

Wolverhampton

How did you decide which area to designate as a Cultural Quarter?

Our decision to locate the Cultural Quarter in this area was based on the fact that the majority of our existing cultural assets i.e. the Art Gallery , The Arena Theatre, Light House Media Centre, The Grand Theatre etc are located in the area. Also there are a number of vacant premises which would be suitable for conversion into cultural uses.

What were your objectives in establishing a Cultural Quarter?

A Cultural Quarter, it is felt, gives us a focus for Cultural activity in the City Centre. It was also felt that Wolverhampton has a very vibrant night time economy based predominantly around bars and clubs which appeal mainly to the 18 to 30 age group, and one of our key objectives is to broaden this offer to appeal to families and others. An increase in Cultural activities being one type of activity which we would like to pursue.

Had designating the areas a Cultural Qtr had any effect on those cultural institutions outside of the designated area ?

Not significantly.

Which partners are involved in developing the area ?

Partners include, West Midlands Police, The City centre Company, Wolverhampton Development Company, the private sector.

What have been the successes of the Cultural Quarter initiatives ?

The Cultural Quarter to date has only developed to a limited extent largely because the other activities as mentioned above have predominated. A small area around the rear of the theatre called the Artists Quarter has been somewhat successful in that a number of artists studios were developed and have been subsequently supported by the Makers Dozen, another artists community created as part of the Art Gallery.

What are the key factors in gaining that success ?

External funding from agencies such as Advantage West Midlands and ERDF. Also a large amount of courage from the private sector.

What have been the problems of the Cultural Quarter initiative ?

The problems we have experienced are mainly due to the piecemeal nature of the developments and the fact that all of the funding we have used is no longer available. The market is not buoyant enough to encourage such levels of private sector investment.

How where those issues overcome ?

We are still in a period where we are trying to diversify our offer and encourage a greater investment by the private sector.

Has there been an increase in visitor numbers ?

The Art Gallery ,The Lighthouse and a number of other organisations have reported an slight increase in visitor numbers.

What did you do to engage with and keep the city's residents informed ?

The Cultural Quarter initiative was dealt with as part of our UDP consultations a few years ago. To date we have a LANA coordinator who liaises directly with the City Centre residents ,although they are fairly few in number at the moment a number of new residential schemes are due to be completed in the near future.

What was the residents response to the initiative ?

We have received only positive comments in respect of the initiative.

Finally, If you were to start again, would you do it differently ?

Probably try to secure longer term funding. Our biggest issue has been the predominance of brewery owned and run premises in the area which has somewhat diluted the impact we wanted to achieve. We are in the process however of looking more broadly at this area particularly in terms of diversifying its current function and to this end a number of studies are being undertaken to assess how we can achieve this.