

SUMMARY

The built environment of the United Kingdom's waterways is a remarkable working heritage infrastructure. The special identity for Stourport-on-Severn can be seen in its canal basins placed at the central part of the town. There can be few places with such a strong association with a single determining feature - its canal basin infrastructure. This makes Stourport Britain's premier canal town and an important national heritage asset.

A partnership involving British Waterways (the public corporation that cares for the 2,200-mile/3,540 km network of canals and rivers in England, Scotland and Wales) and key stakeholders determined that the protection and presentation of the historic environment must lie at the centre of efforts to bring vitality back to town.

By exploring its history alongside undertaking sympathetic building works the project could thereby celebrate the town's unique qualities and character.

By the summer of 2008 the canal basins at Stourport had been restored over a four year period. This was delivered via the local partnership with the £ 3.2 m (€ 3.6 m) costs funded by British Waterways, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the West Midlands Regional Development Agency and many other players.

The work has regenerated an area encompassing no less than 29 listed buildings and helped to kick start wider town regeneration plans.

Alongside comprehensive engagement of the local community, physical elements of the restoration work have included faithful traditional construction techniques, removal of unsympathetic modern additions and introduction of new high-quality contemporary features and these themes are explored by the article.

The concluding message for those seeking to assemble regeneration plans is that historic environment is an asset in seeking to achieve sustainable development.

Winner of the 2008 Waterways Renaissance Awards Outstanding Achievement award and chosen by the public as winner of the 2009 national UK Lottery funded projects heritage category award, the Stourport basins restoration project is an acknowledged excellent example of incorporating heritage values into regeneration plans.

By breathing life into a historic setting it shows how changes can be true to their context and become heritage for the future.