

### 3: DRIVERS OF RENAISSANCE

There are two focuses for the renaissance of Halifax:

#### RENAISSANCE FOCUS ONE:

#### MAKING A TOWN THAT IS A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE AND WORK

The first focus, but by far the more important, is the renaissance of the town for the benefit of the citizens of Halifax, today and in the future.

The town centre is not sufficiently well integrated with the rest of the town to be accessible and enjoyed by the whole community. This is because of a number of physical, social and cultural problems that need to be addressed.

A legacy of road construction and redevelopment has severed important links into the town centre. In some places severance has an impact on the integration of some of the town's key assets - Dean Clough and Eureka! for example. In other places severance isolates parts of the community that are close to (but find it difficult to have direct access to) the town centre, for example in West Central Halifax. In all cases these areas of physical severance are reinforced by a poor quality environment. Directly addressing the quality of the urban environment in these

locations is central to a Strategic Development Framework for the future of the town centre.

Within the town centre, the structure of the public realm - the regular layout and 'grain' of streets - is exemplary and is one that supports good accessibility and high levels of use by both the citizens of the town and its visitors. However, in many places the balance between people walking and those on buses and driving their cars is not right and needs to be reset. Halifax must become a really good place to walk; irrespective of whether people arrive on foot, on the bus or in a car; in the town centre everyone becomes a pedestrian and the commercial life of the town relies on people who are walking.



BUSES IN MARKET STREET



ENTRANCE TO THE PIECE HALL



EUREKA!



DEAN CLOUGH

## RENAISSANCE FOCUS TWO: MAKING A TOWN THAT IS A GOOD PLACE TO VISIT

The second focus is to put the town firmly on the map for prospective visitors who could contribute significantly to the local economy.

The town has assets of regional, national and international importance that have the potential – both individually and collectively – to attract visitors, investors and residents from a very wide catchment. These are:

- The Piece Hall, a totally unique testament to Halifax's place in the early industrial revolution, which is in a remarkable state of preservation and already known to a limited constituency across the world
- Eureka!, a justifiably renowned Children's museum aimed at the enlightenment of children and their parents, offering an unparalleled attraction
- Dean Clough, a remarkable transformation of a former carpet factory into a huge working community and arts facility, the first of its kind in the UK
- People's Park, a magnificent philanthropic gift to the people of the town from one of its sons, now fully restored.
- The Town Centre, which has a collection of remarkable buildings, notably the Parish Church, Somerset House, Borough Market and Town Hall, in a network of fine streets that create a high quality public realm. It would be the envy of any similar town or city, and is a tribute to the benefaction of Halifax's industrial past.

Most towns would give their eye-teeth for any one of these attractions. Halifax has all five.

But these are not known well enough outside the town, and they are not joined to each other through the town centre in a way that maximises their collective contribution to the economic and social life of the town. Visitors that experience one only occasionally experience any of the others, and seldom on the same visit. A strategy is required that unifies this unique array of attractions to encourage the total quantity of visitors to the town, and their length of stay in the town.

It has been argued that, with a population of only 90,000, Halifax by itself is not big enough to attract development of a quality commensurate with these unique assets. It is correct that the scale of development envisaged in this vision, and the range and scale of facilities encompassed, cannot be supported by the population of the town in isolation. But it must be remembered that Halifax is part of a constellation of towns in West Yorkshire, each readily accessible both to and from Halifax, with a total population in excess of two million. Just as the citizens of Halifax make visits to other places – to work, to shop, to go to the cinema or theatre, to visit museums – the people of other places are equally able to use the facilities of Halifax. Given its unique character, Halifax should be able to make sure that the positive effects of visitors to the town is greater than the impact of its citizens going elsewhere; Halifax is fully justified in seeking any form or scale of development that it chooses.

## “TO CREATE A BEAUTIFUL TOWN FULL OF HIGH QUALITY AND PROPERLY CONNECTED PUBLIC SPACES”

### BRINGING THE TWO RENAISSANCE DRIVERS TOGETHER

These two drivers for renaissance are not mutually exclusive. The interrelationships between them mean that what is good for the citizens will generally be good for visitors and vice versa. The physical aspects of proposals for the renaissance of Halifax have a simple objective - to create a beautiful town full of high quality and properly connected public spaces. The physical strategy for the town centre within the vision will do much to address current problems - infilling gap sites and reconfiguring the relationship between traffic space and pedestrian areas.

### SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

In some cases the lack of physical integration is compounded by social and cultural issues. The main location of bars and clubs in the town centre is the point where one of the main routes from West Central Halifax, where Halifax's largely Muslim, Asian community is concentrated, comes into town. This appears to deter the Asian community from participating in the life of the town centre and in the use of its amenities. It is however encouraged to improve the pedestrian environment of alternative routes into the town centre from West Central Halifax which will at least in part serve to enhance the social cohesion of this local community with the town centre.

A perception that the town centre is dominated by a 'drinking culture' in the evenings is also intimidating to older and younger residents, discouraging their

participation in the life of the town centre other than as daytime shoppers and workers.

These cultural and social issues will not be resolved by this Strategic Development Framework, but they are important to its ultimate success. Beyond the scope of this study, serious consideration of cultural and social integration must be embarked upon in parallel to the physical renaissance of the town centre, to ensure that it is a town centre that is at the heart of the whole community.

An effective physical strategy for the renaissance of the town can be readily defined, but this must be set in the context of wider, political initiatives that will consolidate the notion of accessibility for all.





CORN MARKET