



NEWCASTLE **NE1** BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT COMPANY

Background

Established in 2009, Newcastle NE1 focuses on the city centre and the economic growth of Newcastle as a European regional capital.

NE1's approach to place branding

NE1 is commercially-focussed and continually seeks to maximise the value of local assets. Heritage is a unique selling point and attracts businesses. The BID engages with built heritage projects with a focus on economic impact. Newcastle's historic environment is a strength; medieval town walls, the elegant early nineteenth century architecture of Grainger Town, and the iconic Tyne Bridge.

City centre rents are more expensive than out of town and the BID promotes the added value offered by the city centre as North East England's regional capital. Heritage, retail and culture contribute to this value. One of NE1's roles is to work to ensure that these assets encourage more people to live and/or work in the city centre. NE1 has identified that aspirational businesses often view heritage as an asset. These include upmarket retailers seeking a high street frontage and leisure businesses tapping into lifestyle trends, such as café culture.

NE1's use of heritage in place branding

Heritage is integrated into capital projects and events. The city's built heritage provides the setting for an annual motor show around Grey's Monument and Grainger Town and the iconic river frontage hosts the Zapcat grand prix. The intention is to provide a quality offer that complements the restaurants and museums. The BID has a broad view of heritage; "not as a singular pursuit and also not as pastiche. In our view heritage is constantly evolving..."

NE1, working with Network Rail, Newcastle City Council, successfully applied for Regional Growth Fund funding to regenerate Central Station, a Grade 1 listed building, and its surrounding area. For the BID it was important to create a sense of arrival after crossing the River Tyne gorge. The station is the gateway to the city, and has strong heritage connections; George Stephenson built his first steam engine nearby. The project has led to additional private capital investment in the area and the incremental development of the Stephenson Quarter behind Central Station.

The Bigg Market, formerly the site of Newcastle's Town Hall and with 31 listed buildings, had been in steady decline for some time. The BID saw significant value in

reversing this decline though improving the quality of business activity. A Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) application of £1.6m was approved in September 2016 and work is expected to start in spring 2017. The Bigg Market project contributes to creating a "heritage spine" along with the Cathedral and the Castle. NE1 has previously worked with the Cathedral and Newcastle City Council to improve the public realm outside the Cathedral, creating an open, welcoming space for people to use and drawing more visitors to the Cathedral. The Cathedral is planning further development for which it is seeking HLF support and the Castle has recently completed a capital programme supported by HLF.

The benefits of place branding and heritage

NE1 sees return on investment as key. To date, the Bigg Market project has stimulated private investment of £5m improving building interiors, opening new businesses, and increasing residential lettings. The focus is on retail and leisure businesses, therefore footfall is important with a target for year-on-year growth. This is also hugely important in creating an attractive commercial environment to stimulate demand for office space located in the upper floors of the buildings in the area. Other impact measures are reductions in vacant properties, increased revenue received by Newcastle City Council through business rates, and, from a heritage perspective, an increased number of buildings safeguarded.

"Today's consumer is very market savvy and if a brand is constructed from scratch they are suspicious, using heritage brings credibility and authenticity to the offer... Few people know the Bigg Market was the site of the former town hall...this gives depth, sincerity and credibility to the brand. Heritage shouldn't be seen as just bricks and rafters, isolated from its context, geography and society, it is about living places. Heritage has a huge part in the narrative and provides context for places."



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