

# Briefing Paper

## Conservation and regeneration in Ipswich: complementary, not conflicting, objectives

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### Introduction

Ipswich has always seen conservation and regeneration as complementary rather than conflicting aims. A number of landmark historic building refurbishments within the Borough of Ipswich have proved to be the catalyst for regeneration of the surrounding areas. Several refurbishments have been large or complex, but they have not been easy options in pursuit of quick fixes. Associated works to the public realm have also been undertaken to demonstrate a comprehensive commitment to the area.

### Felaw Maltings

The largest of the recently completed schemes and a prominent local landmark is Felaw Maltings, included in Lord Rogers' Urban Task Force Report<sup>1</sup> as an exemplary case of regeneration through conservation.

Felaw Maltings form a pair, each massive and of seven storeys with similarly huge kiln towers (Fig. 1). They remain one of the largest remaining maltings in East Anglia. Built in 1904 and 1911 respectively, they were Listed Grade II in 1972 while still fully in use but they became vacant in 1981. As entries on the Ipswich Buildings-at-Risk Register from 1984, the roofs were badly damaged by the hurricane of October 1987 and a series of Urgent Works Notices was used to keep them secure. They presented particular problems for conversion with concrete malting floors and severely restricted headroom. A series of abortive proposals were submitted for their conversion to residential use in the early 1990s.

The location of the buildings is important. They face Ipswich Wet Dock which, when completed in 1842, was the largest construction of its kind in Britain. The port became the focus for great commercial endeavour, bringing growth and prosperity to the town. From the 1970s, commercial shipping activity and port-related uses had moved downriver to deepwater berths, leaving the quays and adjacent buildings redundant and derelict. The importance of the Wet Dock to the wider historic character of Ipswich was recognized by it being declared a Conservation Area in 1990.

### The conservation and regeneration project

The Ipswich Borough Council was committed to the conservation of the Felaw Maltings and to the regeneration of the area. This was seen as a vital initial stage, in encouraging inward investment, regeneration and redevelopment not only of the Wet Dock and its immediate environs, but also of a wider transitional area between it and the Ipswich central area. The Maltings represented a problem and an opportunity and was a strong physical expression of the aspirations for the area as a whole. Conversion would help demonstrate confidence in the area.

Coupled with associated streetscape improvements to the quays and in the adjacent historic streets, this would encourage more visitors and create a more pleasant working and living environment. To this end, paving of the quay around the Maltings was completed in 1997–1999, and was partly funded by the Borough Council, Ipswich Port and English Heritage's Conservation Area Partnership Scheme. Further paving work is continuing on the most historic frontages to the dock.

The Maltings were comprehensively refurbished and converted to offices and managed workspaces in 1998–1999, with major assistance provided under the Single Regeneration Budget (Fig. 2). The scheme proved to mark a turning-point in the regeneration of the Ipswich Waterfront, which is now well under way, and was an early catalyst for mixed-use regeneration proposals elsewhere, including a new housing development that is being completed by Bellway Urban Regeneration and the purchase early this year of large redundant dock-side industrial buildings by the East of England Development Agency for part conversion and part redevelopment for mixed uses. The Maltings provides a mix of attractive accommodation for major high-tech companies as well as a range of smaller-scale enterprises as part of the Cambridge–Ipswich Hi-Tech and IP-city initiatives. Currently, about 250 people are employed in the buildings but this is set to rise to 800 in the near future. One tenant, 4eNetworking, is targeting a growth to around

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*Fig. 1. Felaw Maltings before restoration*



*Fig. 2. Felaw Maltings following restoration work*

350 employees, and to turning over around £100 million annually within three years.

The borough has also looked at bringing redundant mediaeval churches back into use as a means of revitalizing areas of the town centre. Only Ipswich and Norwich hold significant numbers of such buildings for alternative civic or public uses. The council established a trust in 1979 to seek such new uses and one of the most successful has been the repair and subsequent conversion of St Stephen's Church, Listed Grade II\*. Made redundant under the Pastoral Measure in 1981, this church dates

from the fourteenth century, has two bells, from 1382 and 1385, and a number of important monuments. It was converted into the Ipswich Tourist Information Centre in May 1994 and employs seven staff. It is widely considered to be one of the most successful conversions of its kind in the country. The location and use have proved to be popular with locals and visitors alike, providing tourism, business and heritage information and a venue for temporary exhibitions. It was East Anglian Tourist Information Centre of the Year in 1997 and has been used, intensively, with 1 300 000 visitors in six years.

The sympathetic conversion work, which is fully reversible, has allowed all the existing wall monuments to be displayed and it has used the south aisle for counter space, and the Lady chapel and south porch for unobtrusive storage.

Equally important, the conversion has shown: the potential for adaptation, in a sensitive manner, of other redundant churches; encouraged investment in surrounding historic buildings; stimulated tourism in Ipswich as a major historic town; and helped promote the businesses in the historic streets leading to the Wet

Dock, the historic waterfront itself and the new uses being introduced there.

To encourage the links between the areas, the council embarked on a programme of historic street repaving and lighting improvements. These won the national Street Design 2000 Competition in July this year. Further streetscape schemes are to follow in 2001 in pursuit of both conservation and regeneration aims.

#### References

1. *Lord Rogers' Urban Task Force Report.*