



PROJECT DARLING

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Reimagining High Streets

by Nicky Peacock

In July 2018, The Guardian reported that “the crisis on the UK’s high streets could leave 100,000 shops empty within a decade”, and that “struggling retailers should not be relied upon to prop up ailing town centres.”

According to current research, most notably posited by retail expert, Bill Grimsey, town centres need to shake off nostalgic notions of the past and begin to shape new landscapes where physical retail is no longer the panacea.

Instead, town centres must enter a new phase of flexibility and playfulness and be reimagined as community hubs. The way to reinvigorate town centre therefore is to offer alternatives to retail such as; housing, leisure, entertainment, education, arts & culture and commercial office space. In short, the future of the UK’s high streets is only limited by one’s imagination.

By working with creatives, town centre makers can offer a holistic approach to repopulation and the renaissance of the high street; the future is curated, the future is experiential. From raves in boutiques to curated artisan pop-ups in generic chains; impeccable visual merchandising, picturesque market places, dynamic street art installations, indoor winter gardens, cafes selling local produce, creative workshops, personalised customer service, bold collaborations, the list goes on.

In short, the way back to an essential high street is to move forward into a new realm full of surprises, curiosity, technology, and culture in its widest sense.



Location Research & Development Notes

Could it be pedestrianised completely - if so would recommend centrally located seating?

Parklet in this area - seating incorporating planting

What effects would it have on daytime trade and evening trade?

Ideal place for new artisan food market

Shopfront design guide implementation - unify signage in size and tone

Façade Improvement Grant scheme for landlords?

Repair and repaint neglected shopfronts including upper floor facades - cosmetic

Solid colour palette/with or without pops of design (public poetry or non-figurative design - abstract/repeat pattern i.e - Liberty) for more modern facades - design to be led by age/style of building

Look at unifying flooring - add consistent paving

Modesty film on upstairs windows

New lighting scheme to complement

Objectives

Revive footfall to neglected area

Attract new businesses and investment

Stylise new shopfronts and create attractive unifying theme

Animate area with pedestrians not parked cars

Seating would give message that people are welcome to that area - animate

Public realm scheme would refresh area and signal a new programme of animation to that area;

Orange Pip style artisan market/street parties/ outdoor cinema would create evening offer; Project Darling Cinema Club and for children; Little Darlings Cinema Club featuring street food and beverage vendors

Skinnergate



Overbearing, disproportionate signage & shutters on high street creates a lack of identity and negates original character of place

Oversized signage crowds original heritage features such as bay window (**Left**) and in some cases plastic signage completely obscures original shop front; **Bottom left**

Multiple types of paving; no consistent design; **Below**



Skinnergate



Above: San Jose's Santana Row covers 42 acres. Its dense, high-end retailing, residences, restaurants and offices create a city-within-a-city. The architecture - with urban row houses finished with earth tones and pastel stucco - overtly evokes Old Europe, and developers brought in antique metalwork, pottery and stone fountains to further instill a sense of history.

Right: Multi-sensory urban garden in Favara, Italy, features a landscaped terrace with plants, seating and paths with a hexagon pattern.



Skinnergate



Above: Appropriate shop front design sympathetic to heritage of building with original features intact

Below: Notting Hill, London; unified shop front design with pops of colour on upper floors to compliment high street kerb appeal.





POST HOUSE WYND

Location Research & Development Notes

Shopfront design guide implementation – unify signage in size and tone

Façade Improvement Grant scheme for landlords?

Repair and repaint shopfronts including upper floor facades – cosmetic – design to be led by age and style of original buildings – bring back/uncover original features and careful use of colour to distinguish

Uneven and unattractive flooring; poor quality flags and bricks; repair

New lighting scheme would unify and animate the street

Street furniture and planting

Address shop window displays/consult with shop owners

Modesty film on upstairs windows

Whole street could eventually be leisure focused; cafes, restaurants and bars

Inspired by The Lanes in Brighton

Objectives

Beautify and animate street

Transform scruffy thoroughfare into attractive asset

Return to simple, classic signage as befits a street with such heritage

Focus street on food and beverage industry; attract traders from elsewhere in Darlington and wider locale

Bring high quality footfall to area

Good news story; return to former glory; dispels negative perceptions

Rejuvenated public realm benefits from less vandalism and negative elements

Raising aspirations for shop keepers, landlords and public alike

Post House Wynd



Above and bottom left: Oversized, overwhelming and unsympathetic signage not in keeping with heritage of street

Middle left: Newsagent's window displaying inappropriate items such as replica weapons and drug paraphernalia

Far middle left and below: Post House Wynd should be The Shambles of Darlington; instead it is an unremarkable street, dominated by empty units and unattractive shop fronts.



Post House Wynd



Top left: The Shambles, York

Bottom left: The Lanes, Brighton



THE YARDS

Location Research & Development Notes for Buckton's & Clarke's Yard

Recommendation to strip of all existing artwork/frames and unattractive signage

Implement shop front design guide for Yards with businesses

Existing flooring is pretty sound

Creative Director co-designs with landscaper to introduce planting, borders, climbers and seating

Playful elements - Chess/Ludo tables; low-rise climbing handles

Repair, paint and clean brick walls; add decorative shutters to shops and cafes

Could add poetry/mural to walls/bird boxes/curiosities inspired by heritage of buildings

Hanging plants/climbing plants to soften walls in alleys - non-invasive decorative climbers to protect heritage of buildings - Virginia Creeper etc.

Add climbing handles to walls for play

Look at lighting and mirror installation in alleyways

Encourage dwell time and cafe culture

Objectives

Make yards more of an asset; capitalise on Darlington's naturally interesting infrastructure

Return to simple, classic signage as befits historic nature

Illuminating the Yards will discourage unsociable behaviour

Encourage dwell time and cafe culture

Surprise and delight visitors

Good news story; return to former glory; dispels negative perceptions

The Yards



As well as general disrepair, The Yards are dominated by parked cars, inappropriate and oversized shop front signage and tired public artworks. In addition, some units frontages have been heavily modified by business owners in a manner unsympathetic to the original character of The Yards.

The Yards



A low cost solution to the rejuvenation of The Yards lies in cleaning and greening. Using a shopfront design guide, units would be appropriately redecorated and unsympathetic safety measures such as metal roller shutters would be replaced with characterful timber shutters. Freestanding and hanging planters would soften the space and creative lighting and seating would bring the scheme to life.



Along with planting, playful elements could be added to the scheme; such as low-level climbing boulders for children and chess board inlays in public seating areas. This would transform The Yards into intriguing places that people choose to visit instead of being thought of as just a convenient thoroughfare.

Above; Neal's Yard in Covent Garden



HIDDEN GARDEN AT MECHANIC'S YARD

Location Research & Development Notes for Mechanic's Yard

Recommendation to transform into Hidden Garden

Creative Director co-designs with landscape architect to introduce planting, borders, climbers and seating

Could have elements of sensory garden to encourage learning, memory, positive mental health, mindfulness

Fruit trees for residents to use - healthy eating habits

Playful elements

Repair, paint and clean brick walls; add decorative shutters to shops and cafes

Could add poetry/mural to adjacent walls

Hanging plants/climbing plants to soften walls in alleys - non-invasive decorative climbers to protect heritage of buildings - Virginia Creeper etc.

Objectives

Encourage dwell time and cafe culture, create element of surprise, tourist attraction

Return to simple, classic signage as befits historic nature

Cleans air and negates town centre pollution

Could host parties, film screenings, gatherings

Good news story; return to former glory; dispels negative perceptions

Aids with urban isolation; meeting place, encouraging community

Mechanic's Yard



Mechanic's Yard is the largest yard with the most potential to transform. Currently used by HOF staff as a parking space and a space to store bins. The recommendation for Mechanic's Yard is to create a beautiful and extraordinary 'hidden' garden.

Hidden Garden at Mechanic's Yard



The New York Restoration Project transformed an abandoned alley between two buildings in Manhattan into a beautiful area where inner-city children can interact with nature.



This community garden was previously a vacant parking lot on South Street in Philadelphia. Originally a summer pop up; the garden proved to be a popular and now permanent place for locals to socialise.

Hidden Garden at Mechanic's Yard



In 2015, the Roxborough Development Corporation commissioned a small garden in a vacant lot in the Roxborough neighbourhood of Philadelphia.

Using the existing architecture, the space was reimagined as a lush and inviting public space. The place was then animated using a variety of seating components, art installations, and seasonal programming such as food trucks, yoga and outdoor movie nights.

