Public Realm Toolkit: A guide and toolkit to help deliver the benefits of your public space project

A toolkit produced by OPUN on behalf of *emda* and Regeneration East Midlands

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April 2008

This document forms part of the *emda* Knowledge Bank

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A guide and toolkit
to help deliver the benefits of your
public space project.

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Public Realm Toolkit

This document is available
in alternative formats on request.

**Prepared on behalf of emda by Opun,
the architecture and built environment centre
for the East Midlands, within Regeneration
East Midlands; and based on the report
"Economic Impact of the Public Realm"
by ECOTEC (2007).**

East Midlands Development Agency (emda)
is one of nine Regional Development Agencies in
England set up in 1999 to bring a regional focus to
economic development. emda's vision is that by
2020 the East Midlands will be a flourishing region.
A region made up of growing and innovative
businesses. A region where skilled people are
employed in good quality jobs. A region where
all feel part of healthy, inclusive communities
and live in thriving, attractive places.

Opun is one of over 20 architecture centres across
the UK - organisations which exist to raise the design
quality of the built environment through programmes
of public engagement with architecture. Opun has
been based within Regeneration East Midlands
since 2004 and is a member of the Architecture
Centre Network, one of Europe's largest collective
networks of independent architecture centres.
Opun and Regeneration East Midlands play an
active role in shaping what is a rapidly growing
sector - managing design review, providing regional
training and networks, sharing intelligence with
fellow centres and helping shape built environment
policies and practice.

Contents

Introduction

What the handbook is about

Recent research carried out on behalf of emda has highlighted and demonstrated the impact that improved public areas can have on an area's economy. This handbook draws on that research to provide information, guidance and an interactive toolkit to enable successful funding applications and the delivery of public realm projects.

Public realm is the space covered by all those parts of the built environment and natural environments where the public has free access; much of this space is in the control of Local Authorities, however a growing proportion is controlled and managed by the private sector. Residential, commercial or community spaces can contain areas of public realm and it covers streets, squares, rights of way, open spaces and parks.

Investment and improvements in all these areas can contribute to economic growth of a community, be it urban or rural. Land and property values can be increased, tourism boosted, an area's image enhanced, productivity improved and new investment attracted.
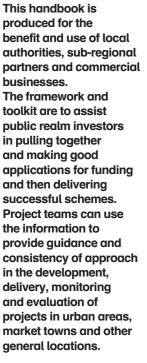
Who is it for?

What is it for?

How to use it

This handbook is produced for the benefit and use of local authorities, sub-regional partners and commercial businesses. The framework and toolkit are to assist public realm investors in pulling together and making good applications for funding and then delivering successful schemes. Project teams can use the information to provide guidance and consistency of approach in the development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of projects in urban areas, market towns and other general locations.

Other users could include Design Review Panels, Local Delivery Vehicles, Urban Regeneration Companies, Regional Development Agencies, Commercial Developers, Town Centre Managers, Rural Forum, Planners and Regeneration Practitioners.

This publication provides an essential reference source for teams delivering any public realm scheme. It will stimulate and enhance innovation and break boundaries that have hampered development of the public realm in the past, whilst supporting the inspirational visions that stimulate the initiation of many public realm and public art projects. The handbook will assist in justifying and assessing investment in projects that are centred on the public realm or contain elements of public realm design. Using the toolkit will assist application for and approval of funds by providing the economic and social justification.
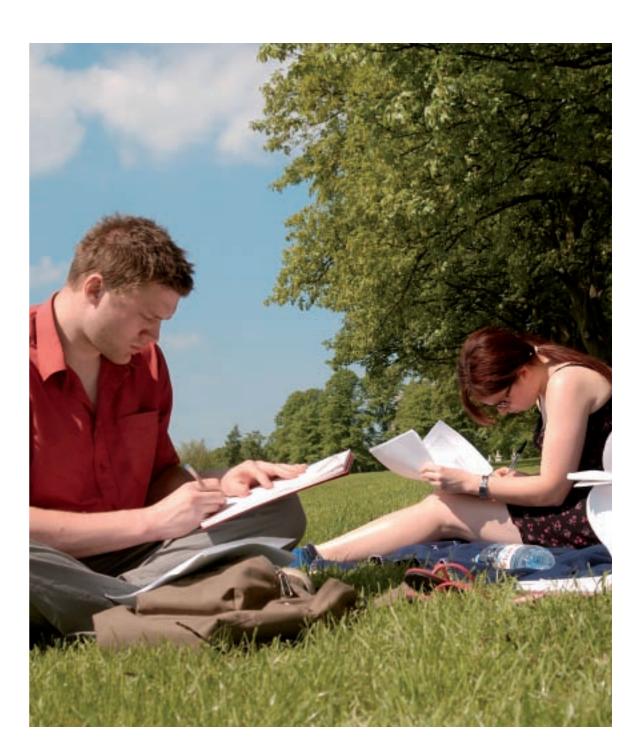
The core components of the handbook are, the framework for implementation and the implementation toolkit. Visual references and commentary on case studies are included and the handbook also provides other source information. Moreover it shows how decisions about investment in the public realm can be based on value rather than solely on cost.

This handbook provides a resource for research and towards making a formal application for funding as well as a checklist for developing public realm projects. It can be used in a flexible manner or applied more rigidly as a working tool for managing the project to a successful completion.

The handbook will also be of significant use to agencies attempting to meet the priorities of a Regional Economic Strategy [RES] and delivering its objectives. For example, the underpinning objectives of the emda vision for the RES - raising productivity; ensuring sustainability; achieving equality - can be achieved through controlled and managed investment in the public realm. The ECOTEC report to emda sets down more fully how this can be achieved.

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The public realm
- a definition

A public realm definition has been adopted for the benefit of this handbook.

"Public space relates to all those parts of the built and natural environment where the public has free access. It encompasses: all the streets, squares, and other rights of way, whether predominantly in residential, commercial or community/civic uses; the open spaces and parks; and the public/private spaces where public access is unrestricted (at least during daylight hours). It includes the interfaces with key internal and external and private spaces to which the public normally has free access"

Implementation Framework
- overview

This section of the handbook sets out an overview of the rationale for investment in the public realm and provides a framework to guide decision making by public and private sector bodies in respect of opportunities for investment in public realm projects and programmes.

The framework adopts the following format:

Types of public realm projects

Rationale for public sector investment

Economic benefits

Economic impacts

Objectives of public realm projects
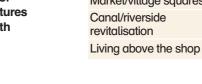
Good practice in public realm projects

Project prioritisation and selection criteria

Evaluation and impact evidence

Types of public realm projects

Projects can take place within cities, towns, villages or rural areas. Within each setting different types of public realm project can be pursued. Although not exhaustive the following table provides a generic overview of project types and the key features that tend to be associated with each of these:

Type of investment	Type of investment
Town/village centre revitalisation	Good design/village design statements
Key features	**Key features**
Built heritage	Pedestrianised high streets
Market/village squares	Signage and interpretation
Canal/riverside revitalisation	Community/locally inspired public art
Living above the shop	

Type of investment	Type of investment
City centre renaissance	Good city urban design
Key features	**Key features**
Mixed use development	Pedestrianised areas
Civic squares	Connectivity
Waterside regeneration	Iconic artwork
City living	

Type of investment	Type of investment
Urban city green space	Bespoke regeneration projects
Key features	**Key features**
Urban parks	Niche market
Environmental improvements	Town centre/village events

Type of investment	Type of investment
Green space	City centre regeneration
Key features	**Key features**
Parks and gardens	Retail led
Soft landscaping	Culture and creativity

Rationale for public sector investment

The public realm, in the form of open space to which the public has free access, clearly demonstrates the characteristic of a public possession - something 'owned' by the public at large. People cannot easily be excluded from public realm spaces and are unlikely to pay to enjoy the use of it. With no tangible financial return being provided through a pricing mechanism, developers have little incentive to invest in it and public authorities can view it as a drain on resources.

It can however be argued that if investment in the public realm is not undertaken and the supply and quality of public open space deteriorates this may bring negative results across a wider area and broader community. As with other public facilities, intervention by the public sector is therefore justified in order to ensure the more effective supply and maintenance of publicly accessible space within cities and towns.

The general rationale that can justify investment in the public realm are either a need to address a poor or worn down environment as a result of the negative impact this has on the quality of place and its ability to attract investment, or to promote an improved quality of place that will then provide the 'right environment' to attract new investment.

Economic benefits

The findings of the ECOTEC report for emda clearly demonstrated and provided robust evidence of the positive economic benefits that can arise from investment in the public realm and it is on these that the implementation framework is based. The qualitative and quantitative research undertaken in the report suggests that investment in the public realm generates 'economic benefit streams' that translate into 'economic impact' through a number of mechanisms:

Attracting investment

"… Small businesses choosing a new business location rank open space, parks and recreation as a number one priority…"

In 2003, the Central London Partnership (CLP) and Transport for London (TfL) undertook a study that examined the economic benefits of walking and public realm improvements. It highlighted that 85% of respondents identified the quality of the streetscape as important to the ability to attract customers or tenants. Research into locational decision making amongst businesses in the West Midlands has highlighted the importance of a good quality environment in attracting new businesses.

Increasing land and property values

"… Property prices in the Netherlands have been measured in terms of their relationship with parks and neighbouring waterways - increases reached 11% in some cases…"

Rents in certain Belgravia Squares and the London Orange Square have increased following re-landscaping. A mixed use scheme at Castle Wharf, Nottingham, has adopted high standards in hard landscaping and has improved connectivity to the surrounding areas; this has contributed to the site becoming a very popular development with rents that are now amongst the highest in the area.

The following list sets out evidence in support of the monetary impact a good quality public realm brings, specifically looking at the natural environment.

Berlin's land values demonstrated a rise of 17% from tree planting in an area in 2000.
The Value of Public Space

A 20% increase in broadleaf tree cover can enhance property values by 20%.
Garrod and Willis, 2003

Buyers' willingness to pay 19% more for a property that overlooks water.
Garrod and Willis, 1994

Properties in Milton Keynes and Bedford were 18% higher in waterside than non waterside locations.
Lambert, Smith, Hampton, 2002

Properties next to the Mountain Bay Trail in Wisconsin sell faster and for an average of 9% more than similar ones some distance from the trail.
Brown County Planning Commission

Attracting visitors

"…Economically, quality public realm increases retail spend. Key causal factors include pedestrianisation and provision of street furniture. Safety measures and perceptions of increased safety help increase use, particularly effective lighting, CCTV and designing public spaces to have natural surveillance…"

Coventry has been cited as an example where urban design improvements including streetscape, signage public art and a civic square have increased footfall by 25% on Saturdays. In addition, consumers now have much higher demands and expectations and will subsequently seek a high quality environment in which to spend their leisure time, shopping, eating out, etc.

Increasing tourism

"…Investment in the physical environment is critical for achieving economic growth and tourist development…"

Riverside improvement strategies in the area around the London Eye have increased footfall tremendously and improvements to the streetscape have enabled economic growth in a much broader area. CABE Space (2004) suggests that Dallas in the United States has published statistics on how public green spaces have attracted people to the area.

Improving productivity

"…Better designed environments beneficially impacted on the productivity and the health and satisfaction of the workforce…"
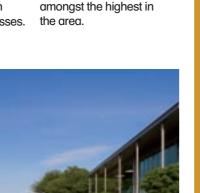
Better designed environments at Brindley Place (Birmingham) and Barbirolli Square (Manchester), were directly credited with increasing the productivity, health and satisfaction of the workforce largely due to the environment created.

Enhancing image

"…A poor quality physical environment not only saps the self-esteem of local residents but can have a wider impact on undermining the confidence of others to commit to the area, be they prospective residents, businesses, developers or the local authority..."

At one time it was the transport infrastructure that was at the 'top of the agenda' for businesses when relocating; now this has shifted and there is an increasing demand for a more sophisticated and attractive cityscape and built environment. There is also a positive role for a high quality environment to improve image making and contribute to urban regeneration.

Economic benefits. continued.

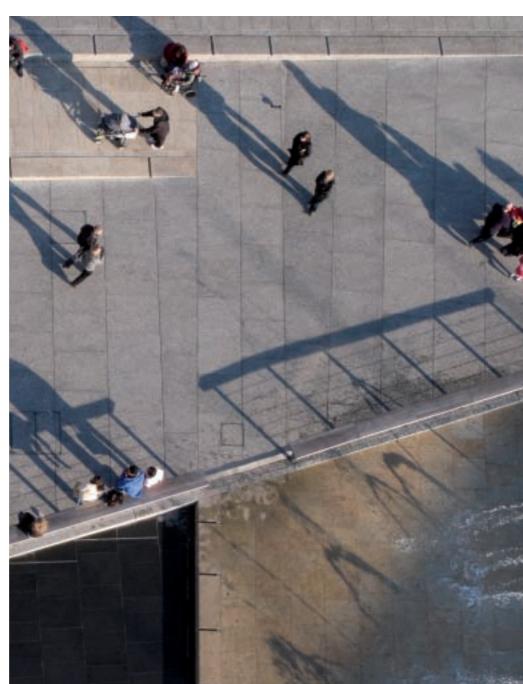**Establishing the objectives of public realm projects**

Other benefits
There are other environmental and social benefits that arise from creating and investing in high quality public realm. These include the potential to secure reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour; encouraging well being through providing the opportunity to run, walk and cycle; stimulating housing markets and reinforcing the sustainability agenda through design and involvement. The value of these benefits in promoting a higher quality of life and contributing to the wider strategy on 'livability' should not be underestimated.

The majority of businesses consulted in the emda research considered that improvements in the public realm had made an important contribution to attracting investment, increasing land and property values, encouraging visitors and enhancing the image of an area as an investment location. The role of an enhanced public realm in attracting John Lewis to Leicester City Centre and other blue chip companies to Castle Wharf in Nottingham should not be overlooked.

Projects where investment in the public realm is part of a wider strategy has highlighted that investment in the public realm can bring with it positive 'spill over' impacts. These are demonstrated in the attraction of additional and new investment to areas that are outside but well connected and related to the area in which the public realm has been improved.

Although small scale public realm projects can make a difference, project interventions generally need to be of a significant scale to generate the greatest flow of identified economic benefits. The scale and size of project intervention is also of importance in securing private sector investment in the public realm as larger projects generally provide greater opportunities for developers and investors to appreciate the economic benefits.

In order to understand and be able to deliver the benefits of a public realm project its aims and objectives should be stated at the outset - i.e. what does the project set out to achieve and how does this relate to the rationale for investment?

The **overall** aim will be all embracing and overarching; from this a number of key objectives will fall. These objectives might be economic, social, and/or environmental and will depend on the type of project and often the nature of the funding streams to be pursued.

They might also be split into different types - e.g. strategic and operational.

In approaching agencies for funding to support the delivery of public realm projects, importance should be attached to the clear definition of measurable objectives that relate to economic improvement. Operational objectives can be used to highlight how forecast 'economic benefit streams' will lead to wider economic impact. The table below provides some illustrative examples of project objectives.

Strategic

Economic	Social	Environmental
To help address market failure	To combat anti-social behaviour	To improve the physical environment
To attract investment	To encourage community cohesion	To improve accessibility

Operational

Economic	Social	Environmental
To appoint an events co-ordinator	To engage local residents in the project	To support the ongoing maintenance of the project
To engage with businesses as part of the project	To involve community groups in the project	To enhance the existing flora and fauna

**The economic
change model**

Context

Rationale
• Public goods
• Externalities
• Opportunity

Strategies
• Range of project
  interventions
• Civic squares, green
  infrastructure etc.
• Best when part of a
  wider strategy/vision

Context
• Image
• Identity
• Investment
• Property
• Accessibility
• Connectivity

Outputs 1

Initial Outputs

Core RDA
• Brownfield land
• Public/private
  investment

Other
• Land improved
• Footpaths improved
• Artworks
• Shop fronts improved
• Construction jobs

Results

**Economic benefit
streams**
• Attract business
• Increase
  land/property values
• Attract visitors
• Increase tourism
• Improve productivity
• Enhance image

Reasons

Attract Business
• Quality of place
• Location factor
• Market opportunities

Land/Property Values
• Desirable location
• Demand increases
• Competition rises
• Price increase

Attracts Visitors
• Quality destination
• Space for events
• Good environment
• Activities to pursue

Increase Tourism
• Quality destination
• Space for activities
• Service facilities
  offered

Improves Productivity
• Good environment
• Staff satisfaction
• Well being

Enhances Images
• Raised profile
• External/Internal
  perceptions
• Opportunity to market

Outcomes

Positive Outcomes
• Market opportunities
• Increased producer
  (business) spend
• Increased consumer
  (resident, worker,
  visitor, tourist) spend
• Business responds to
  spending increase
  (turnover, jobs,
  business growth)
• Spillover (other area
  connectivity benefits)

Outputs 2

Generates Outputs

Core RDA
• Job creation
• Business creation
• Public/private
  investment
• Brownfield land

Investment Climate
• Change in profile
• Change in internal
  views
• Change in external
  views

Impact

PSA Targets
• Regional economic
  performance
• Productivity
• Employment
• Sustainable
  communities

Regional Priorities
• Competitiveness
• GVA/Output
• Employment
• Sustainability

**"...the public realm
has attracted new
business and
additional visitors...
and had a positive
impact on staff
productivity..."**
Castle Wharf

Good practice in public realm projects

"...The success of a particular public space is not solely in the hands of the architect, urban designer or town planner; it relies also on people adopting, using and managing the space - people make places, more than places make people..."

The above quote from the Joseph Rowntree Trust illustrates that a number of perspectives need to be given due consideration in the development of a successful public realm project. The list below identifies a number of attributes through the development, delivery, evaluation and monitoring phases of a project.

Project development

- The public realm project should be set in context - it should be part of an overarching programme or strategy, joined up and aligned with all related policy.

- There should be a definitive project leader who has the strengths to drive forward the project and the enthusiasm to achieve buy in from other stakeholders.

- There should be strong organisational and political support for the project.

- A robust partnership of the key players should be in place providing a multidisciplinary and fluid approach, bringing in expertise as and when needed, and helping the forum work well together.

- The need to involve key professionals at an early stage is imperative and this should include people with design, public art and community engagement skills.

- Effective consultation at the outset is important to encourage ownership; there could also be some opportunities for capacity building activities.

- The rationale for investment should clearly set out what will be achieved.

- Revenue funding for ongoing staffing, maintenance and management should be built into the project costs at the outset.

- The public realm should provide a flexible space for different events and a multiplicity of uses, including income generating assets and event space to hire out; this will ensure viability and sustainability whilst reducing risk.

- The standard of design and the quality of materials should be of a high quality, durable, and robust and provide good value for money.

- The design should also look at community safety in terms of security, lighting and CCTV.

- Areas such as local character and distinctiveness should be considered. The form and function of the site is important, as is the ability to cope with climate change and sustainability.

- At the commencement of a project the team should include appropriate professionals knowledgable about design, creativity, public art and culture.

Good practice in public realm projects. continued.

Project delivery

- There should be a joined up, co-ordinated and strong project/programme management. It is important to have robust contracts with partners to ensure the efficient delivery of the project.

- It is important to win public support for the project and engage with the media - 'winning hearts and minds'. Good communication can engender positive images, at the local, regional, national and even international arenas.

- The overall marketing of the project should be considered.

- A day to day named project officer, with the role of explaining the benefits of the project and delivery timescales, is important to act as the face of the project when dealing with affected/interested parties such as the Local Authorities, businesses or residents.

- Efforts should be made to incorporate opportunities for local skills provision and training as part of the project delivery process. Ideally, this should incorporate both manual and technical construction industry skills.

- Work in conjunction with statutory agencies and utilities providers to develop joint approaches to improvement that can enhance existing duties of care and maintenance, including safeguards against the short term disturbance of newly improved areas of public realm.

Project monitoring and evaluation

- The monitoring and evaluation of the project should be considered at the outset. Extra resources should be built into the project costs to cover this.

- The majority of funders will require feedback on a project and information on the success or otherwise of delivering against project objectives; planned monitoring and evaluation are therefore essential to be in a position to provide this information.

- It is important to draw out any lessons for the project and to share knowledge and expertise with others.

Project prioritisation and selection criteria

"…No single authority or agency has overall responsibility for the public realm. Therefore the key to ensuring a safe attractive streetscape is for those responsible for its management to work together…"

The above quote from English Heritage (2005) illustrates that many players have a contribution to make to the quality of the public realm. The toolkit that follows outlines project prioritisation and selection criteria that we recommend should be taken into account when appraising and taking decisions on potential public realm projects. The **Decision making criteria** is set out in the first section of the toolkit and links back to many of the good practice points highlighted in the previous section.

Monitoring and evaluation

The final part of the implementation framework provides a simple monitoring and evaluation guide. It is important to note that project monitoring and evaluation should be considered at the start of the project - if seeking external funding, most funding bodies will also ask for details of project monitoring and evaluation at the outset. It is also important to understand that monitoring needs to be resourced, so this should be built into the project costs. A baseline should be ascertained at the beginning of the project through an audit using key criteria so that change, progress, benefits and/or impact can be measured. Impact can also be measured against the objectives set as part of the project rationale.

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Collecting economic impact data

The following chart, sets out through time related stages good factual information that can be gathered arising from investment in the public realm and examples of ways in which evidence can be collected. This covers all the six types of economic benefit defined earlier - attracting investment, increasing land and property values, attracting visitors, increasing tourism, improving business (productivity), and enhancing image. By adopting a monitoring process, feedback can be given to funders and the evaluation data used to improve the monitored project or better plan and implement future projects.

Key stages:
1. Agreement of funding package
2. Site remediation
3. Completion of the project

The following are on-going
4. Further inward investment
5. Staged reviews - could be six monthly
6. Regular events
7. Specific events
8. Peak holiday times

1. Upon agreement of Funding Package

Measured Output
Value/type of inward investment influenced by site (£)
Method
Developer and/or stakeholder surveys
Impact
Attracting investment

Measured Output
Private sector leverage / investment (£)
Method
Funding package / consultation with private sector partners
Impact
Attracting investment

2. Site remediation

Measured Output
How many ha of brownfield land has been regenerated
Method
Site mapping
Impact
Attracting investment

3. Upon completion of the project

Measured Output
Business prestige / external image
Method
Consultations with local businesses
Impact
Enhancing image

3. Upon completion of the project...continued

Measured Output
Reduction in anti-social behaviour / crime
Method
Crime statistics from the local Police
Impact
Enhancing image

Measured Output
No. of residents/businesses satisfied with the area as a place to live/work
Method
Household/business satisfaction surveys
Impact
Enhancing image

Measured Output
No. of relocations to the area
Method
Inward Investment Agencies / perceptions of Inward Investors
Impact
Enhancing image

Measured Output
Staff recruitment and turnover rates
Method
Consultations with business
Impact
Improving business productivity

Measured Output
Local businesses improving in productivity, health and satisfaction of workforce etc
Method
Staff satisfaction surveys / consultations
Impact
Improving business productivity

3. Upon completion of the project...continued

Measured Output
% increase in land values
Method
Consultation with local property agents
Impact
Increasing land and property values

Measured Output
% increase in property values - commercial and residential
Method
Consultation with local property/estate/lettings agents
Impact
Increasing land and property values

Measured Output
% increase in rental values (variables - size of let, location, and grade of building)
Method
EGi property search (Estates Gazette) through local authorities
Impact
Increasing land and property values

Measured Output
Availability and take up of accommodation
Method
EGi property search (Estates Gazette) through local authorities
Impact
Increasing land and property values

3. Upon completion of the project...continued

Measured Output
Changes in use - occupiers
Method
Planning applications - local authority websites
Impact
Increasing land and property values

4. Regular monitoring or staged reviews

Measured Output
Business prestige / external image
Method
Consultations with local businesses
Impact
Enhancing image

Measured Output
Reduction in anti-social behaviour / crime
Method
Crime statistics from the local Police
Impact
Enhancing image

Measured Output
No. of residents/businesses satisfied with the area as a place to live/work
Method
Household/business satisfaction surveys
Impact Enhancing image

Measured Output
No. of relocations to the area
Method
Inward Investment Agencies / perceptions of inward investors
Impact Enhancing image

4. Regular monitoring or staged reviews...continued

Measured Output
No. of positive media citations
Method
Media monitoring at the local, regional, national, and international levels
Impact Enhancing image

Measured Output
Staff recruitment and turnover rates
Method
Consultations with business
Impact
Improving business productivity

Measured Output
Local businesses improving in productivity, health and satisfaction of workforce etc.
Method
Staff satisfaction surveys / consultations
Impact
Improving business productivity

Measured Output
% increase in land values
Method
Consultation with local property agents
Impact
Increasing land and property values

Measured Output
% increase in property values - commercial and residential
Method
Consultation with local property/estate/lettings agents
Impact
Increasing land and property values

Collecting economic impact data. continued.

4. Regular monitoring or staged reviews...continued

Measured Output
% increase in property
values - commercial
and residential
Method
Consultation with local
property/estate/lettings
agents
Impact
Increasing land and
property values

Measured Output
% increase in rental
values (variables - size
of let, location, and grade
of building)
Method
EGi property search
(Estates Gazette) through
local authorities
Impact
Increasing land and
property values

Measured Output
Availability and take up
of accommodation
Method
EGi property search
(Estates Gazette) through
local authorities
Impact
Increasing land and
property values

Measured Output
Changes in use - occupiers
Method
Planning applications -
local authority websites
Impact
Increasing land and
property values

5. As additional inward investment flows through

Measured Output
Value/type of inward
investment influenced
by site (£)
Method
Developer and/or
stakeholder surveys
Impact
Attracting investment

6. On the day of an event

Measured Output
Visitor spend (£)
Method
Businesses to assess
increases in turnover
Impact
Attracting visitors

6. At regular events e.g. an annual festival

Measured Output
No. of visitors attracted
Method
Footfall survey
Impact
Attracting visitors

7. At specific events

Measured Output
User satisfaction/
appreciation
Method
On site face to face
questionnaires
Impact
Attracting visitors

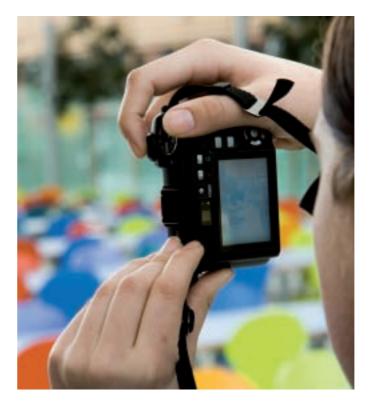### 7. Following specific event e.g. Themed markets over a number of days

Measured Output
No. of overnight stays
Method
Consultation with the local
Tourist Information Centre
Impact
Increasing tourism

7. Following peak times e.g. summer holidays

Measured Output
Tourism businesses
encouraging visitors to use
the public space
Method
Consultation with local
tourism businesses
Impact Increasing tourism

Cover Nottingham Old Market Square by
Gustafson Porter; Photography by Martine
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University of Nottingham, Hopkins Architects;
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13 Whitby Abbey Visitors Centre by Stanton
Williams. **14** Birchwood Park, Warrington
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15 Asha House, Student Apartments,
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20 Ripley Fun Fair © East Midlands
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Nottingham, Gibson Hamilton Partnership;
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