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‘There does not seem to be a single building in Castleford town centre which would justify a mention,’ said Nikolaus Pevsner in 1959. Nearly 50 years later that description still rings horribly true.

*By Richard Waite*

Now the deprived West Yorkshire former mining town, south east of Leeds, is to be the ‘star’ in its own Channel 4 programme. *The Castleford Project* – to be screened over four weeks from mid-August – is a show about the town’s regeneration to be hosted by *Grand Designs* frontman Kevin McCloud.

Stepping off the train it is not immediately clear what improvements the TV cameras have brought. It is not even clear where the centre of town is. Visitors are greeted by an unlinked hotchpotch of scruffy pubs with fake leaded-windows, tired ’60s blocks such as the low-rise British Legion building, and the back of a bingo hall. An uninviting, dark passage

leads through to the shopping ‘strip’ (the town is nicknamed Cas Vegas by the locals – its equally deprived neighbour Pontefract is dubbed Ponte Carlo).

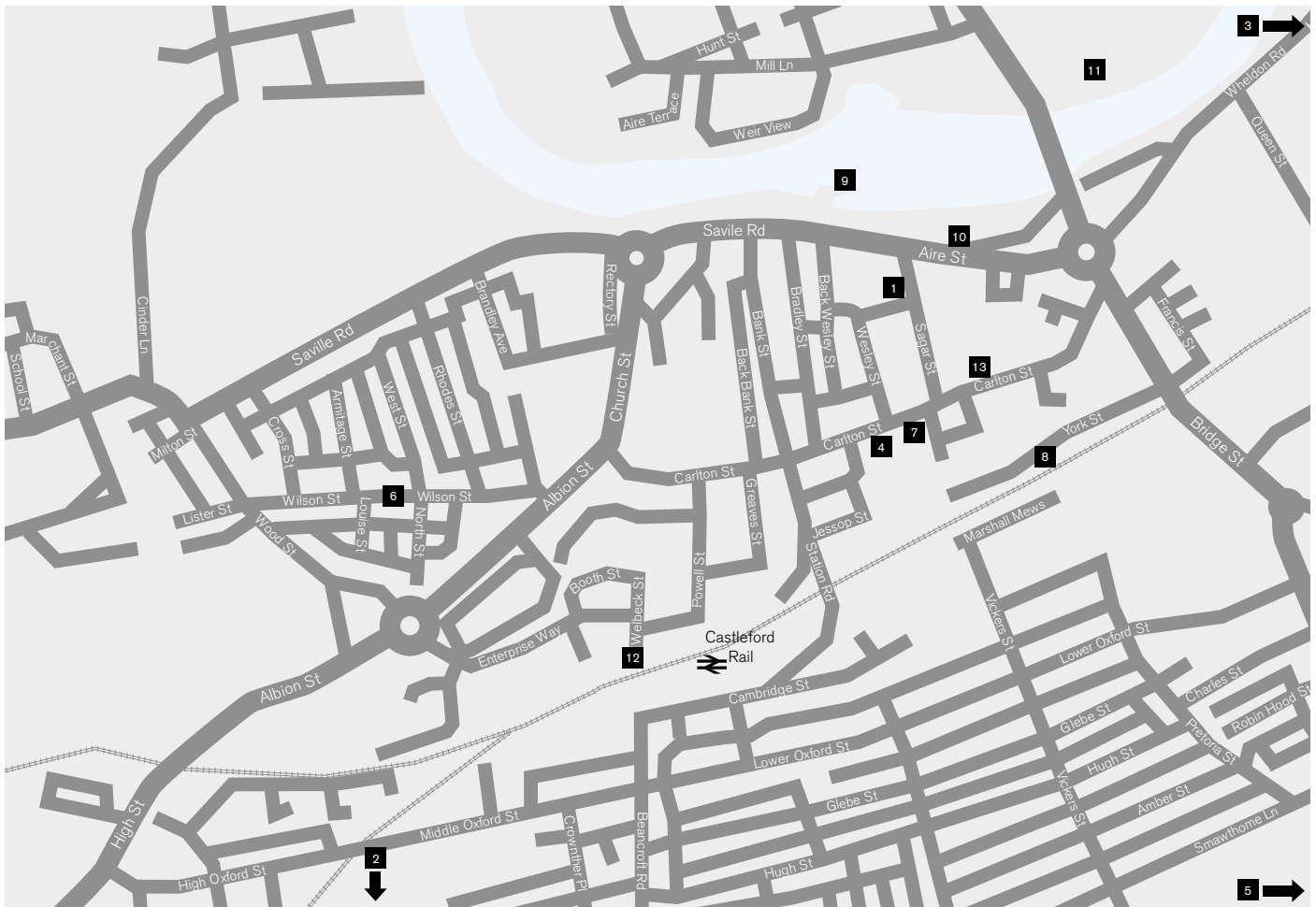
Never glamorous, the town has had it particularly hard over the last 20 years. The pits closed in the mid-’80s and early ’90s. The town’s factories, which once made napalm for the US and at one time produced more glass bottles than anywhere in the country, also shut their doors.

As a result male unemployment among the 40,000-strong population rose to 20 per cent and even today parts of the town rank in the bottom five per cent of the most >>



Buildings in the centre of Castleford, a town being transformed in Channel 4's regeneration programme *The Castleford Project*





CASTLEFORD'S  
REGENERATION PROJECTS  
(SEE PAGES 25-29)

1. Sagar Street Gallery
2. Cutsyke Playpark
3. New Fryston
4. Henry Moore Square
5. Ferry Fryston Green
6. Wilson Street
7. Market restoration, Carlton Street
8. Tickle Cock Underpass
9. Castleford Bridge
10. Riverside masterplan
11. Breeze apartments (proposal)
12. Transport interchange
13. The Forum

impoverished areas in the UK, according to the government's indices of deprivation.

'I love Cas as much as anyone but I still think it's a dump', says local Alison Drake, one of a network of community champions who became integral to the making of the Channel 4 programme. 'We don't ever talk about the good old days – we know really they weren't the good old days – people suffered too much for them to be good.'

But, despite the hardships, Castleford clung onto its strong sense of community and managed to retain its friendliness. 'There is a tradition here of watching each other's backs. Not just underground in the pit, but

elsewhere in the community', says Drake. 'And people just want better.' It was this spirit that persuaded Channel 4 to pick Castleford in 2003 after considering more than 100 towns for a show about urban regeneration.

David Barrie, the consultant project director and executive producer for *The Castleford Project*, says: 'We looked at different places in Britain that exemplified the issues confronting regeneration efforts and where we felt a light-touch approach could work.'

'Cas won because it had a very committed community wanting to make a future for the town, as well as a series of small-scale public-realm projects that were relatively do-able.'



### 1 SAGAR STREET

The new gallery and exhibition space in Sagar Street – a renovation of a abandoned shop – was the first of the 10 Castleford Project schemes to complete in 2004. Leeds-based Carey Jones oversaw the revamp.

### 2 CUTSYKE PLAYPARK

Leeds- and Sheffield-based Allen Tod Architecture teamed up with Leeds' Estell Warren Landscape Architecture to design this adventure playforest on the site of a former allotment in Cutsyke. The scheme opened in June 2005.



### 3 NEW FRYSTON

Funded by English Partnerships, Martha Schwartz's £1 million 'village green' for New Fryston, a former mining village on the outskirts of Castleford, has received a mixed reaction since completing in 2005. Locals have nicknamed the central sculpture 'Martha's Finger'.

*'I love Castleford as much as anyone but I still think it's a dump'*

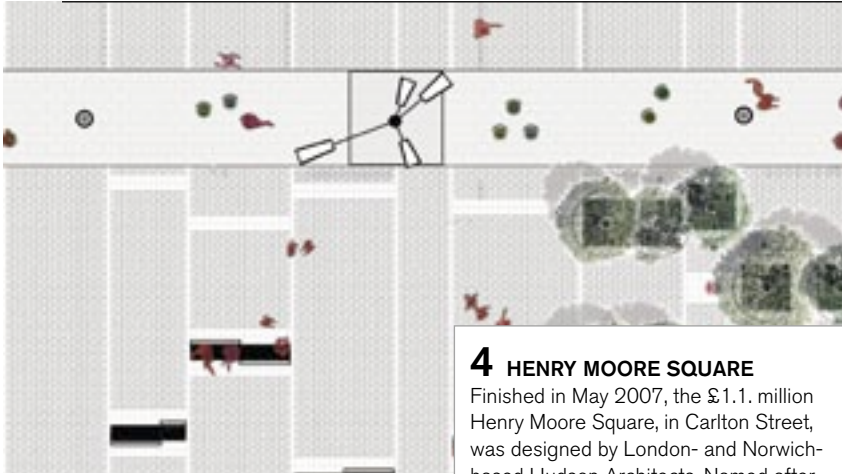
Castleford had already been included in Yorkshire Forward's Urban Renaissance programme under a Five Towns banner alongside Normanton, Pontefract, Knottingley and Featherstone in 2002. A Town Centre Partnership had been set up the year before to look at regeneration.

However, the programme-maker (Talkback) realised the only way it would be able to achieve anything (at least in a short, television-friendly timescale) would be through 'bottom-up' micro-regeneration. With an initial investment of only £100,000 available from the Channel 4 coffers, Barrie wanted to steer away from 'mega-

masterplanning' and instead deliver the first steps to kick-start wider regeneration.

He began by gathering a team of regeneration experts, including developers Chris Brown of Igloo and Peter Rogers of Stanhope, and started working with Wakefield Metropolitan District Council to identify projects. Other stakeholders such as the Coalfield Regeneration Trust, English Partnerships, Yorkshire Forward and the Arts Council were also brought on board.

Channel 4 also set up a process to involve the community in the choice of projects, their scale, the designers and, ultimately, the designs themselves. >>



**4 HENRY MOORE SQUARE**

Finished in May 2007, the £1.1 million Henry Moore Square, in Carlton Street, was designed by London- and Norwich-based Hudson Architects. Named after the Castleford-born sculptor, the scheme features granite paving and tubular-steel and wood-weave benches.



**5 FERRY FRYSTON**

The Ferry Fryston Green was finished in July 2005. Designed by landscape planner Parklife, the project improved play facilities.

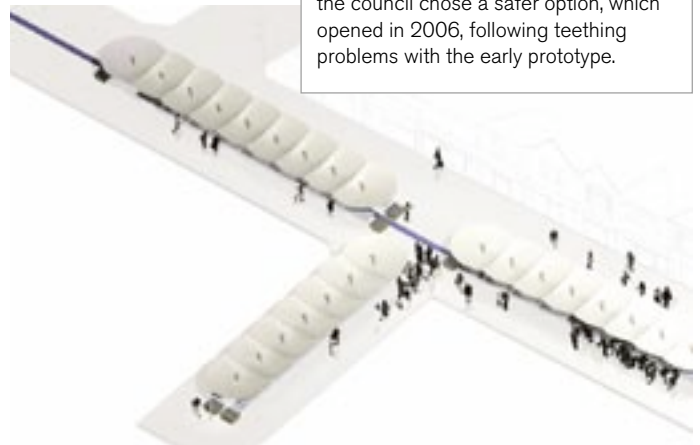
**6 WILSON STREET**

The Wilson Street project, designed by Allen Tod, includes new traffic-calming measures and the planting of mature trees to improve 'the street scene'. The first phase completed in 2006, with further improvements planned.



**7 MARKET**

Hudson Architects masterminded the relocation of the outdoor market from behind the Carlton Lanes shopping centre. The scheme was originally much more bold, featuring foldaway stalls, but the council chose a safer option, which opened in 2006, following teething problems with the early prototype.



Ten schemes dotted around the town emerged through this consultation. They ranged from the very small – a children's play park – through to large greens, town squares, underpasses and McDowell + Benedetti's bridge over the Aire – by far the most impressive of the projects (see pages 30-33).

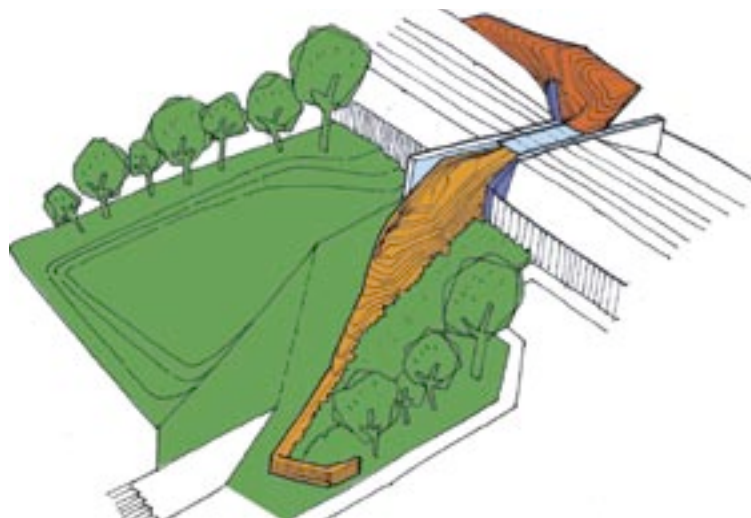
A longlist of architects was chosen through an international competition, followed by a community-led selection process (organised by architect Roger Zogolovitch and regeneration consultant Lee Mallett). As a result local groups helped pick the likes of McDowell + Benedetti, DSDHA and Hudson Architects.



MARTIN PRIESTLEY

## 8 TICKLE COCK UNDERPASS

Five years in the making, London-based DSDHA's Tickle Cock underpass was officially unveiled two weeks ago. The scheme marks one of the busiest entrances into the town and can witness a footfall of more than 10,000 people on a Saturday. Designed in collaboration with artist Martin Richman, the scheme has transformed a dark subway into a welcoming gateway, complete with red, flocked-rubber seating. Project architect Sam Potter said: 'We saw this 'portal' as one of the main priorities to get right for the town and something Castleford could be proud of. Although value-engineered, it is still faithful to our original designs.'



*'Castleford has a very committed community wanting to make a future for the town'*

The first schemes were completed in 2004 and the majority have been well-received, with the possible exception of Martha Schwartz's new public space at New Fryston with its single finger-like sculpture – taken as an abusive affront by some residents.

Yet despite the relatively modest scale of the individual projects (worth a combined total of £14.5 million) there have been numerous 'creative' battles and compromises. DSDHA struggled to get its full budget from the council for its proposed £350,000 revamp of the dingy, drippy Tickle Cock pedestrian underpass. The practice has managed to create an ultra-modern gateway and flocked rubber

seating-area from around half the funds it wanted for the busy portal.

Hudson Architects' plans for the relocation of the market, which involved prototype foldaway stalls, was curtailed and a scheme to revamp Sagar Street was ditched. Practice founder Anthony Hudson also admits to being 'slightly disappointed' by the detailing of his Henry Moore Square designs. Meanwhile Sarah Wigglesworth's waterside 'viewing platform' plans remain just that, and a riverside boardwalk next to the McDowell + Benedetti bridge has yet to secure funding.

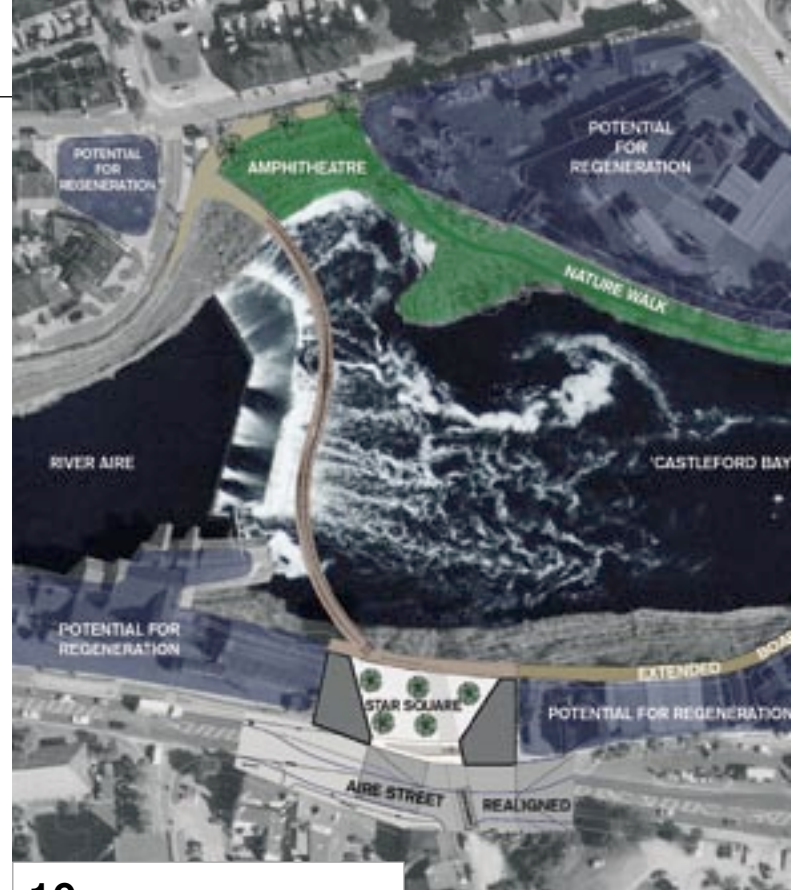
So what has Channel 4 succeeded in delivering? The programme-makers claim >>

## 9 CASTLEFORD BRIDGE

The showpiece of Channel 4's Castleford Project is McDowell + Benedetti's snake-like bridge running along the weir (see pages 30-33). The £3.2 million pedestrian link over the River Aire opened last week.



TIMOTHY SOAR



## 10 WATERFRONT MASTERPLAN

As well as designing the bridge, McDowell + Benedetti also devised a masterplan to open up the waterfront and link it through to the town (to the south) and to Duck Island (to the north). A cantilevered boardwalk along the water's edge is still being considered.



## 11 THE BREEZE

Architecture2B's proposed 141-flat scheme next to the town's existing road bridge over the Aire has been in for planning since the beginning of the year and is going in front of a planning committee tomorrow (11 July).

*'Regeneration started before Channel 4 came in and will continue after they leave'*

their efforts have helped 'leverage' around £250 million of investment. But according to Wakefield Council leader Peter Box, the project has actually touched on 'only about 10 per cent' of what needs doing.

'If you put a television camera in front of a funding agency you are more likely to get a positive response', he says. 'We are not going to turn up our noses at something that cuts through bureaucracy. It has been a tremendous help. However the regeneration of this town started long before Channel 4 came in and will continue after they've left.'

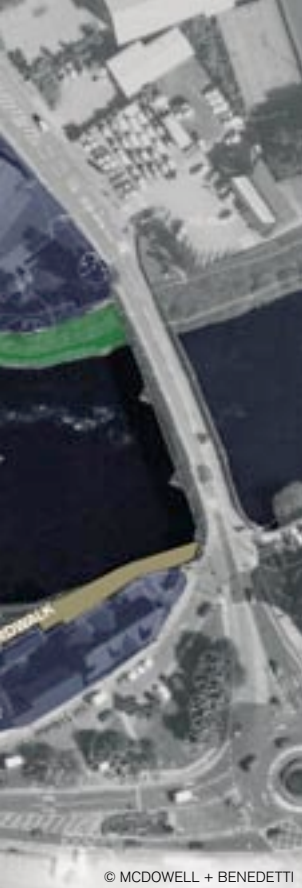
Plans are already afoot for a much-needed combined transport interchange, designed by

Aedas, and Edinburgh House – the owner of the existing shopping centre – intends to extend retail space across the town centre.

Box admits that there were 'creative tensions' between the council and Channel 4 but thanks the programme-makers for opening the town's eyes to 'less conservative' design.

He says: 'People are talking about architecture on the street – not just about Castleford Tigers [rugby league team] losing by 20 points again.'

But how the council sees the town's regeneration being managed needs defining. Heavy community involvement may not work on larger, more contentious schemes.

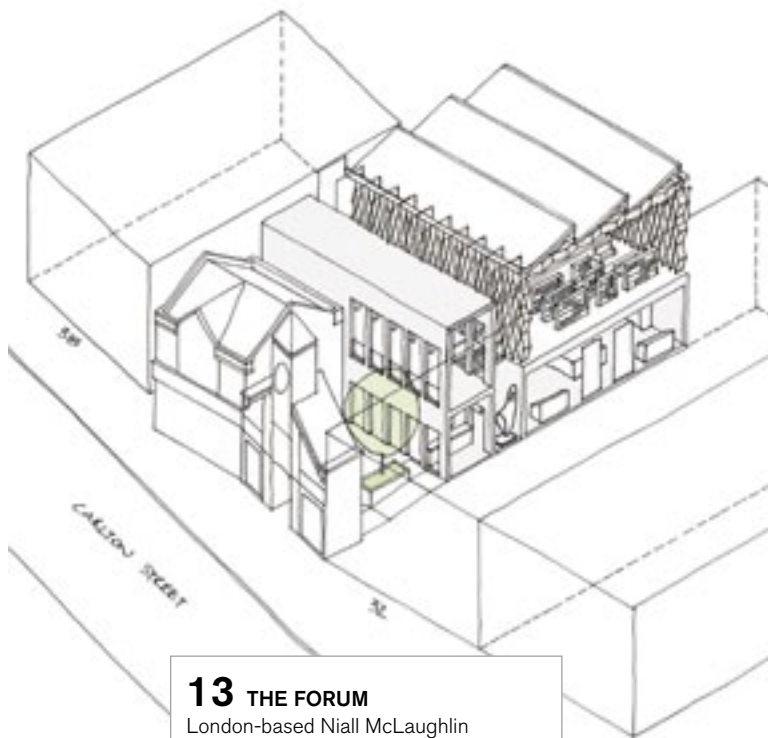


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**12 TRANSPORT INTERCHANGE**

Work is expected to start soon on Aedas' rail and bus interchange. The £14.3 million development, which will sit next to the existing station, won planning permission in February 2007.



**13 THE FORUM**

London-based Niall McLaughlin Architects' competition-winning library and museum proposals have gone through various designs over the last three years. The scheme will be built behind the entrance to the old market hall and next-door library.

Nick Brown, from Architecture2B, which faced a 'hostile' reception when outlining plans for a residential scheme alongside the river, said: 'Despite all the work done as part of Yorkshire Forward's Five Towns Initiative, and the interest generated by Channel 4, there is a startling lack of vision for how to resolve the issues and help Castleford move forward.'

'The town needs strong political leadership; an individual or small group that have the mandate to deliver change, and the ability to bring the community together.'

Channel 4 has successfully put Castleford in the public spotlight. Somebody needs to make sure it isn't turned off. ■