

newcastle: 21st century city

A straight forward approach to key challenges is behind Newcastle's ongoing regeneration.

"First, cities have to identify their assets and make them work hard in the global economy," says Newcastle City Council's assistant chief executive, Paul Rubinstein. "At the same time they must address internal and external perceptions by building a positive brand that is backed by real action; and the third part of the holy trinity, as it were, is a genuine ownership of the regeneration process by a wide range of stakeholders and communities.

"I would argue strongly that you can't have a successful economy without the right infrastructure and without people having a sense of optimism. But investing in the physical fabric is not enough. You need a strong and positive economic base."

Of course, Rubinstein would be the first to acknowledge that the practical implementation of his "holy trinity" is far from simple. But judging by the smart Quayside, flourishing cultural offer and leading business sectors, Newcastle, Gateshead and the surrounding city region have made huge progress. Words associated with Newcastle 20 years ago included dirty, declining and old. These days the words cultural, innovative and young are more likely to spring to mind. It acts as the core city within a wide conurbation of one million people and has the confidence associated with a regional capital.

But there is still room for improvement, as Rubinstein concedes: "We've still got a way to go. For example, our company formation rate could be better and some of the sectors in which we excel need to be strengthened." To this end, Newcastle City Council, with its private sector partners, is promoting a number of regeneration schemes including Science City, the Discovery Quarter, Newcastle Great Park and Ouseburn Valley to improve the city's economic profile and performance.

Population loss – mainly to other areas of the North East – is another of the city's major challenges. Lack of housing choice has been identified as one of the main factors behind the depopulation. The need for more family housing is being addressed at Newcastle Great Park and Walker Riverside, to name just two of the city's new residential schemes. "Newcastle Great Park is one of the largest developments in Europe and will have a significant impact on the region by keeping people in the area and offering an easier lifestyle where everything is on your doorstep," says regional director of Persimmon Homes, Peter Jordan.

right:
art on the quayside and cafe
culture outside the theatre royal

below:
the millennium bridge over the
river tyne attracts many visitors



Charting Newcastle's regeneration story is illuminating. "I would take as a starting point the decision by Northumbria Water in the 1980s to invest significant resources over a long period in cleaning up the River Tyne," says Rubinstein. That was the catalyst, along with the remediation of land for the Gateshead Garden Festival in 1990, for the creation of our now vibrant riverside and all of the great residential, commercial and cultural developments we have there today.

"It also addressed people's aspirations. You have to remember that this was a city associated with industrial decline. Residents, businesses and investors were lacking in confidence. Was this a city where you could make a go of it? If you went to university here, would you want to stay? There were lots of doubts and questions. That is why creating iconic projects such as the Angel of the North, the Centre for Life, the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art and the Sage Gateshead were so important as they delivered the unthinkable. The NewcastleGateshead Initiative has been key to growing our aspirations."

Partnerships have been crucial to marketing Newcastle, both internally and to the wider world. Anne Mulroy, director of Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder Bridging NewcastleGateshead says: "So much has been achieved in regenerating Newcastle because we are working together. Our partners include local authorities, agencies and private sector partners. We are also committed to engaging effectively with local residents and listening to their views on how we can bring lasting change to their communities." The NewcastleGateshead Initiative (NGI) was founded between the neighbouring councils in 2000 to promote the city region jointly for the first time. It has a board of directors that includes representatives of the business community. "I know it's a cliché but we realised we could achieve more together," says Rubinstein. "Local authority boundaries don't mean very much in terms of the economy," he adds, observing that the Sage Gateshead's location south of the Tyne "was clearly the most suitable place for such an ambitious project" even though it serves both Newcastle and Gateshead, as well as the wider region and further afield.

NGI chief executive Andrew Dixon agrees: "Quite simply, NGI would not exist were it not for the continuing commitment and shared aims of both Newcastle and Gateshead councils." He cites future goals as increasing tourism figures and building on the conurbation's reputation for unique world-class events.

In May last year, regional development agency One NorthEast launched a national marketing campaign with the tagline "Passionate People, Passionate Places". Chief executive Alan Clarke says: "How our region is perceived both within the North East and externally is vitally important to our success and economic prosperity. Quite simply, if North East England is to achieve the regional, national and international recognition that it deserves, we must significantly increase awareness of our superb assets, unique selling points and many successes."

below:
the sage gateshead



"Investment in the 21st Century is based on intellectual assets," Rubinstein continues. One of the city's chief asset is arguably its wealth of world class scientific and technological research and businesses. From cutting edge advances in the fields of ageing and stem cell research at the Centre for Life, to the achievements of the city's universities, to the phenomenal rise of home grown software company Sage Group Plc, the knowledge sector has become one of Newcastle's USPs.

This was acknowledged in 2004 when Newcastle was awarded Science City status and a share, along with two other cities, of £100 million by chancellor Gordon Brown. The Newcastle Science City Partnership was formed between One NorthEast, Newcastle City Council and Newcastle University, supported by the NHS Primary Care Trust, institutions such as the Centre for Life and the local business community. Paul Walker, chief executive of software company Sage Group Plc, is chairing the partnership.

"Newcastle and the wider region can boast some very high quality universities, delivering cutting edge research and educating the scientists of tomorrow," he says. "We have numerous sci-tech, start-up and incubator businesses and a track record of responding innovatively to change."

The Partnership recently purchased 5.9 hectares of the Scottish & Newcastle Breweries site in the city centre with ambitious plans to develop Science Central, a powerful knowledge cluster for scientific research, teaching and businesses. But this won't be just another enclosed business park (see pages 17 to 19). The vision for Science Central is a 24-hour mixed-use integrated city quarter.

"The passion in Newcastle is second to none," Walker observes. "People here really believe in the region and its capabilities – you only have to look at the rapid regeneration of Newcastle Quayside, which now boasts a vista on a par with any other city in the world, to see what the people here are capable of. "All the foundations are here in the region and the Science City initiative is all about developing these skills and qualities in a way that will bring more jobs, boost the economy, enhance the city's reputation and develop science, technology and innovation in our schools and colleges."

Design, another sector in which Newcastle and the city region excels, is again something of a catch-all. "This covers everything from urban design to product design, to our strengths in fashion and the creative industries," says Rubinstein. "Newcastle is a brilliantly designed city and that great architectural tradition continues today." The iPod music player was the brainchild of a Northumbria University graduate and, through its regeneration of the historic Ouseburn Valley to the east of the city, the council intends to boost the city's flourishing creative industries.

In recent years, Ouseburn has been quietly attracting arts, crafts and multi-media businesses to its converted post-industrial factories and buildings. By capitalising on the area's aquatic location and proximity to central Newcastle, the city council hopes to deliver 28,000 square metres of new and refurbished workspace, including live/work units, and new residential and leisure attractions along with around 600 new jobs.

Located on the Ouseburn Valley riverside, Seven Stories the Centre for Children's Books, was opened last year by author Jacqueline Wilson. Tourism is big business for the city, with 2.5 million visitors generating an estimated £550 million annually. The conference market alone, which has trebled since 2002, is now worth £75 million a year. As a tourist



right:
china town in the discovery quarter

below:
ellipsis eclipses, a landmark sculpture
situated outside the gate, grainger town



destination, Newcastle was recently voted "best city to visit in England" by "Guardian/Observer" readers. It's not difficult to see why: the city is synonymous with fun, boasting a plethora of restaurants, bars and clubs, a fantastic retail offer (see pages 27 to 31), art galleries and cultural attractions including the Baltic, the Sage Gateshead, Theatre Royal and the Discovery Museum. All this is surrounded by some of the UK's most stunning countryside.

Ultimately, Newcastle's regeneration is about making the city a better place to live, work and visit. The constraints of the past have been, or are being, tackled to entice businesses and residents to the area and to improve the prospects of those already there. At around five per cent, unemployment is still above the national average. "Fundamentally, regeneration is about improving quality of life for all of our residents," says Rubinstein. "Job creation is really important. Our vision is for a high skill economy but with entry points at all levels and training to support this. In science, you need people with doctorates, yes, but you also need lab assistants."

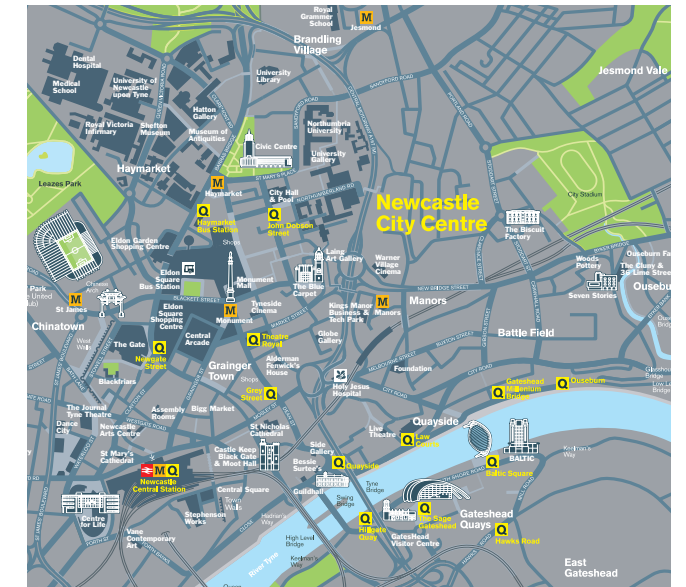
Newcastle City Council is targeting deprived areas to ensure that benefits are shared. Scotswood in the west end (see page 50) hopes to host an international housing expo, the UK's first, in 2009. Demonstrating cutting edge approaches to urban living, the expo will provide the catalyst for developing around 1,500 new residential units and a new community in this deprived area.

The need for improved housing choice, especially at the top end of the market, is also being addressed with 4,500 new homes planned at the Newcastle Great Park and Walker Riverside schemes (see pages 45 to 49 and 33 to 37, respectively). Mary Parsons, business development director of Places for People, which is a developer partner on the latter project, says the company had "no hesitation" in making a 15 year commitment to Walker Riverside.

It seems that Newcastle's target of growing its population from 270,000 to 286,000 by 2020 is realistic. Two statistics shine through: Northumbria University has a graduate retention rate of over 50 per cent and, for the first time in 30 years, the area has seen a reversal in migration trends with more people coming into than leaving the region. The city's renaissance is well under way.

10 things you might not know about Newcastle

1. Seven bridges link Newcastle and Gateshead.
2. The city centre has more listed Georgian buildings than anywhere else in England other than Bath.
3. The song "She Loves You" was composed by John Lennon and Paul McCartney in The Imperial Hotel in Jesmond.
4. Around 600 bottles of Newcastle Brown Ale are brewed every minute.
5. Newcastle United record victory came against Newport County winning 13-0 on October 5th 1946.
6. Property prices increased by 30 per cent in 2003 alone.
7. The Focus Retail Demand Report 2005 ranked the city number one for prime shop demand from leading retailers.
8. The Gateshead Millennium Bridge won the RIBA Stirling Prize for Building of the Year in 2002.
9. Mosley Street was the first in Britain to be lit by electricity.
10. Earl Grey tea originated from Ringtons in Newcastle.



above:
newcastle's action packed city centre

below:
shopping on grey street, grainger town

Success story: Grainger Town

Confidence in Newcastle's massive regeneration programme is supported by what the city has already achieved. "In terms of addressing the physical regeneration there have been marked achievements of national significance," says English Partnerships area director Steve Gawthorpe. "I would highlight the work at Grainger Town and the Quayside, along with the partnership between Newcastle and Gateshead."

Chief among Newcastle's regeneration success stories is Grainger Town. Designed by John Dobson in the 1830s, it was once one of the smartest areas in the city in which to live, work and visit. But by the 1990s, Grainger Town was in steep decline. In 1997, with over half of the area's beautiful listed buildings classed as "at risk", and almost 100,000 square metres of vacant floorspace, Newcastle City Council embarked on a £120 million regeneration programme. Project Director Chris Oldershaw (now overseeing Gloucester's regeneration) professed himself "daunted" by the 35 hectare task.

Nine years on, with around 200 apartments boasting some of the highest values in the city, alongside theatres, galleries, a thriving retail offer, sought after commercial space and The Gate leisure complex, Oldershaw's fears have been allayed. Grainger Town has also gained critical acclaim, winning the British Urban Regeneration Association (BURA) best practice award in 2001. "The area is being transformed in a way that would not have seemed possible a few years ago. It is clear that the remarkable partnership of public sector, local businesses and the local community is contributing greatly to its success," proclaimed BURA. □

