Bradford's 'Top of Town' awarded National Lottery



Bradford's business and cultural fortunes are changing, thanks to National Lottery players and heritage lef regeneration
Simon Sugden

Thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, the four year Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) project aims to bring the Bradford city centre conservation area known locally as the 'Top of Town' back to life to create a high quality, attractive environment and make it a better place for people to live, work, and visit.

A key part of an exciting heritage-led regeneration story in the city, the scheme is the latest in a pipeline of innovative projects that are improving the business and cultural fortunes of Bradford. Projects to encourage the take-up of empty retail units, masterplans for transport infrastructure, incentives for business owners and major investment to create a flagship entertainment venue in the city are all underway.

The 'Top of Town' boasts some magnificent Victorian architecture, such as the old Yorkshire Penny Bank, Church House, the Institution for the Blind, Bradford Dispensary, and the Statue of Richard Oastler - the 'Factory King' - who was at the heart of the campaign to limit the long hours worked by young children in mills and factories that grew out of the industrial revolution.

Since 2012, Bradford has led the way in the North with efforts to rejuvenate its city centre and encourage footfall to its high streets. In the past six years, Bradford has seen 45 new start-ups take advantage of a scheme offering business

rebates and grants to revitalise the city centre, creating 730 new jobs.

The ‘Top of Town’ investment news comes amid recent concerns from MP’s who have last week launched an enquiry into the state of the UK’s town centres. Property experts and think-tank Centre for Cities have warned that waning retail footfall on our high streets needs to be addressed to restore the social purpose they previously served to local communities.

Bradford Council’s vision for the ‘Top of Town’ is for it to become a thriving, well connected city centre quarter, vibrant during the day and night, with quality independent shops and leisure uses, alongside high quality offices and apartments breathing new life into historic buildings and enhancing the heritage of the area. Establishing an urban village of city dwellers will help make the retail and commercial offer more sustainable, while the area will become the thriving core for the independent enterprise community, allowing new and established businesses to benefit from the rich historic built environment.

The Townscape Heritage scheme will build upon ongoing regeneration activity, in particular that to the area around North Parade – historically the city’s premier shopping destination – where several bars have opened in recent years. In addition to improving the built historic environment, there will be better connection between the ‘Top of Town’ and the area around The Broadway shopping centre, bringing a new vibrancy to the area and making it more economically attractive. The area to benefit from the grants, available via Bradford Council through the National Lottery Townscape Heritage scheme, includes:

- Period properties concentrated along North Parade, Rawson Place, Darley Street, Northgate, Piccadilly, Upper Piccadilly, Duke Street and James Street
- 37 structures on the National Heritage List for England
- 47 key unlisted buildings dating to when the city was known as ‘Worstedopolis’, the woollen textile capital of the world.

Regeneration of the built environment will be teamed with a scheme of public realm improvements centred around the Statue of Richard Oastler on Northgate.

Thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, a comprehensive activity programme will also help raise public awareness of Bradford’s wonderful architecture to widen people’s knowledge of the ‘Top of Town’ area, develop an understanding of historic buildings and the skills needed to maintain and protect them, and increase awareness of how protection and preservation of our heritage can enhance our communities and places.

The Bradford City Centre Townscape Heritage Scheme is administered by City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council with the support of local community stakeholders. For further information on grants for property owners and tenants to help repair and restore period features, or bring vacant buildings back into sustainable use please visit: www.bradford.gov.uk/townscape

David Renwick, Head of HLF Yorkshire and Humber, said: “Our historic city centres are the beating heart of our communities, and where they fall into disuse and disrepair, the community pays a heavy price. Bradford is vibrant city with a young population and strong entrepreneurial and community spirit. I’m thrilled to see Bradford continue to lead the way in its approach to focused heritage-led regeneration and, thanks to National Lottery players, be awarded this vital investment to transform the ‘Top of Town’ area into a striking and economically robust city centre destination that aims to make it a better place for everyone to live, work, and play. ”

Commenting on the award, Councillor Alex Ross-Shaw, Executive Member for Regeneration, Planning and Transport, said: “We have been working tirelessly since the opening of The Broadway to readdress the balance of regeneration activity between the bottom and top end of town. Significant interventions, like the proposed redevelopment and relocation of the markets from the Oastler Centre to Darley Street, will see a growth in investment in this part of the city centre.

Being awarded this National Lottery funding will mean we can continue to work with businesses and landlords to further develop this area as an independent destination for the city centre, which will create an alternative offer for shoppers, visitors and businesses. This award is a significant milestone to the regeneration of the ‘Top of Town’.”

Saira Ali, Landscape Design & Conservation Team Leader for Bradford Council, commented: “The ‘Top of Town’ is of significant interest for Bradford Council. The restoration of heritage buildings within this historic location is of paramount importance for the city centre to develop its full potential. Successes, like The Broadway and City Park, have already made a significant contribution to the heart of the city centre, but we need the whole city centre to thrive.

“The overarching objective is to increase the economic activity at the ‘Top of Town’ by using its historic environment as a positive resource. The scheme is designed to improve the public space and heritage assets, bringing business and investor confidence, creating an improved shopping, living and working environment, and encouraging further regeneration.

“In developing the scheme, we have met with many property owners, to discuss their ambitions and explore how they will be able to use the grants to repair the exterior of their period property, restore lost or damaged architectural features, or to develop vacant space for sustainable new uses.

“We have also devised some interesting ideas for how to get people involved in the scheme, from working with local schools and colleges, construction trades and consultants, to heritage walks and sneaky peak tours.”

Richard Middleton, Townscape Heritage Scheme Project Officer for Bradford Council, said: “With the support of HLF, and National Lottery players, we plan to make some valuable improvements to the historic fabric of the ‘Top of Town’. We should be able to help bring some properties, which currently detract from the quality of the area, back into use and show off their fine architectural heritage. There a number of real hidden gems that should benefit from the Townscape Heritage scheme.”