

# MADE

## Low Town

**location: Bridgnorth**

Bridgnorth is an historic Shropshire town of approximately 12,000 people located in the Severn Valley. It is separated by the river and a 111ft sandstone cliff, into the High Town to the west and the Low Town to the east, which are uniquely connected by the Bridgnorth Cliff Railway.

In High Town are the churches of St Mary's and St. Leonard's, the seventeenth century Town Hall and the remains of Bridgnorth Castle.

Low Town has historically been the commercial and industrial hub of the area, and as recently as the 1970's hundreds of people were employed along the riverside. More recently this industry has moved away to be replaced by housing.



## Design process

The Low Town area of Bridgnorth was one of 5 areas selected in 2003 by the RIBA to produce a 'Local Design Statement' as part of a pilot study. This initiative led to the formation of the Bridgnorth Low Town Action Group, whose remit is to 'improve the working and living conditions of the people of Low Town, Bridgnorth'. This organisation was registered as a charity in 2005 and a limited company, Bridgnorth Low Town Action Ltd, was established in 2009 to 'define and procure the delivery of community facilities and the regeneration of Low Town'. At various stages there has been support and funding from the RIBA, RegenWM, Advantage West Midlands and CABA as well as the on-going involvement of the local practice ID Architects.

Bridgnorth Low Town Action Ltd produced a Business Plan in early 2010 (see link for download), and ID Architects have been commissioned to carry out a programme of stakeholder engagement in order to ultimately produce a Local Design Statement. Local design statements are a method by which local people can help to shape development in their area and they are particularly useful in areas where local character is threatened by insensitive development – one of the reasons why Bridgnorth's Low Town was initially selected as a suitable area by the RIBA. The introduction of the Local Development Framework in England and Wales from 2004 has provided the mechanism for such Local Design Statements to be incorporated into the Local Development Scheme as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD), thus giving the views of local people real weight in the planning system and a real opportunity to shape their communities.

The Local Design Statement will help to deliver sustainable regeneration by identifying activities and locations for future developments, including enhancement of the tourist potential of the town, whilst fully recognising the local distinctiveness and regeneration potential of Low Town.

Client: Bridgnorth Low Town Action Ltd  
Partners: RIBA  
Advantage West Midlands  
Shropshire Council  
RegenWM  
MADE

Consultants: ID Architects

## **Evaluation**

The process undertaken in Bridgnorth's Low Town is admirable in many ways and the Bridgnorth Low Town Action Group and its not-for-profit company delivery vehicle are structures that should be able to take the regeneration of Bridgnorth Low Town on into the future in a way that is fully responsive to the community. The way in which the skills and motivation of the local practice, ID Architects have helped to drive the process, along with the commitment of the leaders of the Bridgnorth Low Town Action Group is a clear example of good practice. However, the experience also highlights some of the difficulties of the approach and it is important to highlight these if lessons are to be learned.

The pilot kicked off in 2003 and as of spring 2010 there is still not a completed Local Design Statement. During this period there have been a number of significant changes the most important of which is the creation of Shropshire Council as a unitary authority in 2009. Importantly, there have also been changes to the partner bodies meaning that the future funding needed to develop the Statement will be more difficult to attain.

It could be argued that the process was borne out of a time when area-based strategic funding was in place and the Regional Development Agencies and the RIBA had budgets for such ventures. In these more straitened times the budget needed to progress the production of a Local Design Statement will be more difficult to amass and the assiduous, ongoing and largely pro-bono support of local professional practice can only stretch so far.

One way forward would be to gain the support of the Local Planning Authority, Shropshire Council, who could support the development of the Local Design Statement with a view to it becoming the Bridgnorth Low Town Supplementary Planning Document. This would ensure that the hard work and commitment of all involved was rewarded with a document that could really shape the future of Low Town.

## **Key lessons**

The Bridgnorth Low Town case study shows how the production of a Local Design Statement can be a method of:

- Galvanising a community and setting up the structures that help to provide meaningful involvement into the future
- Fostering close links between the professional practice community and local residents
- Producing a locally responsive document that recognises the local distinctiveness and will help to shape the future direction of the town with real community buy-in

However, if the process is to be ultimately successful:

- Funding needs to be identified and allocated to cover the costs of producing the Local Design Statement
- The document should be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document in the Local Development Framework, to give it real weight in the planning system
- In order to achieve this the Local Planning Authority needs to be fully on board and supportive of the process.

## **Link and downloads**

Bridgnorth Low Town Action Group  
[www.shrop.net/bridgnorthlowtownactiongroup](http://www.shrop.net/bridgnorthlowtownactiongroup)

Shropshire Council  
[www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk)

RIBA West Midlands  
[www.architecture.com/Home.aspx](http://www.architecture.com/Home.aspx)

MADE  
[www.made.org.uk](http://www.made.org.uk)  
Bridgnorth Low Town Action Ltd Business Plan

## **Contact for further information**

Bridgnorth Low Town Action Group - Edward Marshall (Chair) or Mike Grocock (Secretary)  
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