Celebrating a Decade of Renaissance

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By the 1990s this most ancient of thoroughfares in Lisburn had suffered years of neglect and economic decline to the extent that many of the historic buildings were in danger of collapse. However Bridge Street Townscape Heritage Initiative Partnership emerged to save and restore the street and its historic buildings.

Bridge Street - A Decade of Renaissance, produced by Lisburn City Centre Management, was launched today (Thursday) and illustrates before and after images of 15 properties that have been restored with the support of Bridge Street Townscape Heritage Initiative. It charts the progress from a position a decade ago when the commercial vacancy rate in Bridge Street was running at 70% and the residential community that added social and economic vibrancy in the past had totally deserted the street. Currently there are 20 modern fit-for purpose private rented apartments that have reintroduced a new residential community, with planning approval in place for a further 20 apartments. A total of 15 commercial premises have been restored and many important heritage features retained.

With the investment through Bridge Street Townscape Heritage Initiative, matched by investment from private property owners having now reached over £2.6 million, significant change has been achieved. The combined effect has reintroduced the essence of the historical streetscape back in one of the oldest surviving streets in Lisburn’s historic heart.

Speaking at the launch event in the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum, Cllr Allan Ewart, Chairman of Lisburn City Centre Management and Lisburn Historic Quarter Partnership, commented: "This book illustrates how the restoration of our architectural heritage is delivering a brighter future for Bridge Street and our wider city. It celebrates the work of Bridge Street Townscape Heritage Initiative in bringing about a renaissance over the past decade, something of which all who have been involved should be proud."

Guest speaker at the event, Rita Harkin, a member of the Heritage Lottery Fund Northern Ireland Committee, highlighted the role that Heritage Lottery Fund has played in supporting the focus on heritage restoration through the HLF led Townscape Heritage Initiative Grant Programme. She congratulated Lisburn City Centre Management as the local delivery agent on their success to date and went on to thank the other supporting funders that have contributed to the scheme including Lisburn City Council, through their Economic Development Committee, Planning Service through their Conservation Area Grant scheme and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive through their Town Centre Living Initiative Grant. She said: "This joined up approach to sustainable regeneration involving the public, private and voluntary sector is breathing new life into the area. By restoring the heritage features that give Bridge Street its unique townscape character, Bridge Street and Lisburn Historic Quarter will continue to reap benefits for the whole community for years to come."

Cllr Jenny Palmer, Chairman of Lisburn City Council Economic Development Committee placed the success of the ongoing Bridge Street restoration within the context of the wider Lisburn City Council and Lisburn Historic Quarter Strategies. She said: "I would like to thank the unsung individuals who have invested their own money in Bridge Street, as well as those who have chosen to work and live in its wonderfully restored buildings. Together they are bringing a fresh sense of community spirit and economic vitality to the revival of the historic heart of Lisburn City Centre. Even in these very difficult times it is encouraging to learn that there are property owners still willing to invest in the street and

Lisburn City Council looks forward to supporting the continuing efforts of Bridge Street Townscape Heritage Initiative Partnership."

Further information
Copies of the book, **Bridge Street, Lisburn, A Decade of Renaissance**, priced at £5, are available to purchase from Lisburn City Centre Management, Rawdon House, 45/47 Market Square, Lisburn or contact 028 9266 0625 / office@lisburnccm.co.uk / www.lisburnccm.co.uk