



Partnerships: working across boundaries

Regeneration

V/O Commentary – David Mayle

The City of Stoke-on-Trent – formed from the towns known as the “Potteries” – built a reputation for its china, its smoking “pot kilns” testimony to a thriving industry, the names of its most famous companies, Wedgwood, Spode & Royal Doulton, known around the globe.

But like many industrial towns its prosperity has declined steadily over the last few decades.

Stoke’s economy was almost entirely based on pottery, the associated coal mining, and a Steel works. But by the 1980s large areas of the city were derelict. It had become an area of high unemployment and had all the social problems which go with it. The City of Stoke-on-Trent was in need of major investment.

Through the 1990’s Stoke has been the scene of a major programme of urban regeneration, which has not only brought improvements to the physical and social environment of the city, but changed the way that the City Council and other agencies do business.

The change has been brought about by new types of funding, and the formation of a wide range of partnerships.

Brian Smith – Chief Executive - City of Stoke-on-Trent

There’d been a tradition for a long time in North Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent of working together, so it goes back for a long period of time. But traditionally, the city council had been the city council delivering its own services. One big, major catalyst was the introduction by government of a single regeneration budget. That brought about a need for working together, it told us that we had to do that if we wanted to win big sums of money to improve things in the city. We were already along the way towards it, they were pushing against an open door with us, but that was the major change, that was the moment when we recognised that partnership we had to take really seriously, to make it work, to get money for this city.

Over the last five or six years, through partnership, we’ve won something like, in round figures, a hundred million pounds worth of...of government aid, European aid, Lottery Fund aid, but we’ve levered in, and the money’s still coming in, something like a billion pounds of...of overall investment for this city. So, for us, partnership has a real financial bottom line, the financial bottom line being the ability to bring in a lot more money from the private sector in part, but, equally, from other public sector agencies.

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Some 200 projects concentrated around the Cobridge area of the city have been financed under the Single Regeneration Budget or SRB programme. Each involves a variety of partnerships which span the community, the private, public, and voluntary sectors.

Co-ordinating such a range of projects, keeping them on track financially, and making sure that the partners deliver, is no mean task.

Rajeev Prakash – Chief Executive - Cobridge Community Renewal Programme

The role that we perform is asking people to walk the talk. Asking project leaders who may be perhaps lower tier officers in the various organisations both in the community, the private, the voluntary sector, to come together to deliver that range of products.

And we’ve acted as, in a collegiate way, the link between quite disparate and desperate organisations, saying what’s in it for us, how are we going to do it. You’re exposing us to new

pressures that we've never been involved before, and we've had to act as the buffer, the protection, and at the same time keep enthusing them, keep asking them to deliver.

Brian Smith

One of the interesting elements of our partnership has been the development of a close working relationship, a formal relationship with a development company in the city. We work closely with a firm called St. Modwen's and indeed have formed a joint company called Stoke-on-Trent Regeneration Ltd. And that company has helped to deliver a substantial proportion of the outputs associated with this SRB scheme; jobs, basically.

Mike Herbert - Stoke on Trent Regeneration Ltd. / St Modwen Developments Ltd.

The partnership works very much on a partnership basis. We meet with Stoke City Council at chief officer level and technical level on a monthly basis and we have quarterly board meetings, which involves the councilors, and at those meetings the aim is to establish the strategy for future sites to go through the sites in progress. And the position that it gives us is basically an open talk shop. We identify the future issues, we find the sites that we want to deal with and work out the strategy for dealing with it on a partnership basis rather than on a confrontational basis.

Brian Smith

Why have we used a joint company approach like that? Quite simply, in a city like Stoke-on-Trent with lots of dereliction around, appalling levels of dereliction, nothing comes easy. Bringing land together, assembling land in different ownership, land that probably in a city like this has got a mine shaft or two lurking within it, which has probably got more than one or two, pose tremendous difficulties. Nothing comes easy in a city like this, in terms of developing land. It's not like developing a virgin Greenfield site, it's hard work. We need the expertise that a development company can bring to bear.

Mike Herbert

We saw that there were a lot of opportunities around Stoke, a lot of derelict land, a lot of big sites capable of future developments. There were sites clearly that needed grant assistance, clearly that needed long-term master planning and we felt that the way to deal with that was to work jointly with the City Council, come up with a long-term strategy, agree the funding requirements, and by doing that we have been able to bring the sites forward for development more quickly than perhaps might have been the case if in purely private sector situations. And I think really it's borne fruit to show that sites that we now have, we've got large sites coming forward for development in Stoke, and Stoke has been receiving a lot of praise for that.

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There had been some investment in the city through a garden festival in the 1980's, which reclaimed derelict land around the former steel works. But Stoke never achieved any special regional development status.

St Modwen had the contract to develop the Garden Festival site and it was this that eventually led to the formation of Stoke-on-Trent Regeneration and the effort to secure funds for further development of derelict industrial land.

Mike Herbert

We identified two major areas adjacent to Festival Park. One was an area on the north-eastern side which is about 30 acres, which was a derelict greyhound stadium and various other facilities.

On the other side of Festival Park we identified an area which we now call Etruria Valley, which was part of the former steelworks, not been reclaimed previously, owned by British Steel, but not really used by them to any large extent. We've actually entered into a partnership with British Steel and then reclaimed the area of land using government assistance.

Another major site we've developed is a former coal mine. That needed significant reclamation which couldn't be funded purely commercially. And there we've got both European assistance and English partnerships assistance, on that site. And part of the strategy, this is working with the council, was to re-site the local football stadium there – Stoke City football club – as a new community facility. So a new stadium has been built which is used primarily by the football club, but also is available for full community uses as well, and that now is the flagship for the site. So, you know, it's been a working-together process to establish the best way of bringing forward a site using either our own pure commercial finance or with European or UK assistance.