

PlacesMatter!

Inspirational Spaces Dissemination Event
30 April 2008, Whitehaven

Event Report

This was the first event in the Inspirational Spaces series. Each event will feature a guest speaking on a locally relevant theme, and a local case study workshop.

Themed Presentation: Seaside Spaces

The guest speaker for this first event was Simon Warren of Bauman Lyons Architects. Simon gave an illustrated talk on the design of South Promenade at Bridlington, a seaside resort that had been in decline for many years by the mid 1990's when this project was commissioned. Simon's key messages for the design of long linear spaces such as seaside promenades were that they should be broken up into highly functional areas, rather than simply subdivided to break up the space visually. The Bridlington promenade was successfully sub divided into a public promenade on the seaward side and grassed semi private areas adjacent to a new colony of beach huts on the landward side, with the transition between the two being provided by a water filled rill. This gave opportunities for people to walk and also to relax and 'people watch'. Simon also advised that project planning should take into account the implications for maintenance over several years, and he noted that many major public space capital projects have very little funding identified for maintenance to secure their long term vitality.



The rill separating the promenade from the more informal grassed space at Bridlington

Bauman Lyons Architects - Creating Inspirational Spaces - Bridlington

Case Study: Civic Square, Whitehaven

The case study site for this event was the linear space in front of the town library and Civic Hall at the junction of Scotch Street and Lowther Street in Whitehaven. Whitehaven is a Georgian town built on a tight grid pattern. The spaces in the town tend to be quite well enclosed by buildings, and even the space around the parish church of St Nicholas is walled and continues the grid iron effect.

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The central enclosed space of Whitehaven's St Nicholas Church is enclosed by Georgian and Victorian buildings in a grid iron pattern

The case study space breaks with the tradition of the enclosure of space by buildings, as it is one where a relatively new building is itself surrounded by a ribbon of space. This also results in a departure from the traditional building line. The delegates explored the space and made recommendations based on a set of 25 assessment questions introduced by Jerry Spencer. Many considered that the space was poorly laid out and functioned largely as a pavement. (See below)



The Civic Centre space currently functions largely as a pavement

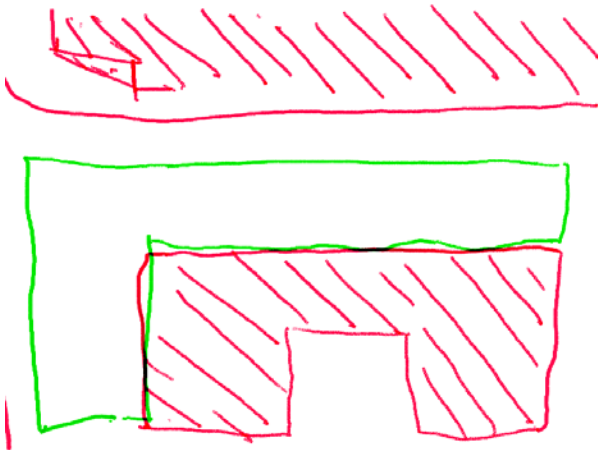
One option suggested was the removal of the left hand turn lane and reinstatement of a pavement on the original Georgian street alignment. Relocation of flower beds to the street edge would provide a screen from the through traffic on the adjacent roads, leaving more room for places to sit and watch the world go by behind the pedestrian desire line.

Some delegates proposed incorporating the space on Scotch Street into the square as this is no longer needed as a vehicular access to the underground car park.

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The Scotch Street Space is no longer needed as a car park access



The available space wraps around the corner in an L shape

However, research has shown that L shaped spaces rarely function as one space because it is not possible to sit at either extremity of the space and know what is happening around the corner, and this creates an unsettling atmosphere.

Another suggestion was that the return onto Scotch Street could be built on right up to the corner with Lowther Street. This would help reintroduce the attractive Georgian grid and give better enclosure to the resulting space in front of the civic hall. A new building fronting Scotch Street would need to allow some light to reach the civic hall windows, however inside it is curtained from view, so there seems little need to protect its outlook.

Jerry Spencer, 30 May 2008