

Conservation Area Developer Case Study – The Malings, North East and Tees Valley: Developed by Igloo

Background

Igloo have existed in the development sector for over a decade. The organisation has £1.2 billion completed and pipeline projects, for 40 communities, across 12 different cities. They have won a number of awards within a range of categories including; ‘Best Sustainable Development’, ‘Residential Development of the Year’ and ‘Award for promoting Economic Growth’.

The Malings development in the Ouseburn Valley, Newcastle upon Tyne is one of their major successes, winning the ‘Housing Design’ award in 2016 and the ‘RIBA North East’ awards in 2017. The Malings development is street-based urban community housing, facing the Ouseburn Valley River. It consists of 76 eco-friendly homes with communal areas such as gardens and bicycle stalls.



The Malings, Newcastle upon Tyne. ©Jill Tate

The Conservation Area

Lower Ouseburn Valley Conservation Area (designated in October 2000) contains one Grade II* listed building (Ouseburn School) and 9 Grade II listed buildings. The Hadrian’s Wall World Heritage Site also runs through the conservation area.

The Valley forms one of the main cradles of the Industrial Revolution on Tyneside and consequently is rich in industrial heritage. Since the 17th century the area has supported a variety of glass-works, lead, iron, soap, lime works, mills and later, potteries, which by the

late 19th century stood next to housing beneath the rail and road bridges. Although much has been demolished or changed, there remains substantial physical evidence of the past. The valley is also identified as being part of a wildlife corridor and is considered to be of moderate ecological value.

Interview with David Roberts, Director, Igloo

Do you feel that the Malings development has been different because it is in a conservation area compared with other developments not in a conservation area?

‘Working on a development in the Lower Ouseburn Valley Conservation Area has been beneficial in a number of ways: Fundamentally the Conservation Area has protected, and must continue to protect, the sense of distinctiveness. We are accelerating the development of the urban village that has evolved over time and it is important that we and all other developers are held to account for the various impacts that our developments will have. On some issues the need to “make the case” for our proposals has required a greater amount of research and analysis than would otherwise have been necessary. This serves to deepen the dialogue with stakeholders, which is also beneficial’.

From your experience, what are the advantages and disadvantages of undertaking a development in a conservation area?

‘The principal of conservation areas can work well for us in so far as it is founded on valuing place and place-heritage, which are elements that we look to draw on as differentiators.

Where this can fall down is when individual conservation officers / statutory consultees interpret conservation to mean the preservation of everything and the prevention of new. That has not been the case with the Ouseburn sites. In fact it may be that the greater amount of experienced and expert practitioners that comment on schemes in conservation areas becomes increasingly advantageous, compared to other areas where the diminishing resource of skilled urban designers available to planning authorities means that discourse on a scheme’s merits is more limited.

The Conservation Area status places on us a requirement to give additional consideration to preserving the significance of the area, and in the case of the Ouseburn we identified this significance in a rich record of the area’s industrial past. With the help of the local amenity groups we quickly understood its roots in the coal, glass and pottery industries that have shaped the area since the C17. Its dramatic topography combined with the compact configuration of buildings and streetscapes is intimate and distinctive, creating a strong sense of place and individuality which our architects were able to work with through thoughtful integration with the historic environment and high-quality, original design’.

“Good growth” refers to a wider range of social, wellbeing and environmental benefits in addition to purely economic outcomes. Do you think the Malings development has helped to achieve good growth in the area?

‘Our developments are planned within and tested against our Footprint(R) policy which includes significant measures of social and environmental benefit. It states that, because successful urban areas incorporate buildings of different eras, attempts should be made to retain existing buildings on site of heritage value. The Malings had no buildings on the site when we commenced development, but the design and layout of the scheme, and its respectful relationship with neighbouring sites, was greatly informed by the Lower Ouseburn Valley Conservation Area Character Statement’.

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