



## **INT-HERIT – IMPLEMENTATION NETWORK**

HERITAGE STRATEGIES IN SMALL AND MEDIUM- SIZED EUROPEAN CITIES

## **OPERATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK**

## **ARMAGH**



## Contents

1. Introduction
2. Baseline position
3. Outline Implementation plan
4. Response to the implementation challenges
5. Learning journey
6. Synthesis

## 1. Introduction

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The City of Armagh is located some 40 miles south west of Belfast and 15 minutes' drive north of the border with the Republic of Ireland. It is set within a picturesque landscape of drumlins, characteristic to counties Armagh and Down. Surrounding the City, these drumlins predominantly consist of pastures with occasional woodlands and orchards, crisscrossed by hedgerows and tree belts. In 2015, the former Armagh City & District Council merged with its neighbouring municipalities of Banbridge and Craigavon to form a new authority of Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council. The new Authority undertook preparation of a city masterplan which has identified heritage and the Georgian character of Armagh as key selling points for the city. It also considered the following:

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- Achieving a balance between pedestrian and vehicular usage of the City Centre and resolving key congestion black spots;
  - Enhancing connectivity between the various parts of the City Centre and promoting sustainable methods of traversing the City;
  - Preserving, protecting and maintaining the historic built heritage and the importance of conserving the unique character of Armagh City Centre; and
  - Identifying unique selling points with regards to the stimulation of tourism activity in the City Centre and ensuring there is adequate provision for visitors.

The City has historically suffered from a lack of investment over several decades both by the public and private sectors and the masterplan proposed a new approach to enable the necessary investment to be prioritised in order to address the ongoing decline and proposed a heritage led approach to regeneration in order to differentiate the city from its competitor towns and cities. The management and maintenance of heritage assets is a key priority for the Council and its partners. We are keen to observe how this process has been undertaken in other regions of Europe to guide both the development of the Masterplan going forward and the work that is being undertaken to develop a Townscape Heritage Scheme for the City. There are 5 conservation areas and over 100 properties on the Heritage Buildings at Risk Register within our Borough and we are keen to learn how other areas have worked to unlock the value of the heritage assets within their respective areas.

We have struggled historically to derive maximum value from our heritage assets. Anecdotal evidence from visitors to the city indicates that you can spend a lot of time in Armagh without spending a lot of money. A lot of the assets that we have work on a voluntary contribution rather than on a set fee for visiting basis and thus struggle with sustainability issues which

leads to a grant dependency culture within the heritage sector locally. Additionally, our new Tourism Strategy contains a shift away from measuring visitor numbers to measuring visitor spend as a key performance indicator, marking quite a radical departure in terms of performance management and measurement. At the outset of INT-HERIT, we detected significant similarities between Armagh and the other participant cities i.e. Baena located amongst key tourism destinations, Cahors with a key project of restoration of the city prison and Mantova with a reputation for being a key artistic, cultural and musical hub. We felt that participation in the project could lead to significant learning benefits for us through working with the partner cities and seeing at first-hand how they capitalise on their own unique heritage. A further benefit was to enable our local partners to participate in transnational visits to enable them to undertake capacity building to better support the work of our local partnership.

## 2. Baseline position

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### > City current/previous implementation practice

Armagh City is one of the earliest urban settlements in Ireland and has long been a place of importance, first associated with the Kings of ancient Ulster and later with Christianity. The city first developed as a religious and administrative centre, ruled from a large fortified rath by Daire, a local Chieftain. Its importance, however in Christian history began with the arrival of St Patrick in 445AD. Whilst a very different cultural and political context exists today, plentiful evidence of Armagh's status still remains. Fine architecture and urban spaces adorn the city centre and it retains its administrative, religious and political significance, playing host to the headquarters for the Education Authority, the North South Ministerial Council and both the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland. Armagh has an extraordinary heritage. No other city in Northern Ireland has been so distinguished since ancient times, first becoming the seat of royalty and then the most important religious centre in Ireland. Armagh's heritage is central to its identity and character. Armagh's heritage is most visibly reflected in its collection of landmark buildings and spaces, many of which are listed and the City Centre's status as a Conservation Area. The most prominent are the two Cathedrals, both of which are devoted to St. Patrick. Other notable buildings include the former City Hospital, Public Library, City Library, Tourist Information Office, Courthouse, Gaol and the Palace. Similarly, open spaces such as the Palace Demesne and the Mall are also central features of Armagh's heritage. The continued protection and enhancement of these buildings and their settings is fundamental to the future of the City. Given such rich history and architecture, Armagh should be a leading tourist destination akin to other great cathedral cities in the UK, Ireland and Europe. However, analysis would suggest this is not the case. Whilst visitors do come, time spent and the likelihood of repeat visits are often limited. Such patterns point to the fact that Armagh's

collection of buildings cannot sustain high visitor numbers alone.

### **A.- The global strategy**

Like most urban centres, Armagh has faced significant challenges in terms of the changing nature of urban centres and the decline in traditional retail accompanied by enhanced online commerce. Armagh has struggled to redefine itself in this context and has suffered from high vacancy and dereliction levels. Dereliction has proved particularly stubborn to address given its nature and some important buildings in the City (Armagh Gaol) have been vacant for several decades despite significant efforts to identify new usages for these. In order to improve this situation, the municipality has developed a partnership with National Lottery Heritage Fund to establish an Armagh City Townscape Heritage project which will aim to achieve the following outputs:

- 28 buildings restored;
- 5,000 square metres of vacant and underused floorspace brought into use;
- £6.25m of investment;
- 50 new jobs created as well as the safeguarding of 30 existing jobs;
- A range of uses are being promoted through the scheme including retail, residential, commercial office and facilities to support the growing evening economy in the City including Cafes, restaurants and entertainment venues. The scheme will see a range of projects including filling gap sites, restoring derelict properties and replacing lost architectural detail.

### **B.- City project in Int Herit Network:**

Critical to the work that the municipality have instigated are principles which align to the Urbact ethos and that tie in with the INT-HERIT fundamentals, namely:

- Establishing a public private partnership approach to financial management and governance;
- Ensuring meaningful engagement and participation of key stakeholders;
- Fostering an integrated approach with key participants' involvement and willing participation;
- Moving from the City masterplan into the delivery and implementation phase, showcasing real improvements and benefits;
- Measuring both quantitative and qualitative performance

Specifically, Council along with our partners are seeking to utilize the restoration of important historic buildings in different clusters across the city as key economic drivers, stimulating job creation, entrepreneurship and opportunities for residential development and thus supporting the development of our evening economy. Our County Club case study is a key examples of this:

## Armagh County Club –



The County Club building is a prime example of an underutilized heritage asset. This building houses a charitable and voluntary organisation and has been severely neglected recently resulting in significant dereliction and dilapidation. The Club will celebrate their 150th anniversary in 2019 and it is fitting that the membership has agreed an ambitious programme of improvement works to their property for this important milestone in their history. The project, once completed, will create sustainable income streams for the owner and enable them to invest resources in their charitable activities. Although this project is still in its design and planning stage, we feel as a team that we have learnt some valuable lessons to date. This project is an example of a PPP approach to regeneration although the private partner is quite unlike any of the other private partners that we as a municipality usually work with as they are governed by a Committee and are a voluntary organisation. A more patient iterative approach is required when dealing with this type of group although the end goal has to continue to remain in sharp focus.

### 3. Outline Implementation Plan

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Our planned investment in the city centre will lead to the restoration of up to 28 key buildings and will achieve the results highlighted previously in section 2a. We appreciate that this is an ambitious undertaking over a 5-year period but we feel this level of ambition is required to enable Armagh to fulfil its potential. It is important to note that we are in the early stages of this project so definitive outcomes and results are not currently available. It is also important to appreciate that the property owners are fairly reluctant and we are bringing them along with us on every step of the journey and the availability of financial assistance at levels of approximately 60% to these property owners does not always prove to be enough of an incentive in order to realise these projects. One of our key problems is the really poor condition of these heritage buildings thereby necessitating large investments in order to realise their commercial potential. Also the Brexit issue and the ongoing uncertainty has led to investors taking a 'wait and see' approach.

#### ***1. Integrated approach***

We believe that an integrated approach involving owners, communities, local government and central government all have a role to play and a contribution to make in the promotion and safeguarding of the cultural and built heritage of our city. We have fostered an integrated cross-sectoral approach through shared responsibilities and partnerships among central and local authorities, public and private stakeholders. The conservation of the historic urban environment poses specific and urgent challenges that requires a multidisciplinary approach, where conservation actions are embedded within economic, social and environmental development strategies. Council, as the lead partner, have established a cross departmental project board, aimed at representing the integration of the approach and of ensuring that this integrated approach remains consistent throughout our project.

#### ***2. Maintaining involvement of local stakeholders***

It is generally accepted that the conservation of cultural heritage requires the involvement of multiple players across the public, private and nongovernment sectors, not only to initiate and carry out conservation but also to sustain the place. We believe that heritage belongs to all and too often, individuals and communities can be excluded from enjoying their local heritage. Twinned with our capital investment programme which will support the restoration of key buildings across the city, we have established a complementary programme of activities including an extensive awareness raising and education programme which will enable local school children and college students to engage meaningfully with heritage.

#### ***3. Measuring performance***

Whilst the measurement of quantitative performance is a fairly standard activity for the local municipality, establishing qualitative performance measurement mechanisms is a more complicated task. Our heritage led

approach to regeneration is designed to induce new life into dilapidated and derelict properties to create meaningful economic, social and environmental benefits for the city and the communities which use the city and call it home. The establishment of the heritage dividend is a critical tool for establishing some of the more quantitative benefits of the scheme with the ultimate goal of leading to the economic regeneration of the city centre and to create commercial and employment opportunities for the local population. However, we also will be seeking to monitor qualitative aspects of the improvement including contributions to wellbeing, civic pride and neighbourhood satisfaction.

#### ***4. From strategy to action plan***

As a new municipality in a new political governance situation in Northern Ireland, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council have developed ambitious plans for the regeneration of the urban centres, particularly those that have designated conservation protection status. A dedicated masterplan has been developed for Armagh City Centre aimed at addressing the key challenges for the sustainable and viable future of the city centre. It is important for the municipality to start to move towards the implementation of this action plan in order to start to realise the potential of the City. Heritage led regeneration is just one of a number of strands within the plan which will be important to consider as we start to implement the masterplan.

#### ***5. Setting up PPPs***

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have offered a promising new approach to financing, developing, operating, and maintaining historic buildings. This is in recognition that central and local government do not have the full necessary financial authority or resources in order to undertake the rehabilitation of heritage buildings on their own. Whilst the public stakeholders may bring access to specific expertise and alternative sources of finance, the private partners bring differing skills, resources and expertise to the table and there is an acknowledgement that this collective approach can reap significant benefits including risk sharing and collective expertise imparted upon a project. The private sector locally is unwilling to lead on heritage led regeneration due to the significant gap between cost and value, thus the need for public intervention. However, the municipality, as the public partner in the arrangement, does not simply wish to provide the finance, rather we wish to be seen to be a strategic and equal partner in determining the new uses for the heritage buildings within our scheme.

## **4. Response to the Implementation Challenges**

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This section documents how you responded/will respond to the various challenges you face(d) during the lifetime of your implementation network. It will include a subsection for each Implementation Challenge plus any other relevant Implementation Themes.

This should include, for **each** Implementation Challenge:

> What this Challenge “looks like” in your city – how it presents itself in practice, what is the exact nature of the problem to be overcome? Include the specific barriers/blockers/problems that you experience or that you worked on in your local situation as part of the network (i.e. to what will you apply your capability/methods?)

> The assessed importance/relevance of the Challenge in the local city context.

IC1: Very relevant

IC2: Very relevant

IC3: Very relevant

IC4: relevant

IC5: PPP relevant, enhancing funding of actions and policies very relevant

> How do you plan to overcome the Challenge. In the final version this will become how you *overcame* the challenge, or tried to – success is not a pre-requisite. What concrete tools or responses will you / did you develop and put in place in your city to improve your response to the various Implementation Challenges. For example, a new governance structure for projects, a monitoring & evaluation plan. When available these tools / descriptions of them would be annexes to your Operational Implementation Framework and are important local outputs to refer to and illustrate.

IC1

Establishing an integrated approach in Northern Ireland is extremely complicated as we have a fairly fractious system of Government, with competing priorities between local and central government agencies. Responsibility for the preservation and enhancement of the built and cultural heritage resides with the Department for Communities’ Historic Environment Division (HED). HED do not have the resources necessary, either financial or personnel, to undertake the entirety of work that is required in order to champion this heritage led approach to the regeneration of our cities and towns. National Lottery funding has been established in this area to enable municipalities to partner with some of the key players in the sector and to address the systemic dereliction and dilapidation of the historic built environment of Armagh. Left unaddressed, key treasures dating from Georgian days, and carrying the legacy of Archbishop Richard Robinson, will continue to decline and fall into further disrepair until they reach a state where they will be lost forever. Take Armagh Gaol as an example. A significant tourism opportunity lies in wait for Armagh and our ongoing research informs us that the provision of high quality tourism accommodation is absolutely required to enable the city to completely take advantage and capitalize on this opportunity. Armagh has been recently recognized for excellence in the evening and night time economy and is regarded as the religious and ecclesiastical capital of Ireland, drawing significant influences from its Georgian heritage. This is a product that people will want to see and travel to witness and the provision of a suitable quality of facilities for the city is critical to the continued development of Armagh’s tourism offer and its evening economy. The property in question has been vacant for a number of decades and with every year that passes, falls into even more significant state of disrepair. Addressing this disrepair and creating a meaningful and sustainable

use for the property can lead to wider benefits for the city and its population through new jobs and career opportunities. Gaol has the potential to be a fairly significant tourism driver for the City of Armagh and has attracted private investment in excess of £11m. However, this is a £25m plus project which needs intervention from central government in order to ensure that it is realized, funding which is not currently, nor likely to be any time soon, forthcoming.

IC2:

The involvement of local stakeholders is a critical stage for the continued preservation of the heritage assets of Armagh. In addition to the capital elements of the project, we have established a comprehensive programme of complementary and educational activities which is aimed at involving local people in heritage education and preservation schemes. But, in the long run, effective conservation of heritage resources not only helps in preserving and safeguarding the resources, but also in revitalizing local economies, and in bringing about a sense of identity, pride and belonging to residents. Good heritage conservation strategies require (a) better appreciation of the value of heritage assets (both tangible and intangible), and (b) integration of such strategies within the larger processes of planning and development of a city or urban area.

IC3:

In a funded environment, measuring both the qualitative and quantitative performance of interventions is critical to enable funders to glean the value for money impact of their investments. The funding for our programme of restorations comes from the National Lottery and in recent years, the National Lottery have reported a slowdown of people playing the Lottery as increased competition in this market has led to customers spending their money elsewhere. Therefore, realizing the impact of lottery players' money and articulating and communicating that widely has become a major challenge and an important aspect of our work. Whilst the quantitative aspects of this are fairly self-explanatory, we find the softer, more qualitative performance measures a significant challenge.

IC4:

The municipality have recruited a project manager to lead on the move from action plan to implementation. Authorities come under criticism for developing plans and not acting on the delivery, however, we have found that implementation remains a particular challenge for a variety of reasons outside of our control. The availability of private finance is one such factor affecting the delivery of our action plan. Whilst the financial assistance available from the funders is substantial, it appears that a challenge remains with the owners of the heritage buildings accessing enough finance in order to make the respective projects work.

IC5:

PPPs have been slow to properly take off in most of Northern Ireland outside of the major centres such as Belfast. Given the slowdown in the global economy, the state of lending has been extremely difficult, a situation that has been exacerbated in recent years by the uncertainty surrounding the UK's decision to leave the European Union. We are in constant discussions with our private sector partners and they all report that BREXIT is rendering the majority of investment decisions more difficult and that their banks are increasingly reluctant to lend given the uncertainty.

We feel critically there is a need for leadership in this important issue. Leadership needs to be shared but usually it requires one partner to take responsibility for leadership and to bring other partners along with them. The Council will have to assume this leadership role going forward to ensure that the value of investing in heritage as a driver for wider regeneration and economic activity is realised whilst the issue of sustainability is consistently on the agenda. We also feel that leadership is critical to develop an appreciation of the importance of these assets to ensure that the owners realise that they are custodians of these important heritage assets for future generations. We also recognize the important role that the Council has to play and have undertaken investigatory work around the establishment of a Civic Forum for the city in order to reinforce this importance.

#### 4. Learning Journey

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The instances of Civic Leadership displayed in the partner cities is extremely compelling. All aspects of their society have come together in order to better position their respective cities for the realisation of the heritage potential of their respective cities. This leadership needs to be channelled by the local authority with input from a range of other key players which can lead to a facilitator for private sector investment and community and stakeholder support and providing a framework for innovative new multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working often central to effective project delivery. In our circumstances, there is no one real leadership organisation, dedicated to the preservation of Armagh's built and cultural heritage. To this end, we have brought heritage stakeholders together in our ULG and, further, we have commenced work on the establishment of a Civic Forum for Armagh. These groups, consisting of heritage practitioners, civic and religious leaders and the business community exist in many of Ireland's larger cities such as Belfast and Dublin, but the importance of Armagh from an ecclesiastical, historical and heritage standpoint, now means that the establishment of such a group is a pressing concern.

We have ascertained that local identity, authenticity and uniqueness are key characteristics of a heritage destination. This is one of the issues very evident across all the participants in the network. Heritage and history can be particularly controversial topics in a Northern Ireland context and Armagh Gaol is an indication of this as it was used to house inmates from Northern Ireland's troubles but we appreciate that this heritage is symbolic of where we are as a society and there are opportunities to capitalise on this.

Skills and capacity need to be enhanced. It has become apparent to us that a serious threat to key restoration techniques has been the loss of skills, particularly vocational skills, across society. Further, we believe that the lack of capacity in delivering PPPs within the municipality is a serious concern with relation to the projects we are undertaking. Like in most European cities, there are a plethora of agencies responsible for the protection of the built environment and heritage. This offers opportunities and challenges as we seek to bring these partners together to realise these ambitious projects. Another critical element of our work will be to educate and train property owners on the requirements for maintenance and maintenance arrangements and training will be made available for the beneficiaries of our support.

Finally, it is evident that other cities (particularly Mantova and the Flemish partners) have developed sophisticated monitoring and measurement techniques that enable them to track and report on both quantitative and qualitative benefits of their interventions. At the outset of our scheme we have been accused of rewarding the bad behaviours of specific property owners by investing in properties that have been left to fall into disrepair. We feel that the Local Municipality has an obligation to take a bigger picture perspective and undertake projects that are in the best interests of the city at large and specific quarters/clusters. Whilst we have an obligation to report on the more tangible benefits (such as properties restored and jobs created) we often struggle with the less tangible benefits of heritage led regeneration such as its contribution to wellbeing and civic pride. We will be seeking to establish mechanisms by which we can start to track these important outcomes from our financial support to property owners. We feel that the less tangible measurements can enable us to 'convince the doubters' and showcase the wider benefits of this work to the city and the region in its totality.

## 5. Synthesis

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All in all, we have found the experience of participating in the pilot Implementation Networks to be challenging and also very beneficial. The partner cities, whilst presenting very different case examples and peer review subjects, had lots of similarities in terms of the issues and challenges they were facing and we felt that they each taught us something different about their challenges and how they related to our own circumstances. Participation in this project has certainly elevated the importance of heritage within our municipality and with our partners and a lot of positive impacts have accrued over the course of our participation in the programme. One key tangible aspect of this is that Armagh will host the heritage Angels Awards in 2019 for the first time (<https://www.ulsterarchitecturalheritage.org.uk/heritageangelawards/>) demonstrating a realisation by the awards organisers of the esteem in which Armagh's heritage is held across the sector and beyond.

The transnational visits enabled us to expose a range of partners, including our elected representatives, to the challenges and opportunities presented by a heritage led approach to regeneration. Indeed, the opportunity to have a peer review of some of our key heritage opportunities, such as the Gaol, has in some



ways opened our eyes to new possibilities and opportunities for this project. Also, playing host to the delegation in November 2017 provided us with some interesting feedback in relation to wider issues including the navigability of the city, transport and accessibility issues and the dominance of motor vehicles in our city.

We feel that through this process the critical issue that has been highlighted is the need for leadership in promoting the heritage agenda. It is important that partnerships are established in order to provide this leadership and, to this end, we are investigating the potential for the establishment of a Civic Forum for Armagh. Whilst terms of reference have not yet been established for this group, we feel that they can be a conduit for the leadership necessary to enable heritage led regeneration be kept high on the agenda for the municipality and our key partners.

Finally, we would like to thank the URBACT Secretariat, the lead partner of Baena and all the Baena municipality staff who have helped to deliver the project, our lead, Ad Hoc and URBACT experts and all the project partners for the opportunity to participate and learn from them during this process. We hope that you each have learnt something from us and enjoyed the opportunity to visit Armagh and participate in our Georgian Festival during our transnational meeting.