

SOLUTIONS: CASTLEFORD

'If there's a TV camera rolling when you ask for funding, people are more likely to say yes'

For five years the Yorkshire town of Castleford was filmed by Channel 4 for its series Kevin McCloud & the Big Town Plan, broadcast in August. BD spoke to Peter Box, leader of the town's district council, about how the show affected the regeneration process



Peter Box on Castleford Bridge.

PHOTOS BY TYLER

BD: How do you feel about the way Channel 4 portrayed Castleford?

Peter Box: I remember seeing a preview of the show last year which marked out Castleford as a failing town, suggesting Channel 4 are going to come in and turn it into one with a future. I think that's very unfair.

We weren't a failing town. We are a town that's undergoing change. We are still a very strong mining area. I think we are dealing with change quite well without some of the problems that you see in other areas. We've got the lowest unemployment in West Yorkshire and the highest GCSE passes in West Yorkshire. That's hardly a failing area, is it?

Kevin McCloud and his crew filmed a street with one or two boarded-up shops, which there are in every town, and concluded this means it's a failing town.

What did the show tell us about regeneration?

I don't think the programme showed the complexity of regeneration, the time things take, and the difficulty in arranging funding.

There was a great play made about the money that Channel 4 put in, £100,000 into the bridge, without really making sufficient play of the £4 million of public money that went in. I don't think Channel 4 understood. It isn't the same as a Grand Designs programme, where you've got one couple building a house.

The other thing I don't think they illustrated is the difference it has made to a community in social terms. I'm very surprised that relatively small regeneration projects, apart from the bridge, can have a disproportionate beneficial

effect on the neighbourhood.

Why was Castleford chosen?

We were asked if we were happy for Channel 4 to film, and I felt it would be a good thing for the town. There are drawbacks when you invite a television crew for a long period into your community. I was concerned that the council didn't come over as overtly bureaucratic, and that we were seen as an enabler. It's a shame the programme didn't quite capture that.

Do you think Channel 4 understood the time projects take?

They had an agenda to do things as quickly as possible, and that agenda changed when they realised that things took longer than expected. In the real world these things take time, and we've got to attract funding.

When there's a TV camera rolling as you go into a meeting and you're asking for funding, people are more likely to say yes, let's be honest about it. But when the cameras are gone, we've got the hard slog of putting together finance, taking local people with us, sometimes making difficult decisions and delivering them. In Castleford, the whole of the waterfront could be developed, but we can't do it overnight, it's long term.

Why did you oppose Hudson Architects' market square proposal?

I didn't think the fountain they proposed was appropriate. That particular episode showed the market traders had taken a bold decision to turn down a design that wasn't practical. In the same programme, some members of the

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

This is one in a regular series of Q&As about projects that have made the headlines. Read previous interviews at bdonline.co.uk/behindthestory

Casting starts for Castleford TV drama
Castleford TV show on hold

Castleford regeneration show delayed till autumn
McCloud blasts changes to Castleford bridge

Castleford gets the 'vision thing'

BIRTH OF A STRATEGY

In 2002, Wakefield Council and Castleford's Town Centre Partnership agree a strategy to regenerate the declining West Yorkshire pit town. An 18-month consultation with residents determines the scheme's priority areas.

In early 2003, a Renaissance Towns team for Castleford and Pontefract is set up to develop a 25-year vision for the region. In April, a five-day community planning event takes place. Producers from Talkback Productions attend and are impressed by the community's passion.

C4 COMES TO TOWN

In June 2003, Channel 4 chooses Castleford for its reality show about regenerating a town in a year as it typifies "a strand of towns under 40,000 that have missed out

on regeneration". The plan is assisted by Roger Zogolovitch and Chris Brown of Igloo Regeneration, and Ben Dentan of project finance firm Abros.

GROUP FORMATION

In October 2003, a shortlist of firms for three areas of work is drawn up. Whitbybird, Civix, DSDHA, Hudson Architects and dRMM work on ideas for the town centre, including the covered market; Fat, Sarah Wigglesworth, West 8 and McDowell & Benedetti take on riverside projects; and a third



Hudson's proposed market pods.



New paving, seating and relocated market stalls are part of Hudson Architects' plan for the market square.

local authority, including myself, were shown turning down the design from Hudson Architects and we were portrayed as having made the wrong decision.

Were any of the council's decisions influenced by the desire for good television?

I spoke as I saw fit. In the case of the fountain, I'm sure the architects were expecting an easy ride. I turned that design down because I didn't think it would stand the test of time. I've seen some developments in the town where architects have plonked their design onto a community and it's not lasted.

Which project was the least successful?

Martha Schwartz's village green in Fryston. There wasn't any consultation on that project, so it didn't have that community ownership, and also the project itself is too big for what's there now. But that may well change because there are proposals for more housing, and if that happens, what's there now will become more relevant. Personally, I like the project.

group including Allen Tod, Letts Wheeler and Edward Cullinan work on regenerating areas such as Cutsyke and Ferry Fryston. The work is funded by Yorkshire Forward, English Partnerships and Cabe.

■ COSTS AND COMPLEXITY

In February 2004, nine schemes within the £50 million regeneration budget win planning, including those for the town centre and the outdoor market. Talkback confirms the show's cost at £4 million, with £400,000 coming from the council, while Sarah Wigglesworth criticises C4 for underestimating the project's complexities and how long it will take.

■ FORUM FOR THE FUTURE

In June 2005, six British architects are shortlisted to design Castleford Forum, a museum and library scheme.

■ FRYSTON GOES GREEN

In September 2005, Martha



McDowell & Benedetti's pedestrian bridge over the River Aire.

'The programme wanted to show a split between a community and a local authority'

Which is your favourite project?

The bridge, because I had the idea

that it would connect communities, because Lock Lane is a little community of its own and is an island. The existing bridge, which is the oldest structure in Castleford, is very difficult and dangerous to cross. People love bridges and I thought it would be a catalyst for regeneration. I hope I've been proven right. I've been told that people come from all over to look at it, and it's been voted one of the top 10 bridges in the world! **Did the architects engage**

with the local community?

Having that level of interaction with local communities worked well. If there was any friction, it was because the architects weren't used to being questioned by local people who don't have the "expertise" that experts have. So they were asked more basic questions than they're used to. It was probably a good wake-up call for the architects.

Do you feel you were well portrayed?

I remember reading a quote by Kevin McCloud where he said local politicians come and go and when they go, there are still local community people living in Castleford. He forgot the blindingly obvious, that I'm one of the people who live in Castleford and will continue to do so.

The programme wanted to show a split between a community and a local authority. For example, the Cutsyke Playforest is in my ward and in an area that has social problems. Rita Davis, the person driving it, has become a strong community leader. I have no problem with that. We work well



Martha Schwartz's village green for Fryston.



The Cutsyke Playforest by Allen Tod Architecture and Estell Warren Landscape Architecture opened in 2005.

together and the programme gave the impression that we are divided. I suppose conflict makes better television than peace and light. I think it tended to accentuate the difference.

What will happen with Niall McLaughlin's Forum project now that the Heritage Lottery Fund has turned down its funding bid?

If it goes ahead simply with council funding, then it will be scaled down. It may well include simply extending the existing library.

Do you think the TV series helped or hindered the regeneration process?

On balance I think it brought out some very positive things. It brought out the fact that small developments can make a difference to a neighbourhood. It brought out the fact that by delivering in the short term, people will sign up for the long-term projects.

It has also revealed that architects need to be far more accountable — not just to the people who are paying them, but also to the people who will live with that design.

Would you allow a TV crew into Castleford again?

Yes, because I work on the basis that one of the reasons they chose Castleford was because of the people. It did show Castleford people at their best in wanting to do things for their communities.

I think people now have a greater expectation of being more involved with what happens to their community, and they have a greater expectation of the local authority. To turn around and say the cameras can't come to Castleford is a negative approach. I'm relaxed about these things, you can't stop TV being TV. *Peter Box, leader of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, was speaking to Amanda Birch*



Wigglesworth's river crossing.

Schwartz and BDP complete the new village green at Fryston on 170ha of derelict land previously occupied by the Fryston and Wheldale collieries and sand works.

■ TAKING IT TO THE BRIDGE

In May 2006, phase two begins. Seven schemes, including a gallery and exhibition centre have been completed. McDowell & Benedetti's £4.8 million, 130m-long bridge wins planning.

■ DELAYS EXPECTED

In September 2006, C4 delays

the screening of the show for a year because of contractual issues between the architects and Wakefield Council.

■ A BRIDGE TOO FAR

In December 2006, McCloud attacks Wakefield Council in a speech at the Bristol planning law and policy conference. Of particular concern is the redesign of McDowell & Benedetti's bridge due to budget fears. But in early 2007, newly appointed contractor Costain agrees to build it to the original design.

■ DOWNSIZING

In May 2007, the £1 million Henry Moore Square by Hudson Architects opens, but in June Niall McLaughlin's design for Castleford Forum is downsized from £15 million to less than £10 million after Wakefield Council reduces its lottery bid.

■ FURTHER DELAYS

In April 2008, C4 announces further delays to the screening of the show, saying that it's now likely to air in October.

■ UNDERPASS SURPASSES

In July 2008, DSDHA unveils its underpass scheme, made in collaboration with artist Martin Richman. Also in July, McDowell & Benedetti's curving pedestrian bridge opens to great fanfare. But McLaughlin's scheme is in trouble with a lack of lottery funds.

■ A STAR IS BORN

In August 2008, Kevin McCloud & the Big Town Plan is screened as four one-hour shows on C4.

bd
INSURANCE
BUREAU

You know we arrange:
**PROFESSIONAL
INDEMNITY
INSURANCE**

But did you know we also arrange:

- OFFICE INSURANCE
- PUBLIC LIABILITY
- DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS LIABILITY

Telephone
01245 494744

Fax
01245 491641

Email
enquiries@building
-design-ins.com

www.building-design-ins.com
For all your insurance needs

Building Design Insurance Bureau is a trading name of
RJ Hurst & Partners Ltd Authorised and regulated by the
Financial Services Authority