found for the original design of the shop front and so the new design was based upon well proportioned windows, a central doorway with a level entrance and decorative details from the nineteenth century. The unusual corner design was dealt with by incorporating a curved glass window which is not only beautiful but functionally effective. The upper storey bay (known as an oriel window) has been replaced on an exact like for like basis as it was beyond repair. This company now benefit from an enhanced environment in which to work and they are clearly leading their property company by example.



“Investment in the historic fabric will benefit the appearance of an area, improve confidence, quality of life and economic performance and initiate a cycle of investment”. (Evaluating the Townscape Heritage Initiative HLF 2008)



10, 11, 12 & 13 Esplanade

This prominent facade of Ryde had many historic photographs and so finding evidence of the nineteenth century design was simple. Getting to a position where works could start and then incorporating this into the structure which had been changed considerably over time, (visually but also structurally) was another matter. Significant time was spent ensuring the design was as faithful to the original frontage as possible but within the existing structural constraints. The result has been dramatic and visitors to Ryde are now greeted by these restored buildings which now complement the rest of Ryde's architecture.



“This conservation scheme has helped regenerate Ryde’s town centre by contributing to a distinctive high quality town centre environment for residents and tourists/visitors to the Island’s economy” (Project officer Lee Byrne)

13 Union Road

Located in a quiet service road to the rear of Union Street, this forgotten building struggled to find a viable use for many years. Historically and architecturally significant, the opportunity was taken to repair and convert this vacant warehouse into office/studio accommodation with an arts exhibition centre & unit of living accommodation. The design has respected the building which benefits from a central 2 storey space which is now flooded by light through the new roof lantern. The building now provides important commercial floor area in the centre of town as well as the flexibility of offering a 3 bed residential home, creating the best opportunity for its long term survival.



"The Island has a rich heritage and it is important we preserve our historic buildings" (Cllr George Brown, Cabinet member responsible for planning April 2011)

Royal Victoria Arcade, Union Street

Recognised by its grand façade, this grade II* listed building is arguably one of the most important in Ryde. Whilst the building had remained in use, its large size had led to problems keeping on top of maintenance and inevitably this had led to decay. Some less sympathetic later alterations had also taken place and so the grant scheme was used to address this. Extensive work included the restoration of external elevations (using lime render and breathable paints), replacing later windows and shop fronts with authentic replications of the originals, repairs to the roof, new internal tiled floor and importantly the conversion of the basement to a heritage centre for the community of Ryde.



The Historic Ryde Society (formed by a group from local residents interested in Ryde history) took advantage of an additional grant to convert the derelict basement to a local history heritage centre. Their hours of voluntary work have been inspiring and the result is a local history centre for residents and visitors. Details of the society and the heritage centre can be found on their website www.historicrydesociety.com

St Thomas's Square and Churchyard

St Thomas's Square was one of the key spaces identified during the consultation process for the Ryde Public Realm Strategy as central to improving the public realm in Ryde town centre. This work, alongside the enhancements undertaken within the Churchyard itself underpins quality of design and local distinctiveness whilst bringing benefits to the community and the public.



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