

## URBAN REGENERATION AND DESIGN CONTROL IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Daryl Fowler

The conservation planner or the manager of historic districts is faced with a difficult task. By training he or she may be an architect, a planner, an art historian, or may come from other related disciplines. Their main strengths must be a political awareness, an obsession for historic detail and the determination to overcome the inevitable obstacles. Using professional skill, available legislation and sheer force of character they have the task of controlling and managing the growth, change and development of the historic quarters in our cities.

In the economic society that frequently exists in our Western and in some Asian Cities, the role of the private economic market is clearly of fundamental importance to the commercial success or failure of a historic district. In a free market society, commercial districts of towns, even towns themselves are in direct competition, especially in a small scale landscape. The success of one district can lead to the decline and even economic collapse of another.

It is essential to define the character of the historic district. The cultural and physical attributes will be unique and subtle, contributing to the individuality of the area, probably best termed the *genus loci*. The rather undefinable sense of history that develops is a fragile resource, it can be lost all too easily and it is difficult if not impossible to recreate.

The cultural attributes will be a reflection of the way past societies have used the buildings, respected them, or even abused them. Either way, this is an essential part of the historic character. For this reason the philosophy of restoration to a set date or period can often be a flawed concept and difficult to implement.

Physically the area will have evolved its own local vernacular, a language of detailing that is found as a small part of the architecture of the buildings. This must be carefully noted for it is those elements that will enable the scale and massing of new work to be sensitively handled. Failure to respect these will result in the eyesores we are all so used to nowadays.

The pressures in urban areas are the result of economic forces, social change or physical decay of the built fabric. These must be identified and corrected for effective conservation action. At times these forces must also be harnessed so that the conservation work can achieve its own momentum.

This is the work of the conservation manager. The key weapons they have are public participation, positive legislation and limited financial incentives. All urban administrations will view financial incentives together with cost recovery. Successful urban regeneration will achieve cost recovery in a wide variety of ways. The buildings achieve a higher market value and higher desirability, the economic base is often raised, attracting more people with greater spending power.

In order to examine principles involved in more depth when used on actual projects we will examine the completed work at Covent Garden, London and the work that is about to commence in Lahore, Pakistan.

The removal of the wholesale fruit and vegetable market from Covent Garden where it had thrived for four hundred years to the edge of London in 1974 resulted in the emptying literally overnight of major buildings and hundreds of smaller buildings containing the various supporting traders. The resulting vacuum meant that the poorly maintained buildings were immediately subject to low rent uses as the various owners strived to keep the buildings producing an income. A substantial proportion were acquired by the local authorities and the regional authority (the Greater London Council). The various town planners dreams for grand solutions were effectively stopped by giving key buildings protected (or listed) status. Public participation was to prove essential, not only to ensure the views of the local residents were heard but also to provide the pressure to keep the political will going to complete the work. As a result the Covent Garden Area, gathered around the Central Market Building, is now seen as one of the most successful pieces of urban conservation management in Europe.

It therefore seems appropriate to compare it with the projects that are gradually taking shape in one of the world's other great cities, Lahore in Pakistan. Although miles away both physically and culturally from Covent Garden, the conservation management techniques and principles are remarkably similar in the attempt to achieve an urban renaissance in the medieval Walled City of Lahore.

The Lahore Development Authority, with the aid of the World Bank Punjab Development Programme, is vigorously pursuing a series of programmes to provide better living conditions for the urban poor and to set the rapidly expanding modern city into a structured planning framework. Throughout all the planning work of the last two decades, the Walled City has been regarded as a special problem. Indeed, so special that only limited attempts have been made to tackle its complicated

issues until recently. Modern drainage and water supply systems have been laid to about one third of the Walled City but little attention has been paid to the problem of the historic urban fabric in which 220,000 people live in densities approaching 1,500 people per hectare.

The first step in any management programme is to identify the buildings and areas of interest. In Covent Garden this process checked the grand proposals of the town planners obsessed with urban motorways, conference centres and hotels. In Lahore the first attempt at a building inventory has just been completed. Protective legislation will, it is hoped, help to ensure the long-term future for the building stock of traditional design.

The commercial area of Covent Garden, whilst the Market was functioning, had the usual story of deserted and abandoned upper storeys with the inevitable decay cycle setting in. In Lahore, in the bazaar areas the story is exactly the same. It was decided at Covent Garden that the main Market Building, designed in 1828 by Charles Fowler for the Duke of Bedford, was to be the touchstone for the urban renewal programme. This was to provide the standards for the rest of the area. The end use as a "speciality market" is perhaps our nearest western equivalent to the Bazaar of the east. In Lahore, it has been suggested that the Delhi Gate Bazaar between the Chowk (square) in front of the Wazir Khan Mosque and the Delhi Gate itself would provide a similar project to set the standards for urban conservation management in the commercial areas of Lahore.

Wazir Khan Mosque, built in 1634 A.D. (1044 A.H.) is one of the major monuments of the City but the square to the west is disfigured with encroachments. Passing through the ruins of Chitta Gate, Delhi Gate Bazaar leads to the City Wall and the main gatehouse. The buildings of the bazaar vary from the banal modern, nineteenth century colonial classical to traditional carved wooden and brick with the remains of highly decorated, ornamental and coloured stucco elevations. At the west end is Wazir Khan's Hummun (a bathhouse), partly used as a boys school and the grand Delhi Gate on the road east to India.

Public participation, necessary for any project has a double edge in Lahore. To provide covered sewers and modern sanitation will involve major disturbance to the area but the residents are keen to be provided with the modern amenities. The buildings, mainly privately owned and in a poor state of repair, are a stark contrast, the ground floors bustling and prosperous, the upper floors largely abandoned and collapsing.

On comparing this with the situation in London, it is seen that the Market Building had extensive basements, these were unused and largely full of decaying refuse. The upper storeys, originally residential, later Dickensian style counting houses were generally unused towards the end of the life of the vegetable market. Effective replanning of the upper storeys and basements has now provided an economic use for all parts of the building.

The streets were, until the Wholesale Market moved, clogged with traffic causing the gradual paralysis of the area. The building lacked modern servicing, requiring completely new drainage, water and electricity services. The participation of the public through the elected Covent Garden Forum provided a democratic force at a very local level. At times difficult to deal with but always totally committed in their views and their vision of the way the area should develop.

Both London and Lahore like most historic sites stand on the archaeology of the previous generations of cities. At Covent Garden work on the site of the Jubilee Market building established for the first time stratified deposits of Saxon London that linked the Royal Palace of Westminster and the possibly abandoned Walled City of the Romans.

In Lahore the work on the Delhi Gate Bazaar will provide for the first time in Pakistan the opportunity to carry out some urban archaeology to modern standards. Nothing is reliably known of the early stratigraphy of the City and the infrastructure engineering will provide opportunities to examine the defences and part of the settlement area. The training that will be provided for the professionals will it is hoped encourage the awareness of the potential of urban researches in Lahore and the other historic cities in Pakistan. Archaeology will help to bring a new understanding of the past providing much needed historical information and increasing public awareness of the past history of this important city.

Following the successful completion at Covent Garden we are now witnessing the design ideas being copied in new developments, renewal schemes are promoted as the "next Covent Garden". The cost recovery of the funds injected by a variety of technical aid, small grant programmes, home improvement loans and grants and direct action by the local authorities, notably the Greater London Council, has been immense. The area of London has been brought back from decay and abandonment by positive conservation management.

In Lahore, it is hoped that the work that has now started will set the scene for the beginning of a major programme of conservation action in the historic Walled City. It will also begin the development and training of local professionals so that the historic urban areas that are an essential part of the cultural heritage of Pakistan will be gradually tackled. It is hoped that we will all be able to learn from the methods of the west, rather than creating the gentrification of an area, aiming at providing an improved environment enabling the conservation of communities as well as the physical fabric of the city.

## LA REGENERATION DES ZONES URBAINES ET LA CONTROLE TECHNIQUE ET AESTHETIQUE DANS LES QUARTIERS HISTORIQUES

### SOMMAIRE

Le développement de nos villes et cités historiques demande que nous découvrons une gamme d'usages modernes pour nos immeubles historiques. Les centres des nos villes perdent leur base économique et traditionnelle, et nous avons l'occasion de modifier et diriger le développement de nos quartiers historiques. Ceci nous permet la conservation de nos immeubles historiques du moment que une base économique se présente.

Néanmoins les immeubles historiques sont une ressource fragile. L'identité historique d'un quartier se perd facilement sous les influences commerciales. Ce document décrit, malgré brièvement, les principes de base impliqués dans la direction de la conservation des villes historiques.

L'emploi de ces principes est examiné dans la contexte du quartier de Covent Garden à Londres, où les ouvrages sont déjà achevés et considérés comme exemples excellents de la direction du renouvellement urbain. Également la cité murillée de Lahore en Pakistan, où les ouvrages sont sur le point de démarrer est analysée. Ceci démontre le fait que ces principes restent valables, malgré des petites adaptations, d'une façon indépendante du pays et de la culture sous considération.

### URBAN REGENERATION AND DESIGN CONTROL IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS

#### SUMMARY

The changing development of our historic towns and cities is resulting in the need for new uses to be found for historic buildings. As traditional centres lose their economic basis we are in a position to direct and change the way the historic district develops. This provides the opportunity for the preservation of historic buildings once an alternative economic framework begins to emerge.

The historic buildings are however, a fragile resource and the *genus loci* of the district is easily lost to the pressure of commerce.

This paper sets out briefly the basic principles involved in the conservation management of historic towns. The use of these principles is considered in the Covent Garden area in London, a now completed and successful piece of urban management, and in the Walled City of Lahore, Pakistan, where work is about to commence. It shows that these principles are applicable with only minor adaptations, irrespective of location and culture.