



TIME TO POLISH THE GEM



***A RESIDENTS' MANIFESTO
FOR BIRMINGHAM'S
JEWELLERY QUARTER***

***Issued by the Jewellery Quarter
Neighbourhood Forum***

April 2008



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Introduction

“ The Quarter is unique within the local, national and international context for its high concentration of craft industry with associated trades in one small area based in converted 18th and 19th century domestic properties and purpose-built later workshops and factories illustrating the whole history and development of the industry. As such it is of major significance with no immediate parallels either in Britain, or overseas.”

(City Council Jewellery Quarter Conservation Area plan of 2002)

“By 2010 the Jewellery Quarter will be acknowledged as the City's Region's Creative Village, an asset to both Birmingham and the West Midlands. A truly unique area where vibrant design quality is an integral part of its renaissance...”

(2004 Declaration – JQ Regeneration Partnership)

The above quotations from official City documents indicate the importance on the Jewellery Quarter - not just to Birmingham but to the wider West Midlands and beyond.

This residents' Manifesto for the Jewellery Quarter was compiled and issued by the Committee of the Jewellery Quarter Neighbourhood Forum in April 2008. It calls for action to make good past commitments to support the sensitive and beneficial development of this unique area.

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All photographs are courtesy of Anna Gibson Photography.



1. The Neighbourhood Forum – A Voice for Residents

1.1. The JQNF seeks to represent residents in the Jewellery Quarter. It provides opportunities for residents and others to inform and influence the strategies of the City Council and other agencies.

1.2. Following the election of a new Forum Committee we are keen to strengthen the Forum as a both a network for residents and a link to other bodies active in the Quarter. To this end we will shortly launch a new website and other initiatives designed to involve more local people. As its key role is to provide a local view on how the Quarter can be improved as a place to live, the Forum publishes this *Manifesto* to both mark progress to date in regenerating the Quarter and as a call for further action.



2. Forum Aims and Vision

- 2.1.** Our Vision for the Jewellery Quarter is of *a safe, clean and prosperous area in which both the sense of community and the unique value of the historic environment is valued and promoted*

- 2.2.** Our Aim is *to contribute to the improvement of community life in the Quarter for individuals and the community as a whole*

3. Working with the City Council and Partners

3.1. The City Council already recognises the special quality of the Jewellery Quarter. In its JQ Charter (published by the JQ Regeneration Partnership in late 2004) senior figures from the Council, Regional Development Agency and other key partner bodies committed to the following:

“By 2010, the Jewellery Quarter will be acknowledged as the City Region’s Creative Village, an asset to both Birmingham and the West Midlands:

- A truly unique area where design quality is an integral feature of its renaissance.*
- a Quarter with a vibrant atmosphere which not only attracts people to work, live, play and visit but acts as a honey pot for creative businesses ranging from the current jewellery business base, to arts and media.”*

3.2. This was and is an ambitious commitment. Some years on a certain amount of core planning and development work has been carried out – notably the January 2002 Conservation Area Management Plan – but major resourcing and management questions remain.

3.3. Outside the valuable work of the JQ Regeneration Partnership it is unclear, for example, what capital resources the City Council and Advantage West Midlands are committing *directly* to the Quarter - rather than via planning gain dependent upon private sector activity. While the work of the Council backed JQ Regeneration Partnership is essential to any progress, residents would like to see a fresh commitment to the sort of major investment plan required to meet the objectives set out in the Quarter Charter.

3.4. While other agencies – notably Advantage West Midlands - must also be persuaded to take joint responsibility for improving the Jewellery Quarter, the City remains the largest land and property owner in the Quarter. In this context the Council’s recent endorsement of a potential bid for UNESCO World Heritage status is welcome but will require a new and much more comprehensive commitment to the objectives of the 2004 Charter statement. In particular development value realised for the City Council in the Quarter must be ring-fenced more closely for the benefit of the Jewellery Quarter.

3.5. The Neighbourhood Forum believes the time is now right for a major review of progress in meeting the regeneration objectives then set out and targeted for progress by 2010. How far have we got? What needs to be done to get where we all want to be? Is the City leadership, with other agencies, willing to dedicate the resources and organisational commitment actually required to achieve global recognition for the Quarter via World Heritage status?

3.6. We call on City Council lead councillors and officers to join with the Neighbourhood Forum and others to review and renew their commitment to the Jewellery Quarter as a unique regeneration focus for both the City and the West Midlands Region.

4. UNESCO World Heritage Status

4.1. The Council's decision to prepare a bid for UNESCO World Heritage inscription is welcome, but the implications need to be fully understood by policy-makers. World Heritage is the highest form of cultural designation and unlike, for example, City of Culture status, requires a continuing long-term commitment. The highest conservation, management and development principles – plus the resources to back them – are at the heart of the UNESCO inscription, which is in the gift of an international committee rather than the UK Government. Once inscribed, a World Heritage Site, must be actively managed to conserve its character and quality-test development.

4.2. While the threats to the uniqueness of the Jewellery Quarter were identified in the 2002 Conservation Area appraisal, not enough action has been taken to protect the Quarter from poorly designed new build, dereliction and the unnecessary loss of buildings of character. Neither is the Conservation Area design brief fully enforced by the City. More effective commitment to tackling these problems will be required by the City Council with better co-ordination between departments and a genuinely corporate approach to the Quarter if the World Heritage status the Quarter deserves is to be successfully pursued. .

4.3. A bid for WH inscription will require a dedicated City Council team, working with residents and business in the Quarter and possibly with neighbouring local authorities. The Black Country Consortium has already considered a possible bid for WH status for the canal network in its area, the heart of which runs through Birmingham.

4.4. The Neighbourhood Forum believes residents' representation is essential within any World Heritage bid group. This could also offer particular additional expertise to the Council.

5. Priorities for the Quarter – The Next Steps

5.1. A sensible planning and management framework has already been developed for the Quarter in the 2002 *Conservation Area Character Appraisal & Management Plan*. This document requires updating – particularly concerning buildings at risk and development taking place since 2002 – but provides a solid foundation for progress. It could, as noted above, be utilised as part of the basis for a possible World Heritage bid.

5.2. Six years after this major study, the key task is to generate new momentum for achieving appropriate national and international status for the Jewellery Quarter. As part of the major review called for above, the Neighbourhood Forum believes it would be useful to identify a number of major projects in order to move the Quarter forward towards the 2010 Charter objectives. These will be a test of both City Council and other agencies' commitment to sustained investment and regeneration of the Quarter as a flagship City and regional asset, but it can and must be done. Without such effort the prospects for a successful World Heritage bid would in any case be damaged.

6. Key Projects

6.1. The Forum suggests the following four projects for action. They have been selected as they would bring major benefits in physical, environmental and “image” regeneration with consequent economic and tourist benefits. The World Heritage bid is seen as an important project in itself and as a potential over-arching framework offering opportunities for a more joined-up approach to Jewellery Quarter improvement both across the Council’s various departments and with external partners.

6.2. *The Fazeley Canal – a neglected gateway to the Quarter.*

One of the pedestrian gateways to the Quarter is the Birmingham Fazeley canal. This leads from Brindley Place to Ludgate Hill\St Pauls Square area. The canal is also important as a potential link to global recognition of the Jewellery Quarter via UNESCO World Heritage status, given it creates a linear and historic connection with heritage in Smethwick (including Boulton & Watt sites) and the Black Country. It is also a significant surviving element of 18th century industrial infrastructure within the Quarter in its own right.

6.3. Some 10 years ago the British Waterways Board and the City Council took welcome steps to refurbish the canal network into the Quarter. New lighting was introduced; new signage and a general uplift of the environment took place. In 2008 the section used as a route into the Quarter from Brindley Place via Fleet Street is looking tired and graffiti splattered. (Some 30+ separate graffiti sites have been identified along the section from Summer Row to Newhall St alone). While imminent new development at the former Science Museum site may improve matters, there is an immediate need to tackle the environmental decline of the canal gateway – if only at the level of removing widespread graffiti. A multi-agency response to ensure zero-tolerance towards this nuisance in the future would be a step-forward.

6.4. As indicated, the Forum welcomes the City taking the lead in investigating a possible WHS status bid for the JQ; but should this be linked to the work already done by the Black Country Consortium on possible WHS status for the Black Country/Birmingham Canal Navigation? Joint working on a regional WHS bid would increase the chance of possible nomination to UNESCO via the UK Government’s Tentative List - competing West Midlands’ bids are less likely to succeed.

6.5. *The Golden Square – public realm at the heart of the Quarter*

The concept of an attractive open space at the heart of the Quarter has long been canvassed. We call on City and Regional bodies – particularly Advantage West Midlands - to engage seriously with this concept. The aim of a “mini Centenary Square” at the centre of the Quarter around the Big Peg offers an opportunity to tackle past planning errors and to create a community, business and cultural focus for the Quarter. We need a public space linking the unique shopping opportunities of the Quarter with the cultural and public realm possibilities of this unique area. While more intimate than Centenary Square, a Quarter open space suitable for entertainment and public gatherings would enhance the appeal and focus of the area and benefit visitors and residents alike.

6.6. Back from the Dead – Cemeteries as heritage open space and tourism assets.

The Forum believes areas of remaining open space within the Quarter should generally be preserved. Chief amongst these are the Warstone Lane Cemetery and its near neighbour, the Key Hill Cemetery. These contain a wealth of historical details of interest to residents and tourists alike, but, despite sensible presentational efforts by the City Council their visitor potential is largely undeveloped. The sites also represent the major open and green space surviving within the Quarter. As such, they are a valuable resource for residents and those who work in the area.

6.7. We recognise that the cost of restoring the cemeteries is substantial and would require bids to, for example, the Heritage Lottery. We urge the City Council to address such bids as a priority.

6.8. Bridging Great Charles Street – Create an Iconic Link from St Phillips to St Pauls

Just as the canal gateway to the Quarter needs upgrading and better management, the Forum supports priority replacement of the low standard pedestrian bridge currently spanning this part of the old City ring road.

6.9. We welcome the City Council's recognition that the historic connectivity from St Philip's Square to St Paul's Square (via Ludgate Hill) should be re-emphasised. This is a potentially significant route into the Quarter from the central business area. It is made unattractive by the poorly designed bridge and lack of signage and general emphasis. A larger and iconic bridge design providing a broad pedestrian pathway over the roadway and clear accessibility at both ends, would make a more enticing statement to potential incomers. We are keen to see progress on this project.

7. Summary of Action Points

The JQ Neighbourhood Forum calls on the City Council and JQ Charter partners to:

- a) Move quickly to identify appropriate resources and machinery for the proposed World Heritage bid;*
- b) Initiate a comprehensive audit/review of progress towards the 2004 Charter objectives, with appropriate technical and other updating of the 2002 Conservation Area Character Appraisal & Management Plan, plus greater support for conservation and enforcement activity in the Quarter;*
- c) Identify and publish key priorities for further progress in Quarter regeneration beyond 2010 – to include identification of resourcing and appropriate Council/partner agency commitment;*
- d) Adopt or reaffirm the 4 priority projects proposed by the Jewellery Quarter Neighbourhood Forum and as necessary, set up appropriate machinery to implement them;*
- e) Reaffirm City Council commitment to resourcing and supporting the valuable work of the JQ Regeneration Partnership;*
- f) Consult and involve the Jewellery Quarter Neighbourhood Forum in all the above.*