

Project Profile: Warrington Town Centre

Client: Warrington Borough Council

Value: Programme - £5m

Services - Research, Consultation, Strategy Development, Artist Commissioning

Duration: July 1997 – June 2002



Project Aims

To develop a strategy and programme of commissions integrated into the physical improvements into the Town Centre. In particular the aim was to develop a new character for the junction of Horsemarket Street and Buttermarket Street and to explore bringing greater unity to the town centre.

Objectives

- To analyse the issues related to creating a central pedestrian space linking all the radial streets together
- To explore art strategies to integrate Bank Quay Station and the Cultural Quarter into the pedestrian domain of the town centre
- To develop an options schedule with officers and members
- To advocate design solutions and agree resources with the administration
- To research and agree artist appointment for the town centre and for lower Bridge Street
- To secure client and public endorsement of design proposals
- To deliver a successful programme of capital works to the town centre

Outcomes

- A strategy for commissioning within the town centre which acknowledges issues such as the need for connectivity and the proximity of industry to the retail core
- Council Officer and Member endorsement for the strategy
- Funding agreement for the core commissions at the town centre
- Appointment of Howard Ben Tre as Lead Artist for Town Centre Appointment of Vito Acconci as Lead Artist for the lower Bridge Street commission
- An exhibition programme in the town centre to enable the public to appraise design proposals
- Agreement to proceed with Howard Ben Tre's proposals
- Full implementation of Howard Ben Tre's design at the junction of Horsemarket Street and Buttermarket Street

Project Overview

Warrington needed to develop a more mature pedestrian environment and address the amount of vehicle penetration in the shopping streets, the disconnections between the station, the cultural quarter and the retail centre and the general comfort of the walking environment. Our approach was to explore the routes people were expected to take and monitor how logical and intuitive they felt to outsiders. This gave us a clear indication of the most urgent issues to address. The overall strategy addressed the need to create a more coherent and inviting centre but also proposed ways of reconciling the presence of the River Mersey so close to the centre and the fact that this world famous river is virtually invisible to pedestrians. Unrealised elements of the strategy included ideas to relate the factories to the town and the railways station; and ideas to create closer ties between the cultural quarter and the retail core.

As well as the glass and bronze pillars and the light well, Howard collaborated with landscape architects and the lighting designers to create a complete space. At the bottom of Lower Bridge Street, Vito Acconci proposed a series of elevated walkways over the river and enabling people to walk across the Mersey without having to negotiate the huge and busy traffic lanes. The walkways link to a floating theatre space on the river. Although unbuilt the Acconci proposal sparked a lot of Imaginations.

