

Profile for Heritage Counts 2015

David Grech – Historic England staff

1. What is your role title?

“Historic Places Adviser, East of England”

2. What does your role involve?

“There are four main strands to my work:

- Providing advice to project promoters and local planning authorities on large scale developments that impact on the historic environment, and in particular projects involving a degree of master-planning. This work commences at the pre-application stage, allowing me to work pro-actively with the design team and contribute to the design process.
- Providing advice and guidance to local communities (frequently parish councils) on the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans, and ensuring that the historic environment is appropriately incorporated into their plan.
- Providing advice to colleagues and local planning authorities on site allocations associated with the preparation of Local Plans.
- Working with local authorities to identify and implement strategies that would enable failing conservation areas to be removed from the ‘at-risk’ register for positive reasons.

3. What is most pleasing about your role?

“Looking for the ‘win-wins’. Historic England has adopted a working practice based on ‘Constructive Conservation’, whereby we work collaboratively to focus on the active management of change in ways that recognises and reinforces the historic significance of places while accommodating the changes necessary to ensure their continued use and enjoyment. Helping to find a solution that enables a client to attain their requirements whilst preserving or enhancing the heritage significance of a place is very satisfying.”

4. Please explain any interesting examples where there were challenges/barriers that were overcome relating to managing heritage in the local context:

“As a Historic Places Adviser I am particularly aware of the spaces between buildings, and how the public realm is the ‘glue’ that binds together individual historic buildings to create historic places. Projects that enhance the public realm and improve places, and in so doing enhance the setting of historic buildings, are therefore particularly rewarding.”

“Peterborough City Centre Conservation Area was identified to be in decline and was placed on the ‘at-risk’ register. Working with Peterborough City Council and Opportunities Peterborough, we were able to put in place a multi-faceted strategy that has been successful in enhancing the conservation area and enabling it to be removed from the ‘at-risk’ register. This included a major project to re-pave the Cathedral Square, removing clutter and

enhancing the public realm. A second phase then involved the City Council purchasing an intrusive and contextually inappropriate 1960s office block, which was then demolished to create a new public square in the heart of the city. The final phase involved Historic England and the City Council working together on a partnership scheme to provide grant aid to upgrade buildings along Cowgate, one of the historic routes into the city which had suffered a loss of status due to changing traffic movements and desire lines. The grant aid enable essential repairs and enhancements to be undertaken to a number of key buildings along the street (including some grade II listed buildings), re-instating lost architectural details and improving shop fronts. At the same time, the City Council reduced the width of the road and widened the pavements, thereby making the street more attractive to pedestrians and encouraging cafes and restaurants to spill out onto the street. The street is now a vibrant thoroughfare and shop vacancies have been reduced from seven to one.”

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