Norwich Riverside

Keys to Redevelopment:
A Case Study
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Abbreviations

BURA  British Urban Regeneration Association
CABE  Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
CPO   Compulsory Purchase Order
DSC   David Simmonds Consultancy
EEDA  East of England Development Agency
NCC   Norwich City Council
NFC   Norwich Football Club
NorCC  Norfolk County Council
ODPM  Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
RICS  Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
SDF   Steering and Development Forum (BURA)
SEERA South East England Regional Assembly
SRB   Single Regeneration Budget
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 This report has been prepared by David Simmonds Consultancy for the Steering and Development Forum (SDF) of the British Urban Regeneration Association (BURA). It represents the results of a case study intended to explore the factors behind the comprehensive mixed use redevelopment of Norwich Riverside (Figure 1), which is viewed as an example of a brownfield regeneration project that has largely satisfied the aspirations of the Government and local council.

1.1.2 The case study involved a programme of individual close dialogue interviews with private developers, practitioners and other stakeholders in order to establish the range and breadth of factors that expedited successful regeneration of the site.

1.1.3 The report identifies a number of factors that led to project success, and these are highlighted in terms of their more general policy implications. The outputs from the study are expected to contribute towards work being undertaken by BURA addressing the urban regeneration and renaissance agenda.

1.1.4 The report needs to be set within the context of the case study that David Simmonds Consultancy recently completed for BURA, with respect to Rochester Riverside, Medway, in Kent (DSC, 2003). That study identified the issues associated with what is widely seen as an unsatisfactory level of progress in comprehensive mixed-use redevelopment of that major brownfield site.

1.1.5 The report also needs to be set in context of other substantial studies - local and nationwide - that have recently been recently undertaken under the theme of barriers to regeneration, including BBP Regeneration (2002); RICS and SEERA (2002), Local Government Association (2002) and CABE and ODPM (2002), and EEDA (2003).

1.1.6 There are a number of common themes and ideas that emerge from our report which complement and build on the findings of these other studies.

1.2 Structure of the Report

1.2.1 The report structure is as follows:

- Chapter 2 discusses the methodology;
- Chapter 3 provides an overview of Norwich Riverside today;
- Chapter 4 outlines the main redevelopment issues that affected the site;
- Chapter 5 outlines the key factor that led to successful regeneration there;
- Chapter 6 discusses the role of pragmatism;
- Chapter 7 discusses the role of innovation;
- Chapter 8 provides some concluding remarks to inform future policy.
Figure 1: Location Map (Source: Norwich City Council)
2 METHODOLOGY

2.1.1 A balanced account is required in the case study; therefore our methodology was designed to be inclusive, engaging the private sector developers and their professional consultants, as well as some of the public sector practitioners and other stakeholders who had actively participated in Norwich Riverside.

2.1.2 In-depth face-to-face interviews and/or telephone interviews were undertaken with senior-level representatives of: Gazeley Properties Limited, Higgs Young Architects Ltd., Roche Chartered Surveyors, Norwich City Council (East Norwich Single Regeneration Budget Board, and the Directorate of Development), the Environment Agency, and Norfolk County Council (NorCC).

2.1.3 In all cases, the interviewer looked to the interviewee to set the agenda and in most cases the interviewee would talk for a considerable time without prompt or interruption. The interviewer at times prompted topics for discussion, and key issues were followed up with lines of questioning that probed deeper within those themes.

2.1.4 During the interviews, the interviewer used a laptop computer to record comments and to make short notes in order to remember special points. The notes of the interviews were collated into a standard structure and themes were then identified according to their explanatory value.

2.1.5 The findings reported below represent our assessment of the issues associated with regeneration of Norwich Riverside based on the collective views of the interviewees. Individual responses remain confidential.
3 NORWICH RIVERSIDE TODAY

3.1.1 Norwich Riverside is a former contaminated industrial site comprising about 17 hectares (42 acres) located south east of Norwich City Centre, on the banks of the River Wensum and adjacent to the Norwich Railway Station and Carrow Road (beside the grounds of the Norwich City Football Club) (Figures 2 to 5).

3.1.2 Riverside was the largest and most significant site that had become available for redevelopment in the central part of Norwich in recent years, or indeed is likely to arise in the foreseeable future.

3.1.3 The site was seen to provide the opportunity for a major expansion of the City Centre, and now accommodates a major new mixed use redevelopment encompassing residential, retail and leisure uses for which there were no suitable alternatives and available sites within the City Centre.

3.1.4 The first phase of construction was completed in 1999, and the range of uses that have now been built on the site include:

- 224 residential units, including 15% affordable;
- leisure facilities including a 14 screen UCI multiplex cinema, a bowling alley (Hollywood Bowl), nightclubs (Square, Brannigans, and Time), restaurants (Frankie and Benny’s, Nandos, Pizza Hut, Old Orleans), bars (Wetherspoons, Norwegian Blue), and a health club (Fitness Exchange);
- format retailing functions including a Morrison’s food superstore and Woolworth’s Big W, an associated shopping centre containing Boots the Chemist, JD Sports, Argos; Mamas and Papas, JJB Sports, and Going Places Travel, and the service operations Big Yellow Self Storage Company and STS Holburn Tyre Centre;
- a new and re-orientated portion of Norwich’s inner ring road, and associated internal service roads;
- 1800 car parking spaces, including a new build six storey park (730 spaces) intended for use by both rail and leisure development users,
- restoration and improvement of the existing Norwich Railway Station, a Grade 2 listed building;
- redesign and landscaping of the Railway Station’s forecourt to integrate it into the adjoining development;
- a landscaped Riverside Walk (promenade);
- a major swimming and recreation centre;
- 2 new pedestrian and cycle swing bridges (one constructed to date) which link Riverside with the historic King Street area, another major regeneration project on the opposite side of the River Wensum.
Figure 2: Norwich Riverside – Derelict Brownfield Site – 1995
(Source: Higgs Young Architects Ltd.)

Figure 3: Norwich Riverside – site in 1995 (Source: Higgs Young Architects Ltd.)

Figure 4: Norwich Riverside – site in 1995 (Source: Higgs Young Architects Ltd.)
3.1.5 The project value was around £75 million, and involved the following partners:

- Norwich City Council
- Norfolk County Council
- Wensum Developments Limited
- Gazeley Properties Limited;
- Railtrack (now Network Rail);
- East Norwich SRB;
- MWB;
- Wilcon Homes;
- Wilson Bowden;
- East Norwich SRB (NCC);
- Norwich City Football Club;
- The Broads Authority;
- Sports Lottery;
- The Environment Agency.

3.1.6 The area comprises two distinct precincts in terms of use and architecture (Figures 6 and 7). Greater coherence is placed in the waterfront areas by providing a pleasant mix of residential and leisure frontages that reflect the traditional warehouse character on the north side of the River Wensum in this area. The residential development also serves to balance the highly utilitarian ‘shed’ retail formats in the much larger rear portion of the site, where there is good motor vehicle access from Norwich’s inner ring road.
Figure 6: Norwich Riverside - masterplan in context – 1997  
(Source: Higgs Young Architects Ltd.)

Figure 7: Norwich Riverside - masterplan 2002 showing waterfront and rear precincts  
(Source: Higgs Young Architects Ltd.)
3.1.7 The waterfront environment provides the fine grain with entrances to leisure facilities (Figure 8) and housing (Figure 9) orientated to feed off of a prime pedestrianised street that threads the different uses, and holds everything together. The design and materials reflect a warehouse character. A central open space creates a pedestrian heart to the development and a landscaped walkway and pedestrian bridges provide new links to the rejuvenated Rail Station and multi-storey car park, the new swimming and recreation facility, and Norwich City Centre (Figure 10).

3.1.8 The ‘shed’ format retailing (Figure 11) at the rear of the site is grouped around a landscaped car park that integrates pedestrian and cycle routes. The retail ‘sheds’ are detailed with silver-grey cladding, curved roofs, canopies, and solar shading.
3.1.9 Although the layout of the site is not considered continuous at a fine grain, most of the interviewees believed that the site does work as evidenced by its popularity. Today Riverside is an up and coming part of Norwich, and its attractiveness is based on a way of living - on the part of both visitors and residents - that is related to proximity to water and proximity to the City Centre, Railway Station, as well as to plans to regenerate surrounding areas (e.g. the King Street regeneration across the river).

3.1.10 The mix of uses together with the prominence of the site and the extensive river frontage and the attraction this affords, has ensured that the redevelopment has had a major impact on the character and appearance of Norwich, and how it functions.

3.1.11 Riverside now represents a new quarter that complements the City Centre in accordance with recent Government planning policy guidelines, in a location with existing public transport infrastructure improved by a new interchange for buses, taxis and cyclists.

3.1.12 The area’s commercial success has changed the face of the evening economy in Norwich. The night-time economy received a major boost through the creation of a major new leisure quarter with nationally branded businesses not prevalent in Norwich before. Off-site, Prince of Wales Road has been a prime beneficiary as it now serves as another major entertainment precinct and as a pedestrian thoroughfare that links Riverside with other leisure quarters in the City Centre, such as Tombland.\(^1\)

3.1.13 While there has been no economic impact studies undertaken to date, a significant site on the edge of the City Centre has been regenerated, replacing a ‘back water’ area that had been blighted for a long time. Redevelopment has enabled residential developers, leisure occupiers and new format retailers to come to Norwich by providing new sites with a City Centre focus for activities. Leisure and retail elements are a commercial success with operators reporting trade exceeding targets. Most of the leisure units are on 25 year leases, initially at £12-20 per square foot on average depending on a unit’s location and size. Anecdotal evidence suggests that redevelopment of the area has been pivotal to regeneration of the surrounding area, for instance, Riverside has prompted new development in the regeneration areas associated with King Street. The Norwich Football Club

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\(^1\) EEDA (2003) reported that the footfall is in the range of 29 000 people, but this appears to be anecdotal evidence, as we are not aware of any formal surveys that have been conducted. Also, EEDA does not specify the context or time period that the footfall relates to. Notwithstanding this, the interviewees concurred that the footfall had increased substantially since the redevelopment of Riverside.
may have benefited from its close proximity, its facilities are now used regularly for conferences and other functions. The adjacent Railway Station is accessible from around the region and serves the main London-Norwich rail line. There is some anecdotal evidence that an increasing number of people are choosing Riverside as a place to reside so that they can commute to their jobs.
4 REDEVELOPMENT ISSUES

4.1.1 At first glance, it might be easy to think that Norwich Riverside’s size and location must have offered potential investors a uniquely profitable opportunity, and that the project must have been straightforward and unproblematic. However, there were in fact many serious questions about urban form, and infrastructure and other planning needs and development obligations, as well as with respect to issues regarding land assembly and commercial viability and phasing. Because of this, the site had become well-known within the country’s development industry as a difficult one containing a great deal of commercial and investment risk. For these reasons, there is agreement among all the interviewees that Riverside was an ambitious project, and that it was not easy to get to the point where the site was actually redeveloped.

4.1.2 While the plan for a mix of residential, leisure and ‘shed’ retail uses satisfied the aspirations of most members of the local community, there were some residents who expressed dissatisfaction with the form of urbanisation. This was primarily because the aesthetics of the retailing facilities at the rear of the site were not deemed to be characteristic of a historical city, or indeed any sustainable high-density urban community.

4.1.3 However, the perspective of NCC was that the overall quality of urban design proposed was appropriate, and that the plan catered well to a range of potential users including pedestrians and cyclists. Riverside needed to be designed to accommodate a level of ‘shed’ retailing, otherwise such functions would continue to locate out-of-town, possibly including the food store which would serve the south-eastern part of the city and the City Centre. The retail functions would not detract from the core shopping area in the same way that they would if they located out-of-town, since their inclusion would provide the opportunity of combining shopping trips with those in the core.

4.1.4 Also, the site had previously been used for a wide variety of industrial activities, some dating back many years. These included the former British Rail marshalling yards (including workshops and engine shed buildings), the former Boulton & Paul engineering and joinery works, the Harrington oil and gas works, and timber yards.

4.1.5 By the mid-1980’s, many of the industrial uses had declined or ceased operations owing to deindustrialisation, and most of the site had become vacant and derelict. Other portions were leased to mixed industrial and commercial uses on short term tenancies.

4.1.6 The Boulton and Paul works was purchased by Gazeley Properties Limited after its closure in 1986–1987. The railway lands were owned by the British Rail Property Board until privatisation when they were transferred to Railtrack (the forerunner of Network Rail). Gazeley and Railtrack ultimately established a joint development company - Wensum Development Limited – on an equal partnership.
basis in. Other land owners included NCC which owned Corporation Quay, an
metre wide frontage along the River Wensum; NorCC as the transport authority
responsible for the old Riverside Road which then ran along the riverfront, and the
STS Holburn Tyre Centre which had to be relocated and rebuilt by the developer
at a cost of £750,000.

4.1.7 In addition to the vacant and derelict properties and the ownership issues, the area
suffered from industrial contamination and tidal flood risk and, as such, there was
over £5 million that had to be spent on site remediation. Required site preparatory
works included:

- treatment/removal of petroleum hydrocarbons, polyaromatic hydrocarbons,
  and polychlorinated biphenyls, as well as Japanese Knotweed);
- river wall (repair and rebuilding);
- site levels (to meet flood protection standards).

4.1.8 In addition, the area also suffered from major access issues, including the need to
accommodate part of Norwich’s inner ring road and to construct the necessary
internal service roads. This would cost £4.5million.

4.1.9 The original plans for the ring road required the closure of the old Riverside Road
which ran along the riverfront, and the construction of a dual-carriageway
diagonally through the site, which would have had commercial implications for
the developer.

4.1.10 To fulfil the parking needs of a major mixed use redevelopment it was necessary
to integrate the surface parking associated with Norwich Rail Station, therefore a
new multi-storey car parking facility and a refurbished forecourt was essential.
This would add another £6.4 million to the cost of a redeveloped Riverside.

4.1.11 Access for pedestrians and cyclists was also an issue, and another significant need
was for the construction of the two pedestrian and cycle swing bridges over the
River Wensum, to link the Riverside site with emerging regeneration areas and the
rest of the City Centre on the other side of the river. These would cost about £1.2
million each.

4.1.12 There was also a need in Norwich for a swimming pool and recreation centre in a
City Centre location, and its location in the emerging mixed use quarter would
help to anchor that area and also serve as a catalyst to get the King Street
regeneration areas off the ground. However, this would cost another £5 million.
5 PARTNERING - THE KEY TO SUCCESS

5.1.1 Notwithstanding some concern within the Norwich community regarding urban form, all of the interviewees suggested that Riverside today must be viewed as a success, given the nature of the formerly contaminated and derelict site and the extent of the issues, needs and costs involved in bringing a major mixed-use redevelopment on-stream.

5.1.2 When asked to identify the reasons behind the success, there was unanimous opinion among the interviewees that the credit must go to a culture of ‘partnering’, based on pragmatism and innovation that evolved between the various local authorities and the developers involved.

5.1.3 However, this culture of partnering was not immediate; it was not present from the start of the local authority–developer relationship. According to the interviewees, two distinct periods in the site’s redevelopment history need to be highlighted primarily because of the different levels of partnering that these periods reflected.

5.1.4 Boulton and Paul closed in 1987, and in that year NCC assessed the development potential of the Riverside area, and their appraisal resulted in a set of planning guidelines that envisioned a reasonably fine-grain redevelopment and integrated mixed uses over the whole site. These planning guidelines served as the basis for consideration of redevelopment proposals until new planning guidelines were prepared in 1994.

5.1.5 Between 1989 and 1993 a number of proposals were put forward by the principal owners – including an outline planning application for mixed use redevelopment - but none of these were ever progressed. The interviewees together put forward a number of propositions on why this was so, including the downturn in the property market and privatisation of British Rail, but the one proposition that everyone agreed on was that the planning requirements during this period were unrealistic in terms of the local market.

5.1.6 No agreement could apparently be reached on the correct mix of uses to make the redevelopment commercially viable. Other outstanding policy issues included requirements for the developer to construct the inner ring road through the centre of the site, and to provide the swimming pool and swing bridges. Also, a phasing requirement restricted commercial flexibility in terms of attaining early returns on investment.
However, by 1994 the relationship between the local authorities and developers took on the culture of partnering. It is not completely clear what the dynamics were that brought about this change but, according to the interviewees, it was probably some combination of: senior-level staff changes, a new vision within NCC that saw Norwich as a dynamic regional centre, the availability of new sources of public funding for regeneration initiatives, and the effect of the local plan inquiry in 1992-1993. In any case, some or all of these factors shifted the policy positions with respect to the form of urban development and planning obligations.

### Table 1

**Change in Culture**

“…..new (senior manager) coming on the scene was extremely helpful….left professional mark through successful development of site….very open….very pragmatic….also knew when to dig heels in….above average relationship….greater degree of understanding (of development finance) than others in UK….and not naïve…..”

“… compared to others in the UK (planning staff), they understood what needed to happen….fantastic relationship was built….better relationship than any other site in the UK….they came to understand and solve the problems …and we worked together”.

“….a personality that showed strong leadership….took a wider view of things….very important at a critical and timely period…..”

“….the paradigm changed….Norwich was now seen as a regional centre….there was risk for the City if it (Riverside) did not happen…..”

“…. (NCC) wanted to develop this derelict site as a catalyst for the rest of the King Street area….also a need to provide land for bulk retail, otherwise inspectors would (have) started allowing this out-of-town”.

“….recognition of need to use resources to prime-pump physical elements….coincided with a new awareness (of funding sources)….the rise of single pot funding funding (ie SRB – Single Regeneration Budget)…..”

“….there is now the SRB as a way to bid for money and this quadrant had the criteria… (NCC) put together a team….and put together a bid which was successful in 1995….which showed a recognition of the need for joint funding…..”

“….perhaps it was also the experience of the late 1980’s….the (local plan) public inquiry in ….Norwich learned the reality that it is the market that is the driver”.

What is clear is that both sides saw it as a priority to bring about the regeneration of Riverside, and the partnering culture that the local authority–developer relationship took on was based on the view that pragmatism and innovation were the necessary ingredients to make it happen.

The following chapter illustrates the role that pragmatic and innovative partnering played in the successful redevelopment of Riverside.
6 PRAGMATISM

6.1.1 An advantage for the Riverside project that was implemented before any master planning solution was the commercial terms for the project. These included:

- a clear contractual agreement between the two major property owners – Gazeley Properties Limited and Railtrack – to set up a joint venture company to share the commercial risk, through the creation of Wensum Development Limited. This allowed the land to be pooled and subdivided with equal gain, institutionalised at a certain return level (at a : split).

- a comprehensive financial appraisal by the developer of the indicative costs and likely returns on the income side, based on a number of alternative assumptions concerning changes in demand and interest rates. The laying out of the cost and return issues brought a sense of realism to the project in terms of what could be sustained within the commercial context of Norwich, and ensured that the developer and the local authority knew the parameters of the site.

6.1.2 There was a consensus among the interviewees that the financial appraisal served as the basis for the production of a financially-aware Development Brief by NCC that dealt with most of the outstanding issues on the site. The Development Brief was site specific and served as the primary proactive tool for achieving a good standard of development by giving an indication of the correct quantum and mix of uses and their design.

6.1.3 The interviewees noted that the Development Brief tool also produced an awareness of commerciality that enabled planning objectives to be married with the development process through:

- *flexibility* - in the mix of uses and their phasing and planning permissions that allowed the developer to balance costs with receipts as the project went along, and which drove the economics of the site by minimising the commercial risk associated with the infrastructure and site remediation issues. The development brief introduced a compromise by creating the two distinct areas – the fine grain mixed use redevelopment along the River Wensum, and the format ‘shed’ retailing area at the back of the site, adjacent to the inner ring road. From whatever angle you look at it, the urban form is not continuous, however all of the interviewees suggested that the final product must be viewed within the context of commercial viability, out-of-centre development pressures, and the availability of alternative sites.

- *a vision* - that understood the chain of events in relation to competing developments within and outside the city. Major anchors, such as the multiplex cinema and food store, were prioritised in planning through strategic reviews which showed their importance as drivers of regeneration. An eye for the ‘bigger picture’ also triggered modification of long-established transport considerations for the area, including the location of
the inner-ring road, parking, and road space management (during NFC fixtures) that maximised the development potential of the site.

6.1.4 This process also demonstrated the need for external funding, and successful bids were then made through a number of public funding schemes, including the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), and the Sports Lottery. Flexible funding arrangements were also implemented to not over complicate and delay commercial phasing for the developer, minimising commercial risk.

6.1.5 The external funding sources enabled the resolution of the key issues. The construction of the swimming pool was jointly funded through the SRB and the Sports Lottery, the developer only had to provide the land. One of the pedestrian swing bridges were ultimately funded through the SRB, the other one is to be funded by the developer. Also, the flooding issue was resolved through a study commissioned by NCC (using SRB funds), which established a new and more economically viable standard that was acceptable to the Environment Agency.
7 INNOVATION

7.1.1 There were also examples of innovative thinking that helped to marry the planning and development processes.

7.1.2 The implementation of a one-stop shop by NCC provided one initial point of contact, and that officer then drew on the necessary expertise within the staff team, as necessary and appropriate. Also, the Broads Authority delegated responsibility to NCC to determine the part of the application relating to the swing bridges, subject to the Broads Authority being consulted on conditions and design.

7.1.3 Some interviewees also commented that it was helpful to the project that there was a clear division of responsibilities between Council officers and members. This reflected a level of trust and gave officers a degree of latitude in decision-making.

7.1.4 Design and build construction contracts, structured to match planning obligations (per planning agreements) were used, so that the design firm involved at the planning stage was imbedded in site construction. This ensured that the knowledge built-up through the planning phase was taken straight into the delivery phase, reducing the likelihood of conflict between design and construction issues.

7.1.5 There was flexibility in the implementation and management of the planning agreements. The developer allowed the various commuted sums to be very loosely ring-fenced, which gave the local authorities the ability to use the money as most appropriate, for instance, on hindsight issues that could not be predicted, rather than in predetermined ways. There was not an obligation on the local authorities to return the money if was not used in ways specified in the agreements.

7.1.6 The environmental remediation solution was timely and facilitated cost effective treatment of contaminants through a bioremediation process that involved large-scale on-site blending and volitalisation of hydrocarbons. This saved about £0.5 million compared to off-site disposal. Heavy metals were hauled off-site by rail. The solution was also a more sustainable one since it eliminated the need for more than 4,500 lorry journeys, and minimised the need to import clean material (Figure 12).

7.1.7 Attention was paid to media management and other public information outputs. A public relations firm was appointed early in the process to develop a strategy to distribute information about what was going to be achieved in order to build credibility and gain support with the local people in the area, and politicians. Exhibitions were held at the Railway Station, and at the Castle Mall in the City Centre, and key participants participated in radio interviews.
The interviewees also underlined the significance of key individuals, and the role special personalities play in bringing about the success. The impact of senior planning staff of NCC was discussed earlier. Gazeley Properties Limited, although in a joint venture arrangement, took on the role of project manager, drawing on their substantial expertise with large projects. Also, the main construction contractor “had his finger on the complete pulse of the project”. Interviewees said that the project may have had different outcomes were it not for the timely involvement of these key people, and a common characteristic of their career track records was experience in both the local government and private sector environments.
8 CONCLUSIONS

8.1.1 The success in redeveloping a major brownfield regeneration site such as Norwich Riverside may provide some useful lessons for other major industrial sites that have undergone market failure. However, a cautious approach should be taken in drawing any steadfast conclusions for other sites.

8.1.2 Each situation may be unique, different causal chains and redevelopment aspirations may apply in different cities, and there is not necessarily a single set of solutions that can be applied universally. Clearly, an important part of any future research agenda in this theme should be directed at developing an understanding of context in terms of potential transferability.

8.1.3 For instance, at Norwich Riverside it helped that there was only one key landowner (in this case the private developer - Gazeley Properties Limited) alongside other governmental landowners (including Railtrack), rather than the multitude of land interests at Rochester Riverside in Kent, that was reported in DSC (2003). At Rochester, the multitude of ownerships and the compulsory purchase order (CPO) timing issues contributed to the problems, whereas in Norwich much of this difficulty was avoided by the differing nature of the land-owning parties.

8.1.4 Also, at Norwich Riverside, from whatever angle you look at it, the urban form across the site is not continuous, and there are still some lingering concerns about its overall coherence, sustainability and fit. In this regard, there is a question of whether Rochester Riverside failed to deliver anything because the planners had unrealistic expectations of the market, while Norwich Riverside failed to deliver a finer grain urban environment over the entire site because the planners failed to drive a hard enough bargain with the developer?

8.1.5 However, even if with hindsight, the planners in Norwich could have bargained harder to achieve a higher quality outcome, it is not fair to read that back into the circumstances at the time. All of the interviewees agreed that the final product at Riverside must be viewed within context of the commercial viability of a contaminated and derelict site, and out-of-centre development pressures. While it could be argued that, with more patience at the planning stage, a higher quality urban environment could have been delivered across the site, this could not have been guaranteed, and further pursuit of the ideal project could have jeopardised the completion of the project. Ultimately, the key factor that was active and present and which led to successful redevelopment of the former industrial site was a culture of partnering based on commercial pragmatism.

8.1.6 The culture of partnering that eventually transpired (after a number of years of failure to come to terms with a private developer) was about merging the planning objectives of NCC, NorCC and Government with the profit motive of the Wensum Development Limited, itself a partnership arrangement between Gazeley and Railtrack.
As noted in Rochester Riverside, a major criticism of town planning professionals is their failure to understand or learn about development finance, particularly what makes property development viable. However, while this ‘knowledge gap’ may be true of the broader profession, a key conclusion of the Norwich Riverside case study is that (ultimately) it was the commercial awareness of the planners there that was a major factor in bringing Norwich Riverside on-stream.

Under the culture of partnership that developed in Norwich, the local authorities and the private developer became a team. Project difficulties were then foreseen by the team, but did not in the event arise because of the acceptance of a practical and realistic approach based, in part, on commerciality. In particular, there was a need for clear but flexible planning policies up-front that carefully balanced the ideals of mixed use redevelopment and planning obligations in a historical city with scheme viability. The private developer needed to respond to market conditions and the team’s first step was to marry planning objectives with the development process.

This required the achievement of a shared vision, and the planning solution – a Development Brief – was prepared ‘with’ the developer, not ‘for’ the developer. The development brief was based on a clear understanding of all planning objectives, within the context of commercial viability.

Attention was then paid to the details of what was needed on both sides to ‘make it work’. This often required innovation to resolve project difficulties, which meant having the ability to ‘think outside the box’. All this necessitated a cooperative, enabling approach rather than a process of negotiation where the best interests of the site, including its commerciality, may not always be met. The project therefore involved compromise, as well as trust in all arrangements and initiatives, including the funding of project elements.
9 REFERENCES


