

Case study for Heritage Counts 2015

Theme demonstrated by case study:	Making development commercially viable
Name of project/group:	Green Man
Location:	Ashbourne, Derbyshire
Duration (if applicable):	2014
HEF member who provided case study:	Historic England

Short description of project

The Grade II* Green Man is a focal point for Ashbourne's famous Shrovetide football match and was a much loved local venue until its recent decline. Now an imaginative conversion scheme is set to breathe new life into the town. With new retail and internet units completed, work has begun to create a new pub, boutique hotel and new-build bistro.



The Green Man (Image: © Darren Archer, Channel Design).

The owner, local businessman Colin Wright, wanted to make the Green Man 'a venue the town could be proud of'. The project was commercially funded, but given that the previous business struggled to achieve a sustainable level of investment, innovative uses would need to be developed in order for the scheme to stack up financially.

The owner engaged local architects Channel Design, who in turn sought specialist advice from conservation architects Brownhill Hayward Brown. The local planning authority, Derbyshire Dales District Council, and Historic England, assisted with Colin's search for a business formula which would make the building more profitable while also safeguarding its historic character. The solution illustrates how, with dialogue and a little imagination, historic character can become a key ingredient which releases long-term profitability.

What would have happened without this project/group?

Before Colin took it over, the Green Man had begun to decline, to the extent that it had been attracting poor reviews on TripAdvisor. The building had begun to show signs of a long-term lack of investment. The hotel occupies a crucial location at the heart of this small picturesque town, and in its deteriorated condition had a negative effect on overall experience that visitors had.

One of the lessons from work in historic areas at risk of decline is that disrepair in one or two key buildings has to be 'nipped in the bud' to prevent a downward spiral of business confidence, visitor numbers and property values affecting the whole area. If this conspicuous building's condition were allowed to deteriorate further, it could have increased the vulnerability of the town centre as a whole.

Equally such a sensitive location required a sensitive 'recovery plan'. It would have been possible for the hotel to be renovated in a way which was visually unsympathetic to the 18th and 19th century environs of the Market Place, and obscured the historic identity of Ashbourne as a coaching stop. The effect of ill-conceived development could have been as harmful to the vitality of Ashbourne as continued neglect.

How did the project achieve its objectives?

The Green Man is at the heart of the Ashbourne, visually, historically and culturally. It was clear from the outset that if the scheme was to be successful – for the building, the owner and the wider town of Ashbourne – it would need to reveal fully and celebrate its historic significance and character.

A design process was adopted which started with gaining a sound understanding of the building. In fact like many historic coaching inns the Green Man is a complex of buildings which has grown and changed over time, reflecting the developing story of Ashbourne.

Conservation architect Peter Brownhill undertook a survey of the site and consulted historic maps and photographs. This enabled him to identify the ages and stages of construction, and establish the relative significance of the numerous elements. In the course of his investigations a range of structural problems and leaks came to light.

This research gave Darren Archer an understanding of which aspects of the building were most crucial to its heritage value, which needed repair, and which could be altered or demolished without losing heritage value. That understanding in turn enabled him to develop design solutions to meet his client's brief.

What difference has it made? Main outcomes and outputs.

To take advantage of the building's main frontage, two new retail units were opened in ground-floor spaces either side of the main coachway, which had previously been bars. The first tenant, occupying 4500 sq ft, is a premium designer fashion retailer for women and men, stocking over 60 designer brands. Young Ideas made a successful move from a smaller shop 100 yards away and has seen trade increase by 40%, and has also won three nationally prestigious awards. The second tenant occupying 700 sq ft is an expanding lifestyle clothing and homeware store. Less visible but equally important are an internet sportsbra and childrens clothing business with 3400 sq ft on the first floor, an office (600 sq ft) and a self employed physio.

The building's tradition of hospitality is to be continued in three distinct businesses – a new 80 cover family gastro pub with a theatre style kitchen and outside courtyard seating, a 9 bed boutique hotel overlooking St John Street and a new contemporary looking 35 cover bistro due to open in time for Christmas will face south across the car park. Discussions with potential tenants are well progressed.

What were the main lessons learnt or challenges? Would anything be done differently?

The owner, architect and project manager met with Derbyshire Dales District Council and Historic England. At the time the Council held planning surgeries at Ashbourne Leisure Centre and other locations round the district. To the architect these meetings were invaluable and 'saved weeks of work'. He recommends that in projects like this, such a meeting should be held as early as possible in the process. The meetings were also helpful in dispelling misconceptions that listing was a 'problem', and in harnessing the building's historic significance for the benefit of the project.

However, he recognises that the capacity for local authorities to engage with pre-application discussion is under pressure, with many now charging for meetings. The squeeze on public sector capacity is likely to affect perceptions of the planning system among those who use it.

What is the future for the case study?

In effect eight businesses are set to be created where previously there was one, and employment is expected to rise by over 60 people. This regeneration was achieved without the benefit of public funding, but through a partnership approach between owner, architects and regulators.

Read more at: <http://www.ashbournenewstelegraph.co.uk/Green-Man-pub-plans-brewing/story-26002200-detail/story.html#ixzz3hkubunrT>

The Green Man was featured in Historic England's *Highlights* publication, marking its launch in 2015 and showcasing new projects in which it was engaged.

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