



Historic England

URBAN PANEL REVIEW PAPER

Sunderland

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Forward

The Urban Panel (now Historic Places Panel) visited the Sunderland Historic High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) in May 2017. The panel's report was submitted in January 2018. The visit focused on the HAZ and its relationship to the city centre, addressing issues including the area's future role, sense of place, connectivity and community pride.

A key theme of the Panel's report was the need for a clear vision for the city centre. This was already under consideration by the Council at the time of the Panel's visit, and city centre regeneration was one of the priorities noted in the City Plan.

In 2021 Sunderland secured £20m from the Levelling Up Fund, this included £4.7m towards a £26m scheme to redevelop the 1.1ha Nile Street/Villiers Street brownfield site into 87 new high-quality dwellings with shared private gardens and 894m² of workshop / commercial space. In addition, the funding is supporting the renovation of the historic 177 High Street West to bring it back to life. This project is being delivered by the Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust and follows the Trust's successful restoration of 170-175 High Street West as part of the HAZ.

Riverside Sunderland – an area connecting the city's civic and commercial core to the river, Sheepfolds, the HAZ and Sunniside – was identified as a site for a new business district, residential neighbourhoods and a landscape park, and a design team was appointed. The Riverside Sunderland vision document was published in November 2019, followed by a Masterplan in October 2020. Implementation of the masterplan is already well advanced, with several projects completed by 2022, and 12 more scheduled for delivery by the end of 2024, in addition to developments in the wider city centre.

Sunderland was, in 2017, one of the first places to be granted HAZ status by Historic England. Since then, the organisation has been working with Sunderland City Council and local partners to bring historic buildings to the forefront of regeneration and development in an area around the city's historic high streets. Historic England has contributed significantly to the HAZ, offering planning advice and grants, updating listings and funding a project officer post, while also carrying out targeted research.

John Lord – former member of the Historic England Urban Panel

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Old Sunderland and the High Street which connected it to Bishopwearmouth were once at the economic and commercial heart of Sunderland. This area, adjacent to the port and along the banks of the river, was a thriving retail, commercial and administrative centre, with elegant streets and prestigious properties. For a century-and-a-half, its financial fortunes and growth very much reflected what was happening across the town as a whole. However, the development of a bridge across the Wear, at the end of the eighteenth century, and the coming of the railways, a century later, signalled a shift in the economic and commercial focus of Sunderland and the beginnings of a change in the prosperity of its eastern end. No longer would the ups and downs of Old Sunderland mirror those of the wider settlement. Whilst Sunderland continued to grow, steadily, throughout the second-half of the nineteenth century, its East End suffered a slow and steady downward spiral. If the decline and eventual disappearance of the coal mining industry, shipbuilding and glass making throughout the twentieth century hit Sunderland hard, the impact upon its East end was even more marked. And although the past two decades have witnessed a resurgence in the economic fortunes of the new City of Sunderland, this success has largely passed the area to the east of its new City Centre by.
- 1.2 The *Sunderland Historic High Streets Heritage Action Zone* is the latest in a long line of initiatives designed to tackle some of the problems facing the legacy of historic buildings found around the eastern end of the City and to help assist in the wider regeneration of one of the most deprived parts of Sunderland. Whilst previous grant programmes have seen some notable and spectacular successes in restoring and returning to use a number of its key buildings, nonetheless, this area still contains the greatest concentration of heritage assets at risk or in poor condition in the central area of the city (including one of Sunderland's finest Georgian treasures, the Grade I Listed Holy Trinity Church) and the area still has some of the greatest social and economic challenges facing the City.
- 1.3 Will this latest initiative deliver a sustainable future for the heritage assets in the area around the historic High Streets? Will it help to deliver the much-needed regeneration of the area to the east of the City Centre? Or will it, like its predecessors, deliver some very well-restored properties but, at the end of the day, not achieve all that was hoped of it?
- 1.4 The Urban Panel were invited to Sunderland to advise on how the HAZ might best support the physical and cultural regeneration of this area whilst keeping the local community involved and engaged. They were asked, in particular, to consider a number of points:-
 - What role should this part of the City Centre play in Sunderland's future and how might businesses and investors be encouraged to establish in this area?

- How might the character and appearance of this area be best enhanced and how might its assets be knitted back together to create a stronger sense of place?
- How might the connectivity between this area and the City Centre be improved?
- How might a sense of pride and interest be generated in the area's heritage and how can a stronger sense of collective purpose in community heritage activity be encouraged? How might a stronger sense of community buy-in to the future of this part of the city be realised?
- How might people be encouraged to see the HAZ as a destination, to linger there, and to spend time and money in the area?
- How might the community develop a sense of self-confidence so that it can achieve its ambitions with the support of local agencies?

2 Executive Summary and Recommendations

- 2.1 In the course of the various presentations, its walking tour around the City Centre and overnight stay in Roker, and in the discussions that its Members had with the guests over dinner, the Panel were struck by how fascinating a City Sunderland is and, in its river, seaside, and wealth of historic buildings, what a wonderful range of assets it has to offer. The City's economic future, despite all the uncertainties nationally, seems to be on a sound footing, is supported by both a thriving University and College at its heart, and has a Council which provides solid and stable leadership. Both Sunderland City Council and the local community are clearly and, quite rightly, immensely proud of their heritage.
- 2.2 However, it is also a City which, despite its recent economic successes, appears incredibly fragile. The City Centre seems very fragmented and, although there is evidently considerable inward investment taking place, there are particular concerns that it does not appear to be a place where people either want to visit or choose to live; its historic High Street and East End feel isolated from the remainder of the City Centre and the degree of severance of Old Sunderland from the remainder of the City has the propensity to become even worse as a result of the upgrading of the main road to the Port; and despite considerable investment in the heritage assets of Old Sunderland, it is still an area with a huge number of buildings in a parlous state of repair, is largely underappreciated, and has some serious social and economic challenges.
- 2.3 However, the situation is far from bleak and there is considerable optimism that the emerging initiatives, not least the Heritage Action Zone, will help to begin to address many of the challenges facing the area around Sunderland's historic High Streets. There are also some very exciting projects in development which have the potential not only to bring back into use some of the area's most problematic buildings but also to encourage people back into this part of the

City. However, there is a need for a clear overarching strategy which sets how all these various initiatives proposals and actions will be woven together and how what is going on at the East End relates to the wider strategy to encourage people, once more, to use their City Centre.

- 2.4 As for that part of the City which is covered by the Heritage Action Zone, this is not a homogenous area but, rather, a number of distinct sub-areas each of which has its own character, its own challenges and, as a result, each of which demands a different approach. In some of these sub-areas, the HAZ is likely to be a key element which helps to secure their future prosperity; in others, the HAZ will only deliver part of the solution. Realising the potential of each of the various parts of the historic High Streets area, therefore, involves a co-ordinated, comprehensive strategy for each area. Whilst the HAZ itself offers a lot more than any previous grant schemes in this part of the City and includes community engagement as one of its themes, it needs to go further and consider how the HAZ might also be used in better-motivating and empowering the wider local community to get engaged in the future of this area.
- 2.5 The proposed upgrading of the road to the Port could have disastrous consequences upon the wider regeneration of the HAZ area and of the sense of disconnectedness which the East End has from the remainder of the City Centre. How people get between the two halves of High Street is an element which needs designing into this road scheme from the outset. However, it is not just east-west connectivity which needs addressing. Consideration also needs to be had about how north-south connectivity through this area is improved especially to the riverside area. The riverside, itself, is a hugely-important asset whose potential needs to be realised if the regeneration of the eastern end of the City is to be achieved. As a way of bringing life back to the riverside and reducing the isolation of the East End, the City Council needs to give serious consideration to the possibility of a new pedestrian footbridge linking the East End of the City with Monkwearmouth.

Summary Recommendations

- **There is a need for a Vision for the City Centre and a document which pulls all the various initiatives across the City Centre together**
- **The strategy for the that part of the City covered by the Heritage Action Zone needs to be approach it as a number of distinct sub-areas**

- The HAZ Delivery Plan should consider how it might assist in motivating and empowering the wider local community to become engaged in the future of this area
- The social problems facing parts of the Sunnyside area need to be addressed
- East-west and north-south routes through the HAZ area need improving and the connectivity of the East End with the remainder of the City Centre needs to be addressed
- “Meanwhile uses” need to be attracted to High Street West, High Street East and the East End
- The Tall Ships Event should be used to change people’s perceptions about Old Sunderland and to encourage people, once more, to venture into this part of the City
- The potential of the riverside needs to be realised
- Consideration should be given to building a new footbridge linking Old Sunderland to Monkwearmouth

3 The Panel Visit: The Walking tour

- 3.1 The walking tour enabled the Panel to gain an appreciation of the character of the HAZ area, how it related to the rest of the City Centre, the quality and diversity of its heritage assets and, perhaps most importantly, some of the not inconsiderable challenges that it faces. It also gave Members the opportunity to see some of the past successes which the City has had in delivering heritage-led regeneration projects, in securing the reuse and adaptation of some of its historic buildings and, particularly, in producing high-quality public realm enhancement schemes.
- 3.2 St Thomas’ Street - For a City whose history and development is so dominated by the influence and associations with the River Wear, how appropriate that the Panel’s visit should begin at John Hall’s classically-styled River Wear Commissioners’ Building - one of the most graceful and impressive of Sunderland’s office buildings. However, if any proof were needed of the challenges facing this part of the City, the Panel only had to descend the steps of this fine building. Although not within the boundary of the HAZ, immediately opposite was the now-vacant Jopling’s Department Store. Once a Sunderland institution, this impressive modernist building - with its distinctive and eye-catching white-rendered corner featuring the Jopling’s logo and blue clock – is now a somewhat forlorn structure, shuttered and boarded-up with its clock forever showing five-to-one. This building provided a stark reminder to the Panel of the impact which the structural changes in the retail economy, nationally, and the shift in the locations of the prime retail areas, locally, have had upon this part of Sunderland.

- 3.3 Fawcett Street - Although the walking tour only included the northern half of Fawcett Street, nevertheless, the Panel were able to appreciate some of the grandeur that this, once, important retail and commercial area must have had. Between the solidly-classical trio of ashlar-built banks at its junction with St Thomas' Street and the eccentric "Hindoo Gothic" Elephant Tea Rooms, at its junction with High Street West, were an eclectic mix of three- and four-storey buildings including the remnants of some of the original mid- to late- nineteenth century domestic terraces that used to line this thoroughfare.
- 3.4 However, the Panel were also able to gain some impression of what impact the westerly shift in the main retail focus of the City Centre had had. What was, once, Sunderland's premier shopping street is now a sad reflection of its former glory. On its eastern side, this section of Fawcett Street is bookended by two empty buildings. If this were not bad enough, these happen to be two of its most important buildings – W B Brierley's former HSBC bank (whose Corinthian-ordered oriel corner feature and upper floors can only be imagined from the fading illustrations on the shrouding on its Fawcett Street elevation) and Middlemiss' domed Hutchinson's Building at the junction of High Street West. Several of the other ground-floor units lie empty, many are now in non-retail use and, of the shops that are there, the Panel noted a distinct lack of high street nationals. Far too many of the buildings were marred by poorly-designed shopfronts or signage (and in many cases by both) that had little or no regard to the design or detailing of what, in many instances, were interesting and relatively intact historic, upper floors. The strong vertical rhythm of the upper floors had been replaced, at street level, by a linear, horizontal emphasis. Even Caws' exuberant Tea Rooms had had not only its ground floor sanitised by The Royal Bank of Scotland's brutal alterations but the linear design, which now encompassed its neighbouring property, had also had the effect of eroding the historic grain of this part of Fawcett Street.
- 3.5 The general air of a street in decline was evidenced by the fact that several of the upper floors appear to be either to let, underused, or empty, and a number of the buildings were clearly suffering from lack of maintenance. The quality of the public realm in this area is poor – too much street clutter (including advertising panels and A-boards), a proliferation of bus shelters, large square planters, litter bins and serried ranks of bollards aligning the pavement edge. Even the corner detailing of the Elephant Tea Rooms is obscured by a rather unfortunately-sited street lamp. Past interventions to try and reduce the impact of vehicles on, what appeared to be, a heavily-trafficked route by the narrowing of the carriageway and to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment had, unfortunately, only served to emphasise the scarcity of footfall along what would once, no doubt, have been a vibrant, crowded shopping street.
- 3.6 Hutchinson's Building, which echoes the grand architecture of Grainger Town at Newcastle (but which, unlike Sunderland's rivals, did not form part of a unified urban remodelling of this City Centre), is now empty and boarded-up. The Panel wholeheartedly endorsed the identification of this landmark building as one of the key repair/restoration projects of the HAZ and considered that it was

imperative that this hugely-important part of Sunderland's identity be brought back into use. The Panel considered that this may be one of the buildings where a review of the List Description by Historic England to more accurately define the elements which contribute to its significance may assist in identifying how this property might best be adapted for future reuse.

- 3.7 However, the Panel considered that this was a street whose future was not irrecoverable. The considerable architectural interest and character in the upper floors of its buildings simply needs to be more sensitively-reflected at street level and the quality of the older public realm needs to be brought up to level commensurate with that of its buildings.
- 3.8 Keel Square - The unscripted deviation by the Panel Members from the intended walking route to take in the recently-completed works at Keel Square provided not only a stark illustration of the westerly shift of the focus of the City Centre but also the exemplary, high-quality, public realm improvements that Sunderland City Council has been undertaking elsewhere in the City. The Panel were informed that this new public square was part of a wider scheme aimed at connecting the Vaux site redevelopment to the City Centre.
- 3.9 High Street West – Whilst the western end of High Street West has much of the character (and issues) of Fawcett Street, beyond Bedford Street/John Street, this thoroughfare is a stark contrast to what has been seen before. Here the townscape is a lot less coherent (including several gap sites where buildings have been demolished), the historic environment considerably more fragmented and, especially on its northern site, its historic grain largely eroded. Further east along the High Street, the historic character becomes even more fractured.
- 3.10 Although some of the more recent additions to this historic street have sought to make some concessions to respond to their historic context (such as the restaurants and bars either side of the Registry Buildings which, although there may well be much with which one might find fault, at least have attempted to reflect the scale and the grain of this historic thoroughfare), the majority have not. Buildings such as the oppressive, red-tiled, mid-seventies telephone Exchange, on its southern side (which does not even follow the historic building line), and the equally-overbearing four-storey block which steps back from the road, ziggurat-style, opposite, present completely dead frontages at street level. Although the rather sinister black-brick Travelodge next door has included some retail units on its ground floor, these appear never to have been occupied. As a result, during the Panel visit, there was, not surprisingly, very little footfall along what is a rather depressing and disjointed urban environment.
- 3.11 Sunnyside – A further diversion from the original walking route enabled the Panel to gain an, unfortunately, all-too-brief view of one of the past successes of conservation-led regeneration in the City Centre. Again, the Panel commended the Council on the quality of yet another excellent public realm scheme and were impressed with the bold interventions to bring the former Post

Office building back into use. However, despite all expenditure that has been pumped into the buildings and public spaces of this area over the past few years, they were a little shocked to be told that Sunnyside was still facing some considerable social challenges.

- 3.12 High Street West (continued) – It was evident that attempts have been made to try to improve the extremely dispiriting urban environment of High Street West. The temporary green space created on one of the cleared sites at the junction of Nile Street is a welcome relief from the unkempt, overgrown empty sites found elsewhere and local graffiti-artist Frank Styles' large, bright murals (which, the Panel were informed, it was hoped would also reduce the amount of tagging) provide a vibrant addition to the public realm. However, whilst extremely laudable, these measures are insufficient to make much difference to the overall vitality of this very depressing area.
- 3.13 Nevertheless, the isolated pockets of historic buildings do enable one to gain at least some impression of how this area might once have appeared. The largest group of these buildings, around the junction of Villiers Street, includes what is believed to be Sunderland's oldest public house (the Bridge Hotel, now vacant), a building with a fine mid-nineteenth Century Corinthian-columned shopfront, and one of the key repair/restoration projects of the HAZ (170 to 175 High Street West). The Panel were immensely encouraged by the proposals by Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust to transform this rather forlorn and extremely-dilapidated group into a multi-functional performance space, a record shop, and residential accommodation. If the scheme is successful (which despite the enthusiasm behind it is dependent upon the Trust acquiring the building) this seems to be just the type of activity needed to inject some vitality into this important gateway into the City Centre. However, the Panel expressed some worries that the people most likely to visit this new venue and record shop are, in all probability, the students living in the halls of residence who are, at present, cut-off from it by the main access road to the Port.
- 3.14 The ring road - Of the, not inconsiderable, challenges facing the future regeneration of this part of Sunderland, perhaps the most difficult is how to reduce the degree of severance caused by the Ring Road. The Panel were able to appreciate, first hand, just how much of a swathe this extremely-busy route, its associated landscaping, and the incidental areas of car parking either side carves through the historic route connecting Old Sunderland with Bishopwearmouth, the considerable harm that it causes to the townscape of this area, but, more worryingly, the real difficulties it presents to movement between High Street East and High Street West. Members were extremely concerned about what impact the planned upgrading of this route, in order to facilitate movement between Nissan and the Port, might have upon the success of several of the projects set out in the HAZ and of the wider regeneration of the historic High Streets
- 3.15 High Street East/Russell Street/Low Street - Although the historic environment of High Street East and the riverside is just as fragmented as High Street West,

the East End, however, reveals evidence of not only greater investor confidence but also a considerably-larger residential population. Having said this, it was evident that this is an area not without its problems.

- 3.16 It is here that the University of Sunderland has built a number of new student halls of residence. The polychromatic brick development at the junction of Russell Street has sought, to some extent, to capture the historic grain of High Street East and sits reasonably-comfortably alongside the Eagle Building and Sunderland Exchange Buildings (two examples of historic buildings refurbished and brought back to life by the North of England Civic Trust). However, like all the other student accommodation which has gone up in this area, it is totally inward-looking, presents no active frontages to any of the surrounding streets, and prevents any effective north-south connectivity through the area.
- 3.17 On Low Street the Panel were able to see two rare survivals of the intensive warehousing once found in this area - the mid-nineteenth century, two-storey warehouse on the southern side of Low Street (now converted to a wedding venue and tap house) and the four-storey lime-washed rubble-stone Wylam Wharf (the first building restored under the previous Conservation Area Partnership and which is now used as offices by Tombola). The increased confidence in this part of the City is evidenced by the fact that Tombola has commissioned Ryder Architects to develop a new £5m landmark headquarters building on the vacant site adjacent to this warehouse.
- 3.18 This was the first opportunity that the Panel had had to see the river itself. Despite a gloriously sunny afternoon, the fantastic prospect it offered of the activity on the river, and the number of students who are living right next door to it, other than the people associated with the Urban Panel visit, there was absolutely nobody at all using the riverside footpath. This was in marked contrast to the Monkwearmouth side where there were cyclists, pedestrians and people simply sitting on benches enjoying the view. In part, the lack of activity might simply be because this side of the river is north-facing. However, the Panel considered that it was equally likely to be a combination of the poor and uninviting quality of the public realm, the unkempt nature of the incidental areas of open space, and the lack of connectivity down to the riverside from High Street East and Wear Street.
- 3.19 Like much of the remainder of the HAZ, most of the buildings along High Street East and around the riverside sit in isolated groups amongst more modern developments. These historic buildings include, around James Williams Street, the last remnants of Sunderland's original shopping street and, on Church Street East, the only two remaining buildings of what was, once, a grand row of early eighteenth-century merchant's houses. Despite the fragmented nature of its historic environment, what was encouraging was the fact that, with the exception of 51 High Street East (another targeted building in the HAZ), the majority of these historic buildings appear to be in a good state of repair and a large number of them are in use.

- 3.20 The undoubted jewel of the East End is the delightful red-brick Georgian Holy Trinity Church, the Parish Church of Old Sunderland, which sits in relative isolation alongside the remnants of the Town Moor. Although over half-a-million pounds has been spent already on repair works, it still is in an extremely poor condition and the Panel were able to see for themselves some of the significant challenges facing the long-term conservation of this important building. However, Members were encouraged by the commitment and enthusiasm of Matthew McKeague, the Director of Regeneration at the Churches Conservation Trust, and Amanda Gerry, the Coordinator of “The Canny Space” project, to provide a multi-purpose venue for spoken word, theatre, and music.
- 3.21 Of all the marooned heritage assets in this part of the city, perhaps the most forlorn is Phoenix Lodge, the oldest surviving Freemason’s Hall still in use in the country. This important little building, dwarfed by the eighteen-story tower block directly behind it, sits surrounded by a sea of tarmac at the end of an avenue of light-industrial units. Sunderland’s Freemasons were instrumental in the growth of Sunderland in the seventeenth and eighteenth Centuries and were responsible for the construction of many of its most significant buildings. Yet, this unusual building in which they still continue to gather lies almost forgotten.
- 3.22 The Panel had been told during their very interesting and informative tour of this fine Georgian building of the vandalism and attempted break-ins that had occurred in the past and the hope by the Freemasons that the use of the area around the building as a car park for the new Tombola HQ (for which Tombola would erect a high-security fence around the Lodge together with CCTV cameras) will significantly reduce this problem. Whilst the Panel could fully-appreciate the desire to increase the security around this important building, they were very concerned about the potential impact which this would have upon the setting of this Grade I building. They also feared that the Lodge would become even more isolated from not just from the surrounding area but also from its local community. They urged the Freemasons to explore a more community-led solution which might benefit both the setting of this important building and help address the problems of vandalism.

4 Panel Visit – Exploring the Challenges

- 4.1 Les Clarke, the Chief Operating Officer for Place at Sunderland City Council, provided the Panel with an overview of the changing face of investment in the City over the years. He explained how Sunderland had grown from the Saxon period, when it was the main centre of learning in the country, into an industrial powerhouse some two-hundred years later, a place that produced one-third of the world’s shipping, had the world’s deepest coal mine, and was one of the country’s major centres of glassmaking. However, since the decline of these heavy industries, when Sunderland lost almost half its jobs, the City Council has been working with its partners to turn its economic fortunes around. Indeed,

the Panel could not but admire the success which the City has had in not only being able to replace the number of jobs lost through the decline of coalmining, the shipyards and glass manufacturing but in actually managing to exceed that total. Moreover, these new jobs have been created in the types of industries likely to be able to sustain the City's economy well into the future - automotive manufacturing, software and IT, financial and customer services, and the University.

- 4.2 The Panel were also impressed at just how successful the City has been in attracting inward investment, not simply from this country but also from abroad. They heard that Sunderland is now home to some 87 overseas companies (who employ between them over 26,700 people), it is in the top four Small European Cities for Foreign Direct Investment, and it is eighth top Northern European City for Foreign Direct Investment. Moreover, there is potential for this to increase, still further if, as expected, the Nissan supply chain grows.
- 4.3 Over the next seven years or so, some £1.3bn of investment is already committed to a variety of projects across the City. These include the high-quality new public space that is nearing completion at Keel Square (part of the wider Sunderland Strategic Transport Corridor and new Wear Crossing (an iconic statement of Sunderland's direction of travel) designed to better-connect the Nissan Plant to the Port of Sunderland)) which is funded by the Public Sector, a new 4* Holiday Inn on Keel Square (a private sector initiative), The Hope Street Exchange, a £10.8m Enterprise and Innovation centre designed to encourage small business start-ups (which is being developed by the University) , and The Old Fire Station which is currently being transformed with the help of a grant from the HLF of £2.5m into a performing arts centre by Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture (MAC) Trust.
- 4.4 What was evident to the Panel was just how significant a role investment by the City Council is playing in helping not only to stimulate external funding but also to facilitate the City's wider regeneration. In Sunniside, where the economic down-turn had stalled what had been a very successful heritage-led regeneration scheme, the City Council had formed a partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency to acquire a number of key sites for housing-led regeneration. On the site of the former Vaux Brewery, a development partnership of the City Council, Carillion and Igloo Regeneration (Siglion), is transforming this prominent and long-vacant five-and-a-half hectare site into a mixed-use development combining a new public space with, restaurants, cafes, offices and residential use. And in Roker, £6m has been spent regenerating the seafront area (which, itself, has attracted a further £3m of private investment) with the result that more people now visit Sunderland's seafront than at any time in the past 30 years.
- 4.5 Indeed, the Panel were told that Sunderland City Council see their role very much as providing the "glue" which holds all this investment together. A good example is the £5m the Authority is investing in public realm improvements along High Street West (almost all of which is outside the HAZ area) to improve

the quality of the links between Sunnyside, the retail core, and the Minster Quarter/Empire Theatre.

- 4.6 It was particularly reassuring to learn that a key part of the City Council's role is seen as helping to drive-up the quality of development across the City. Thus, not only have the City Council acquired an interest in development sites in order to gain greater leverage in the quality of the final scheme, but they also were prepared to negotiate aggressively on other sites in which they did not have an interest in order to obtain developments of the highest quality (such as the proposed retail development by Next for the site opposite the Old Fire Station).
- 4.7 However, whilst the economic prospects for the City as a whole are very positive, it is clear that the City still faces some very significant economic challenges, especially that part of Sunderland to the east of City Centre.
- 4.8 The Panel had been informed that, up until the sixties, with lots of people working in shipbuilding and the collieries and with numerous support industries associated with the port, the City Centre was thriving. However, with the loss of those industries, the City Centre went into a decline from which it has never really recovered. In part, this is due to the fact that the industries around the river and port which were lost were replaced by jobs on the edge of the City (such as at Nissan and the businesses at Doxford Park). As it was rather aptly expressed by Les Clarke, in employment terms, Sunderland is akin to a donut – all the jobs are on the edge with nothing in the middle. This lack of employment in the centre, however, means that Sunderland does not have the pool of well-paid City Centre workers that other Cities have to stimulate the growth in shops, restaurants and other activities necessary to create a vibrant heart to the City.
- 4.9 Sunderland also has some challenging housing issues. The City does not have a five-year housing land supply, housing demand across the City is very polarised, there is a plentiful supply of smaller housing but a distinct lack of 3/4/5-bedroomed detached properties, house prices in Sunderland are considerably lower compared to the situation elsewhere in the Region (which makes viable regeneration of brownfield sites difficult), and those people who make their money in Sunderland tend to live outside it in places such as Durham. Despite there being three popular tower blocks, very few people live in the City Centre (it is estimated to be somewhere in the order of just 3,000, although is unclear whether this includes students), and even fewer live in the HAZ area itself. Moreover, the housing area at East End, to the south of the Heritage Action Zone, contains some of the most socially and economically-challenged communities in the City (the East End LSOA is among the 0.5% most-deprived LSOAs in England) and the area has a number of hostels (due to, what the Panel thought to be the quite-shocking decision by rest of Tyne and Wear to close the area's Hostels elsewhere). However, the community is relatively stable - people who come here tend to stay here.

- 4.10 Consequently, the combination of a lack of well-paid jobs in its City Centre and a very small resident population means that Sunderland City Centre has not achieved the critical mass of facilities needed to attract significant numbers of shoppers and leisure facilities one might expect of a settlement of its size. This is probably one of the reasons why, despite being the biggest City by population in the North East and having a hinterland that stretches into Durham, a significant proportion of its population (especially Washington) look to Newcastle and, particularly, Gateshead's Metro Centre for their retail needs.
- 4.11 Whilst the City is fortunate enough to have a very successful and expanding College and University, the contribution which they might make to the regeneration of the East End is likely to be limited as the two Core Campuses are effectively divorced from the HAZ area – one by the river, the other by the eastern ring road and the City Centre – and there seems little prospect of getting any of the educational elements of the University to relocate into the historic High Streets area. However, peripheral elements, especially student accommodation, may be able to assist in the revitalisation of that area. The University has already established a number of student halls of residence around High Street East/the East End and the City Council is currently in negotiations with them for additional student accommodation in Sunnyside.
- 4.12 Despite the fact that the University has over 15,000 students, the City has a very poor graduate-retention rate. The Panel considered that this situation was particularly worrying given what appeared from the site visit to be a City with a considerable amount of small, cheap, and vacant properties available to potential new-business as start-up spaces. However, there are a number of emerging developments which offer hope that the current graduate-retention rate might be improved. These include the Hope Street Exchange being developed by the University, a Council-led scheme to provide a series of IT incubator units, and a commitment that the first buildings on the Vaux site will be a mix of small and medium-sized units.
- 4.13 Mark Taylor, the Conservation Team Leader at the City Council, provided the Panel with a brief outline of why the HAZ was needed, what it is hoped that it would achieve, and a summary of the projects included in its Delivery Plan. He explained that the HAZ is based around the area of Sunderland where the economic decline is most evident and where there is Sunderland's greatest concentration of heritage assets at risk or in poor condition. The area includes both of the Conservation Areas in the city that are on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register. Although the Sunnyside Conservation Area is not currently identified as being at risk, nonetheless, the streets at its western and northern edges have a high-concentration of buildings in a dilapidated or poor condition. Across the HAZ area, there are six Listed Buildings which have been identified as being at risk (including one of Sunderland's most important buildings – the Grade I Listed Holy Trinity Church) and 3 unlisted buildings (although that total does not include the numerous other unlisted buildings in poor condition with urgent repair needs).

- 4.14 Although parts of Old Sunderland and the historic High Streets have benefitted from a whole range of different conservation grant schemes over the past two decades (with some very notable successes), these schemes have not comprehensively addressed the numbers of assets at risk across the area as a whole, nor have they managed to secure the effective revitalisation of this part of the City.
- 4.15 The vision and primary aims of the HAZ seek to address Heritage at Risk and secure wider historic area enhancement, delivering demonstrable heritage-led economic growth to support the City's Economic Masterplan. The secondary aims and outcomes are focused more on promoting the area's heritage and Old Sunderland, in particular, as a heritage destination.
- 4.16 Its Delivery Plan, which has been developed by its five partners, envisages that the primary aims of the HAZ will be achieved by a critical mass of conservation projects for buildings at risk along the environs of High Street and Fawcett Street, delivered (with support and services from Historic England and other partners) through grants, surveys and feasibility work, and enforcement action support. This will deliver building improvements, re-use of vacant floorspace, inward investment and job creation to support sustainable economic growth and conservation area improvements. Research Projects (including an Historic Area Assessment and selective individual historic building assessments) will enhance understanding of the HAZ's historic environment and lead to some enhanced list descriptions and, potentially, some new listings. These will inform the refinement and completion of the Old Sunderland and Old Sunderland Riverside Conservation Areas Character Appraisal and Management Strategy, and provide activities, events and accessible publications to promote the heritage of Old Sunderland, as well as further informing restoration and conversion schemes.
- 4.17 The HAZ will be delivered through 28 projects. Although this may appear a daunting number, it was pointed out that several have already started, and some are well on the way to completion. At the same time, the recent announcement of the successful Great Places bid, and the Tall Ships Race and City of Culture Bid, give further opportunities for aligning objectives and complementary working.
- 4.18 Mark Taylor made it clear that the City Council recognised that the HAZ can only achieve part of the regeneration of this area and that this initiative is merely one component of the wider strategic planning of this part of the City.
- 4.19 During the walking tour, Matthew McKeague, the Director of Regeneration at the Churches Conservation Trust, and Amanda Gerry, the Coordinator of "The Canny Space" project, explained the ambitious plans for the Grade I Listed Holy Trinity Church, a building which was partially closed in 2014 and is now cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust. Although over half-a-million pounds have been spent already on conservation works, it still is in an extremely poor state of repair. 2019 will mark the 300th anniversary of the Church and, by then, it is hoped that the building will have been repaired and adapted into *The Canny*

Space, a new venue for culture, heritage and learning, which also celebrates 300 years of Sunderland's history through stories, fun, and immersive experiences. The Panel had been informed of the thriving music scene in Sunderland and *The Canny Space* aims to provide a multi-purpose venue for spoken word, theatre, and music. Dave Stewart, originally from Sunderland and best known as being half of the Eurythmics, has been appointed as its Creative Director. The Panel were told that, in 2015, the HLF gave a Stage 1 Approval, in principle, for £4.2m towards the project (of which some £4m is towards the costs of repairs to the building) and that a Stage 2 Application is in the process of being submitted later this year.

- 4.20 Although Holy Trinity Church is a unique space in Sunderland, the project fully accepts the significant challenges that there are in encouraging audiences to actually come to it - it is even further removed from the City Centre than the Exchange Building (the other big venue in this part of the city). However, the Business Plan recognises that it will be a long-term project to build up its audience.

5 Panel Analysis

- 5.1 The Urban Panel were struck by how fascinating a City Sunderland is, what a rich and diverse historic environment it possesses, and what a lot it has to offer. It was so uplifting to come across a place whose Members, Officers and local community were so obviously (and quite rightly) proud of their heritage. They were greatly impressed at how successful the City has been in not just rebuilding the local economy following the decline of its traditional industries but also in establishing itself on a far more stable economic footing than it was before. They were struck by the strong leadership provided by the City Council, its "can do" attitude, and its enviable record of being able to lever-in funding both to assist the City's economic regeneration and towards the repair and reuse of its historic assets. The Panel commended the Council on their appreciation of and commitment to the City's historic environment. The design and execution of the public realm works that the Panel had seen during their walking tour were very impressive and will undoubtedly make an appreciable difference to people's experience and perceptions of the City Centre, and the Council's emphasis on promoting high-quality design is to be applauded. The Panel were also very pleased to come across a local planning authority whose Conservation Team sits within its Regeneration Section – an increasingly rare occurrence these days – which no doubt helps to explain why heritage-led regeneration is so firmly embedded as an element in the City's wider economic strategy.
- 5.2 However, it is clearly evident that, despite the wider economic successes of Sunderland as a whole, its City Centre is incredibly fragile, the communities at its eastern end are still some of the most deprived in the Country, and the decades of grant schemes that have been targeted at the area around its

historic High Streets have been unable to comprehensively address either the problems of its incredibly-fractured historic environment or secure the revitalisation of the wider area.

- 5.3 The relationship of the HAZ to the City Centre - As has often been their experience in visits to other places, the Panel considered that it was virtually impossible to consider the future of HAZ area without some consideration, from the outset, of how this part of Sunderland relates to the wider City Centre.
- 5.4 One of the most notable things the Panel observed about the City Centre was its lack of, what might be termed, “Cityness” - that is to say, it does not feel very much like a “City”. Whilst the Unitary Authority might well be the biggest City by population in the North East, Sunderland is, in effect, a collection of smaller places and the main built-up area is, actually, quite small. This perception of a lack of City feel is not helped by the fact that the City Centre, itself, is very fragmented – a theatre area in the west, a cinema area in the east, two university campus one on the western side of the City Centre the other in Monkwearmouth, and the University Halls of Residence marooned at its far eastern edge. The Panel recognises that there is a need for current strategies to be more joined-up in order to unify the City Centre.
- 5.5 In 2010, *The Sunderland Economic Masterplan* noted that the percentage of jobs in Sunderland City Centre, especially in the office sector, was almost half that of its rival Newcastle. This lack of expenditure was considered to be having a notable impact upon the vitality and viability of the City Centre. From what the Panel had heard from Les Clark, seven-years later, despite all the considerable investment taking place across the City, this position does not appear to have changed a great deal and it still seems to be the case that very few office developments are happening within the heart of the settlement.
- 5.6 Consequently, with a resident population of less only 3,000 or so people, Sunderland City Centre does not have the critical mass of people either living or working locally necessary to support the scale, quality, vibrancy and variety of uses that one would expect to find within a Regional City of this size. The position is compounded by the fact that a significant proportion of its population look to Newcastle and to Gateshead’s Metro Centre, for their retail and leisure needs. From what numerous guests told Panel Members over the dinner, it seems that that people of Sunderland tend not to choose their own City Centre first.
- 5.7 For most places, a University Campus with some 15,000 students within walking distance of its City Centre would, if not quite, guarantee the economic success of its retail and leisure economy but certainly go a long way to sustaining it. However, in the case of Sunderland, with a fifth of its students coming from overseas (who, apparently, do not engage very much with the City Centre) and a further 6,000 who live at home, there is significantly less spend from this source than one might normally expect.

- 5.8 With the possibility of two exciting new performance venues opening in Old Sunderland and more activity at its eastern end, the HAZ has the potential to inject some of the vitality and buzz currently missing from the City Centre and to encourage Sunderland's residents to make more use of their own City Centre.
- 5.9 However, the economic success of these venues and the creation of a part of the City attractive and interesting enough to encourage people to want to visit, invest in, and live (and actually feel comfortable walking through) is not something which the HAZ can deliver on its own. What goes on along the area around Sunderland's historic High Streets and at the East End has to form part of a wider strategy for the City Centre aimed at making the City Centre a place which people want to visit, use and, especially, start to live in once again. Indeed, the Panel considered it absolutely imperative that Sunderland does whatever it can to encourage its City Centre to become seen as a desirable place to live.
- 5.10 Whilst the various Projects identified in the Delivery Plan might well result in many of the heritage assets in this part of the City being brought back in to use, if what goes on in Old Sunderland is not part of a wider strategy for the City Centre, as a whole, then the Heritage Action Zone, on its own, is unlikely to achieve the wider revitalisation of the eastern end of Sunderland that is hoped for. If connectivity (and, in particular, severance issues) between the HAZ area and the wider City Centre are not addressed, then the HAZ is unlikely to succeed.
- 5.11 It is not just about the regeneration of the HAZ area, but rather about the revival of the City Centre. Indeed, if the areas adjacent to the western periphery of the HAZ do not encourage people to visit them or live in them, then how much more challenging is it to get them to venture even further eastwards into an area with an even more fractured and uninviting townscape.
- 5.12 The need for a strategy for the City Centre - The HAZ Delivery Plan recognises that the success of the HAZ will depend upon the extent to which its heritage aims can be integrated with other Policies and programmes which are seeking to regenerate this area. However, it is not clear what mechanism, if any, exists which will effectively tie the HAZ and all these other programmes together. There are a considerable number of different funding initiatives being drawn into and around Old Sunderland and several policy documents and strategies guiding investment and regeneration of the other bits of the City Centre. But what programmes and strategies exist to weave all this activity together?
- 5.13 Sunderland City Council is investing very heavily in the western side of the City Centre, but what is its strategy for its east end? How can east-west connectivity be improved between the cultural activities in Bishopwearmouth and those proposed in Old Sunderland? And how do the residential areas at the East End and Hendon become better linked to, and feel less disconnected from, the

remainder of the City Centre? Moreover, how do you develop a top-down strategy with bottom-up initiatives?

- 5.14 There is a need for a document which pulls all this activity around the City Centre together. This needs to set out, firstly, a holistic vision for the City Centre (establishing what it is that all the various initiatives, interventions and strategies taking place around it will aim to achieve). Secondly it needs to provide a framework which will help to co-ordinate not just the activities in the area of the historic High Streets and Old Sunderland but also the other measures necessary to secure the revitalisation of the of Sunderland City Centre and make it a place which people want to use, visit, live in and invest.
- 5.15 The Heritage Action Zone - It would probably not be too unfair to say that, with the exception of a few isolated pockets, much of the historic character of the historic High Streets has gone. Indeed, looking across at this part of the City from Monkwearmouth (as the Panel were able to do on the second day of their visit) they wondered just how many people would actually realise that they are looking at one of the most historic parts of Sunderland. Whilst there are some extremely interesting and, indeed delightful, historic buildings dotted around the Heritage Action Zone, apart from the buildings in the Sunnyside Conservation Area, by and large, its historic environment is so disjointed and fractured that it does not look or feel like “Old Sunderland”. However, having said this, this part of Sunderland is fundamental to the understanding and appreciation of the growth of what was, once, one of the country’s major industrial powerhouses and it is absolutely right that the rare survivals from its past are repaired and brought back into active use, and that the urban fabric of what is, despite its losses, still an area with tremendous character, is stitched back together. Perhaps most importantly, it is an area which has numerous very active community groups all incredibly proud of the heritage of their local area. Utilising this strong community spirit can help drive the regeneration and revitalisation of this area.
- 5.16 The HAZ is the latest in a long line of initiatives in this area aimed at tackling the repair needs of its numerous historic buildings and delivering a wider program of heritage-led regeneration. Whilst there have, clearly, been many successes – and the Panel saw several of these during their visit (including the building in which they dined) - these initiatives have never really achieved all that was hoped of them. Part of the reason could lie in the fact that, because this area was a Conservation Area, in the past, its problems had been attempted to be addressed using, what might be termed, a “traditional” Conservation Area approach. Given the range and severity of some of the challenges facing this part of Sunderland, such an approach was only ever likely to solve a percentage of its problems. Whilst the HAZ is, admittedly, proposing a wider, more-encompassing approach than any of the past grant schemes, nevertheless, a large proportion of the Delivery Plan still seems to be focused on tackling a few target buildings. The Panel were concerned that if the Delivery Plan of the HAZ is based upon very much the same approach as has been used before, it will, like previous grant schemes, not achieve the wider regeneration

that is hoped of it. Whilst the “traditional” Conservation Area approaches will probably sort out the problems facing Fawcett Street and deliver some of the repairs that the historic buildings elsewhere might need, it is unlikely to be able to tackle the wider challenges facing this part of Sunderland.

5.17 The HAZ is not a cohesive area. In fact, this part of Sunderland needs to be thought of as a number of distinct sub-areas each of which has its own character, its own challenges and, as a result, each of which demands a different approach:-

- (1) Fawcett Street and High Street West as far as Frederick Street - This is an area of considerable architectural and historic character and is close enough to the main retail core that it has the potential to, once again, become a more up-market, niche retail area. In this part of the HAZ, it is a case of trying to better-connect the ground-floor commercial units to their upper floors, the reintroduction of some of the vertical rhythm (through the introduction more appropriate shopfronts), removing discordant signage, encouraging residential use of the upper floors, and enhancement of the public realm. Here, many of the Projects set out in the HAZ Delivery Plan can be the catalysts which help change perceptions about this area drive investor confidence in this part of the City..
- (2) The area between High Street West/Frederick Road and the A1018 - This is area where the historic environment is considerably more fractured. Although the HAZ is likely to be able to tackle many of the issues facing its isolated groups of historic buildings, solving the wider problems of this area is something that is only likely to be addressed through other mechanisms. Essentially, this area is a urban design/Masterplan challenge involving, in the main, stitching back together the fragmented urban fabric.
- (3) The Riverside and area south of High Street East - Again, whilst the HAZ can help to secure the future of this area’s heritage assets, this is an area which demands a more comprehensive strategy aimed at increasing the attractiveness and vitality of the waterfront, addressing the dead frontages, enhancing the quality of the public realm and, especially, improving north-south connectivity between the riverside and the East End.
- (4) The area north of High Street East, around Holy Trinity Church and the Town Moor - Part of the approach to this area should be based upon traditional Conservation Area solutions (not least of which should be improving the setting of Holy Trinity Church and Phoenix Lodge and reconnecting the Parish Church to the Town Moor) but it should also be about using the area’s heritage as a focus for community regeneration.

5.18 Although the HAZ does, admittedly, include Projects which seek to engage with the local community groups in this part of the City, the Delivery Plan does,

nonetheless, give the impression of being something of a top-down strategy. Consideration also needs to be given about how the HAZ might assist in motivating and empowering the wider local community to become engaged in the future of this area. It is clear from groups such as those who ran the Donnison School and the Phoenix Lodge that the local community is engaged with, and incredibly proud of, their heritage. This seems a likely area to be fertile ground for bottom-up solutions and considerably more needs to be made of the many tiny community sparks around this part of the City. However, there is also a wider community living to the south of the HAZ which is considerably less engaged and getting them involved in the future of this area might be considerably more problematic.

- 5.19 In the first instance, therefore, there is a need to better-understand the different community groups living, working and operating in and around the HAZ area. These groups offer a tremendous resource, a wealth of possible connections, and a community energy which can help to deliver the revitalisation of this part of the City. One of the contributions which Historic England should make towards the delivery of the HAZ is to use its Research and Community Engagement expertise to explore what other initiatives have succeeded elsewhere, and to map, understand and set out a strategy for engaging with and utilising the energies, knowledge and skills of the communities around the historic High Streets and the East End. A further option which might be used to engage the community in the future of their local area is to use a “charrette”, perhaps along the lines of those which were successfully used in South Ayrshire or by Yorkshire Forward with the local community in Castleford. One of the key roles of the new HAZ Project Officer must be to act as a catalyst to bring all the various players together and to engage the local community in developing the vision, narrative and strategy for this area. In doing this, there is a need to recognise that, for many parts of Old Sunderland there is little physical heritage remaining, so it will be as much focused on intangible or legacy, stories etc, rather than actual buildings.
- 5.20 Sunniside - Unfortunately, the Panel only briefly ventured into Sunniside and it would have been useful to have explored more of the area and its issues in greater detail. Despite all the interventions and expenditure that has been spent on the historic buildings and public realm of this area over the past few years, it is a little concerning that this area still appears to be facing some considerable social challenges. Without these issues being addressed, it could make it considerably more difficult to tackle some of the problems facing the areas to the east of Sunniside which are even more remote from the main City Centre.
- 5.21 Reconnecting Old Sunderland and the East End - One of the biggest challenges facing the regeneration of the eastern part of the City is east-west connectivity and, especially, how one manages to reduce the severance caused by the main road to the Port. High Street East and the remainder of the East End already feels incredibly isolated from the remainder of the City Centre by this incredibly-busy highway, a road which, in its current configuration is a thoroughly unpleasant and challenging road for pedestrians to cross and a disincentive for

anybody at the eastern end of High Street West to venture further eastwards. Whilst the improvement of the connectivity between the Nissan plant and the Port may well bring considerable economic benefits to the City, the potential harm which the upgrading of this route might have upon the perceived remoteness of the East End as well as the regeneration of the HAZ area is particularly worrying. Matthew McKeague, the Director of Regeneration at the Churches Conservation Trust, highlighted the significant challenges he saw in encouraging audiences to come to what is likely to be one of Sunderland's most important performance spaces. How much more challenging will it be if Holy Trinity Church is perceived as being even more cut-off from the City Centre and, for those who might actually walk to it, the experience of getting there even less enjoyable.

- 5.22 The new road to the port needs to consider how pedestrians get across it. There is little point in the City Council putting money into regenerating the historic environment of Old Sunderland through the HAZ if, at the same time, its highway strategy does not also consider how it might also help support the regeneration of the East End. Given the level of support behind it, there is now a very high likelihood that one of the High Street's most intractable problems (170-175 High Street West) will actually be resolved (providing that the ownership issue can be sorted). Its reuse as a recording studio, music venue and record shop seems to be just the type of activity needed to inject some vitality into this important gateway into the City Centre. However, the people most likely to visit these facilities are, in all probability, the students living in the halls of residence on the other side of the main access road to the Port.
- 5.23 There are a number of places around the country which have successfully addressed very similar difficulties and which might provide some useful pointers. In Hull, for example (which is, incidentally, this year's City of Culture) where a considerably-busier dual-carriageway serving a far-larger dock complex severed the two halves of its historic Old Town, as part of the upgrading of this road a new architect-designed pedestrian footbridge was included as a key element of the scheme in order to improve connectivity between the two sides of the road (and is hoped to become a new iconic structure in the City in its own right).
- 5.24 Reconnecting High Street East with High Street West in a manner which compliments the actions and activities that are going to be delivered through the HAZ needs to be an integral consideration of the design for the upgrading of this road.
- 5.25 The future role of the HAZ area - If the Hutchinson's Building can be brought back into use again, if the problems of the Sunnyside area can be addressed, and if the quality of the Fawcett Street is improved (through an enhanced public realm and the introduction of shop fronts and signage which actually take some account of the architectural detailing and character of the upper floors), then it is conceivable this area might start encouraging more up-market, niche retailing. However, it is abundantly clear that the vast majority of the High Street

is never again likely to be a centre of retailing. In a few years' time, it is quite likely, all being well, that it will start to make a significant contribution to the cultural offer of the City Centre. However, how successful it will be at this will very much depend of what happens in the areas which connect, what are likely to be, widely-separated islands of cultural activity.

- 5.26 One of the things which Old Sunderland has in abundance is vacant buildings, underused floorspace, and empty sites. For most places this availability of space is rare (26 miles up the road in Newcastle, for example, artists are struggling to get hold of spaces from which to work). This is what the historic High Streets have to offer. In order to assist the likely success of the emerging venues and other cultural attractions in this area, there is a need to get small businesses to colonise the vacant premises and to create a buzz in this area. Vacant units should be given free or for nominal rents to encourage “meanwhile uses” such as artists’ studios, small music venues, cafes and restaurants, and space to encourage start-up businesses (and help increase the retention rate of graduates from the University). This sort of approach has worked very successfully in many other Cities bringing in at least some rental income from what would, otherwise, be vacant buildings, providing spaces for budding-entrepreneurs to take risks and for artists to work, and attracting people back into previously run-down and depressed parts of the City Centre.
- 5.27 The City of Culture bid could be the trigger that helps establish an artists’ quarter in the High Streets/Old Sunderland area. Indeed, a call could go out nationally - come to Sunderland, help us become City of Culture.
- 5.28 The River - The River Wear is the “glue” that holds the City together and is critical to the success in revitalising this part of Sunderland. However, despite the fact that the river has, for so long, been an intrinsic element of both the historic development of the City and its economic fortunes, the south bank seems almost a forgotten area. It is hardly surprising that nobody seems to use this area - there appeared to no signposts to it, its public realm is poor and uninviting, its incidental areas of open space unkempt and litter-strewn, and the recent largely inward-looking University accommodation prevents effective north-south connectivity and has no active frontages.
- 5.29 In order for people to be encouraged to come to this part of the City and for it to start making a contribution to the vibrancy of the City Centre, the riverside needs to be reanimated, that it to say, there have to be activities and uses taking place here to which people will be willing to make the effort to come and see. In the short-term, it might be simply the erection of temporary structures for things such as pop-up cafes, shops, bars, street festivals and street musicians. The Council should also challenge Tombola to open their proposed staff café and restaurant to the public. In the longer term it could be a maritime museum - Maritime Heritage, apparently, have long-term plans to set up a floating heritage centre and, possibly, a little river taxi. But reanimation is also about making this an area to which people are easily-able to get. Whist it is absolutely imperative that east-west connectivity between the East End and the remainder

of the City Centre is improved, it is just as important that north-south linkages through to the riverside area are enhanced. The riverside should not be simply for those who occupy the offices next to it, but should be about a place for the whole community living around the East End. Its old lanes (such as Bull Lane) should not just be a memory of a vanished past, but should be viewed as essential elements of the future connectivity of this part of the City.

- 5.30 The second thing that has to happen is that the quality of the area needs radically improving. Whilst the Panel fully-appreciated the not-inconsiderable revenue challenges facing the City Council (which have resulted, in part, in the lack of maintenance of the public realm in this area), nevertheless, in the short term consideration needs to be given to exploring the potential of using capital funding towards improving the dispiriting experience which visitors currently have of the riverside area (especially as this is likely to be an area from which people will be viewing the vessels in the Tall Ships Race). Sunderland City Council has a first-class in-house design team who have delivered some exemplary public realm enhancements over the years. Why not set them to work with the local community on the riverside area, particularly on creating pop-up parks and green spaces on some of the unkempt areas of incidental open space dotted across the riverside area? In the longer term, the Council need to produce green space strategy for the riverside.
- 5.31 The emerging Local Plan has to include Policies designed to help regenerate the riverside, to ensure that new developments do not perpetuate what is becoming an area of dead frontages and, in particular, to reduce the likelihood of future major investment in this area (such as any new halls of residence) preventing or blocking future north-south movement.
- 5.32 A long-term, game-changing idea to which Sunderland City Council should give serious consideration is the creation of a new footbridge across the river linking Old Sunderland with the University. There are so many examples around the country (such as the one at Govan) where a new river crossing has been the springboard for the wider regeneration of a City. A bridge would get north-south links working, help the communities south of the river feel less isolated, it would better connect the University halls of residence in Old Sunderland to the main campus, it could assist in increasing visitor numbers both to the National Glass Centre and to the new cultural attractions being delivered at the East End, and be one of the ways of better-animating the riverside area. The University is currently drawing-up plans for the development of the site adjacent to the National Glass Centre. Perhaps this scheme could include a design-competition for the base from which a new bridge on the Monkwearmouth side might be sprung. The Tall Ships Race could be used to generate discussions about a new river crossing.
- 5.33 The Tall ships event - Since the south bank of the river and the Town Moors are places from which from which visitors will be able to see these vessels, the Tall Ships Race next year has huge potential to begin to change the public's perceptions about Old Sunderland and to encourage people, once more, to

venture into this part of the City. However, the riverside area needs to be revitalised and signage into and through this part of Sunderland improved considerably – and not temporary signs but permanent, well-designed signs that make a positive contribution to the quality of the public realm. An improved public realm and landscaping can also be designed to help guide visitors through this area (not to mention greatly improve their experience of the area). In preparation for this, the local community groups should be encouraged to design a heritage trail which can be given to visitors to the City and, possibly, plaques put on the historic buildings of the area.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 Sunderland is an incredibly interesting City with a rich and diverse historic environment. In its fifteen years, the Panel had seen few places where the local authority and local community were obviously so proud of their history and committed to its conservation. However, it is also a place which, despite its recent economic successes, has some incredible challenges, not least of which is a City Centre that does not appear to be a place which a large proportion of Sunderland's community wants to use.
- 6.2 The emerging cultural projects, performance spaces and other initiatives in and around the historic High Streets (not least the Heritage Action Zone), provide a great deal of optimism that this oft-forgotten area to the east of the City Centre will become a vibrant part of the City Centre offer. However, the success of this area is unlikely to be delivered without a number of other elements being in place. These include a clear overarching strategy setting how these various activities are woven together and how what is going on elsewhere in the City Centre can assist in the regeneration of the East End, better connectivity between High Street West and High Street East (which significantly reduces the severance caused by the main road to the Port), the improvement of north-south linkages, and the revitalisation of the riverside (a hugely-important asset whose potential needs to be realised if the regeneration of the eastern end of the City is to be achieved). As long-term game-changing plan, not just for this area but for the City as a whole, the City Council should give serious consideration to the possibility of a new pedestrian footbridge linking the East End of the City with Monkwearmouth.
- 6.3 The HAZ Delivery Plan needs to recognise that this this part of the City is not an homogeneous area, but needs to be thought of as a number of distinct sub-areas each of which has its own character, its own challenges and, as a result, each of which demands a different approach. Whilst the HAZ itself offers a lot more than any previous grant schemes in this part of the City and includes community engagement as one of its themes, it needs to go further and consider how the HAZ might also be used in better-motivating and empowering the wider local community to get engaged in the future of their local area.

6.4 Recommendations

- **There is a need for a Vision for the City Centre and a document which pulls all the various initiatives across the City Centre together** – In order to increase the likelihood of the latest initiatives delivering the regeneration of the historic High Street area and the wider revitalisation of the City Centre there is a need for an overarching strategy which:-
 - Sets out a holistic Vision for the City Centre
 - Provides a framework for the co-ordination of the activities, initiatives and projects proposed in the HAZ area and,
 - Sets out the other measures, such as highway improvements, public realm enhancements, masterplan etc that will be necessary to secure the revitalisation of the historic High Streets area
 - Provides a framework to link together the other schemes, projects and investments happening throughout the City Centre and to ensure that, together, they will deliver a City Centre which, as a whole, is a place which people want to use, visit, live in and invest.
- **The strategy for the that part of the City covered by the Heritage Action Zone needs to be approach it as a number of distinct sub-areas**– In order to maximise the potential of this area in successfully assisting in delivering the regeneration of this part of the City this part of Sunderland needs to be thought of as a number of distinct sub-areas each of which has its own character, its own
- **The HAZ Delivery Plan should consider how it might assist in motivating and empowering the wider local community to become engaged in the future of this area** - Whilst the HAZ does include an element of community engagement, it should explore how it might assist in motivating and empowering the wider local community to become engaged in the future of this area. Therefore:-
 - Historic England should build upon its intention to use its Research and Community Engagement expertise to:-
 - Explore what other community-engagement initiatives have succeeded elsewhere, and
 - Understand, map, and set out a strategy for engaging the communities around the historic High Streets and the East End
- **The social problems facing parts of the Sunnyside Conservation Area need to be addressed** - Sunnyside is an important link between the main retail core and the HAZ area. In order to help deliver the regeneration of the historic High Streets area, the problems facing this Conservation Area need to be addressed as a priority
- **East-west and north-south routes through the HAZ area need improving and the connectivity of the East End with the remainder of the City Centre needs to be addressed** - One of the biggest challenges facing the regeneration of the eastern part of the City is the poor connectivity both within this area itself and with the wider City Centre. Consequently:-

- Reconnecting High Street East with High Street West in a manner which compliments the actions and activities that are going to be delivered through the HAZ needs to be an integral consideration of the design proposals for the upgrading of the main road to the Port.
 - The development strategy for this part of the City needs to ensure that north-south linkages between the housing areas at the East End and the river are enhanced.
-
- **“Meanwhile uses” need to be attracted to High Street West, High Street East and the East End** - In order to assist the likely success of the emerging venues and other cultural attractions in this area, there is a need to get small businesses to colonise the vacant premises and to create a buzz in this area. Therefore:-
 - Vacant units should be given free or for nominal rents to encourage “meanwhile uses” such as artists’ studios, small music venues, cafes and restaurants, and space to encourage start-up businesses
- **The potential of the riverside needs to be realised** - The River is a hugely-important asset whose potential needs to be realised if the regeneration of the eastern end of the City is to be achieved. Key to this is the reanimation of the riverside of the HAZ area. Therefore:-
 - In the short term, consideration should be given to the erection of temporary structures for things such as pop-up cafes, shops, bars, street festivals and street musicians.
 - The Council should also challenge Tombola to open its proposed staff café and restaurant to the public.
 - In the longer term, Maritime Heritage, should be encouraged and helped to develop their proposal for a floating heritage centre and possibly a little river taxi.
 - The emerging Local Plan has to include Policies designed to help regenerate the riverside, to ensure that new developments do not prevent or block easy north-south movement, and to ensure that new buildings do not perpetuate what is becoming an area of dead frontages.
 - A green strategy needs to be produced for the riverside area
 - The strategy for this area needs to explore how north-south connectivity might be improved
 - Sunderland City Council’s in-house design team should be set to work on the riverside area particularly on creating pop-up parks and green spaces on some of the unkempt areas of incidental open space dotted across the riverside area
 - A long-term, game-changing idea to which Sunderland City Council should give serious consideration is the creation of a new footbridge across the river linking Old Sunderland with the University.
- **The Tall Ships Event should be used to change people’s perceptions about Old Sunderland and to encourage people, once more, to venture into this part of the City** - Since the south bank of the river and the Town Moors are places from which visitors will be able to see these vessels. As a result, it has huge potential to change the public’s perceptions of the HAZ area. As part of this:-

- The public realm needs to be improved
 - Local community groups should be encouraged to design a heritage trail which can be given to visitors to the City and
 - Consideration should be given to a programme of introducing plaques on the historic buildings of the area.
- **Consideration should be given to building a new footbridge linking Old Sunderland to Monkwearmouth** - A long-term, game-changing idea to which Sunderland City Council should give serious consideration is the creation of a new footbridge across the river linking Old Sunderland with the University

Historic England's Urban Panel provides expertise to help local authorities, development agencies and others to engage in major regeneration of historic towns and cities. The Members who attended the visit to Sunderland on 24 and 25 May 2017 were:

Mr Charles Wilson - Chair

Mrs Joyce Bridges CBE

Mr Peter Buchan

Ms Sophia De Sousa

Mr Michael Hayes

Mr Julian Hill

Mr John Lord

Mr Peter Studdert

Mr Chris Twinn

Copies of this and previous Panel Reports can be found at:-
<https://historicengland.org.uk/about/who-we-are/committees-and-panels/urban-panel/review-papers/>