

Introduction to the Big Blake Project.

William Blake – poet, painter, printer, prophet – has influenced politics, psychology and playwrights with the visionary genius of his work. He lived in Felpham for three years, saw angels and wrote the hymn Jerusalem there. He even saw a ‘Stairway to Heaven’ and declared it a far more spiritual place than London. His very phrases are truly immortal: Chariot of Fire, Arrows of Desire and England’s Green and Pleasant Land for example. Discovering Blake has inspired many contemporary creatives including Phillip Pullman, Robert Plant and the band U2.

The Big Blake Project (BBP), was formed three years ago and wants to see Blake as the cornerstone of regeneration in Bognor Regis. The Planning Policy Guidance makes reference to public art and sculpture as making spaces more interesting – BBP proposed a sculpture trail to promote cultural tourism and to link the town to the sculpture park in Goodwood. Internationally acclaimed artist, Chris Price has provided a map for the Big Blake Trail linking parts of the town and Felpham to ‘Jerusalem’. The project has also been given a sculpture by ceramicist Richard Slee from the Cass Foundation. The song Jerusalem, sung by Katherine Ellis (Oscar Winner for the film Gravity) is available online and award- winning poets are due to produce a poetry event for BBP.

BBP set up the first ever William Blake Festival (Golgonooza) in Felpham. This attracted acts from Brighton and award-winning artists like Delaine and Damien Le Bas who remain avid supporters of the Big Blake Project. As a result, there are demands for this to become an annual event. It has also established a poetry prize which has attracted entrants from across the world. This year, the competition was judged by Stephen Fry. The Ashmolean Museum and Blackwell’s Bookshops carried our blog.

1.0

Vision

Bognor Re-Creative is a bold re-branding of the town towards an creative, cultural and innovative future through the proposition of a tourist and community facility- The Centre of the Imagination:

“What is now proved was once only imagined.”

Our anchor tenant at the Centre of the Imagination would be a permanent celebration of William Blake incorporating work inspired and associated with a Blake exhibition. The historic association of William Blake is a huge cultural resource to Bognor Regis. This has been shown most recently in Oxford whose Blake exhibition has been extremely busy since it opened, helped by the immense media coverage due to the the huge interest in William Blake. The campaign to buy his cottage in Felpham has been featured in every UK national newspaper and even international titles like the New York and Los Angeles Times. This marketing potential is rarely available to most towns.

What we are envisioning for our Centre of the Imagination is a People’s Palace, built to three stories with refreshments on all floors and with cafés on ground level, snack bars on the first two and fine dining with the viewing gallery on the top floor. A beautiful ark by the sea, with glazed elevations punctuated by brise soleil highlighting internal exhibitions and movement, and at its centre a natural whitewashed timber feature, catching the infamous Bognor sun and filling the space with optimism and warmth. This would have the ‘Wow Factor’ – pulling in tourists from London.

A major exhibition space could be utilised with a renewed Alexandria Theatre creating a multifunctional adaptive space for Theatre (seating for 800 to accommodate West End productions), Cinema and a major exhibition space. These could bolster links with local technology and creative businesses such as Rolls Royce and Dyson- they could even utilise this space for displaying technological break-throughs and conferences- a whole new layer of celebrating Bognor’s economic success and Intrapreneurship as established companies nurture local young businesses.

The Centre of the Imagination would be the hub that would empower the whole town to step up to a better connected cultural and sustainable future. The town could run pilot schemes for both public and private electric transport. Bognor Re-Creative seeks to enhance the forgotten and under-utilised assets prevalent to compose a new brand that can provide a narrative to the future strategic planning of the town. We feel that a concept conceived within the town’s identity will better sustain and guarantee growth – new shoots from old.

The key outcomes of this regeneration to renew the brand and identity to Bognor Regis are:-

- 1.) Create a town centre linked to community wellbeing, needs and aspirations
- 2.) New residential schemes that knit together the towns fabric and increase footfall for the town's retail.
- 3.) Provide a forum to support and network established and new local businesses
- 4.) Promote Bognor Regis as a major smart tourist destination for the South Coast, predicated on culture, leisure and technology.

2.0/3.0

Sites Considered/ Response to Core Elements

We propose development to take place at three main sites, it is hoped that these three moves will actively reinforce urban moves that could instigate further development within the town. The core elements from ADC Report have been implemented and highlighted.

1.) The Regis Centre Site- Cultural 'Centre for the Imagination'.

Suggested Functions;

Expanded Theatre/Cinema/High Profile Conference Venue (i,iv); relocated Library/Community facility; Tourist Information with Cultural Tourism, creative trails & international festival; Creative Business support; Hotel and commercial/retail units (ii); Seafront Residential (iii); Refurbished and integrated Town Hall (vi) and undercroft Car Parking with public WCs (v).

Urban Links;

Arrival space for convergence of London Road and Esplanade (v). Public space for existing market, exhibition spill out, festivals- the Primary Public Square for Bognor. Extending either side a rejuvenated Esplanade (ii), lined with retail and commercial units to reinforce and combine with existing seafront commerce.

2.) Hothamton/Queensway- Residential Infill

Suggested Functions;

Apartment/Townhouse Residential (ix, x); Food Retail to Queensway(vii); undercroft Car Parking (viii); potential commercial units to reinforce and combine with Waterloo Square commerce.

Urban Links;

Improve permeability of secondary routes from Station to Pier area; centrepiece to Waterloo Square/ Pier space with active frontage to a renewed sunken gardens (xi).

3.) Bognor Library- University Interface with Town

Suggested Functions;

Student Residential, University Front of House/ Business link centre, Green Technology/Creative Tourism incubator.

Urban Links;

University foothold across from Hotham Park.

4.0

Financial/ Commercial Viability

We propose a Private/Public partnership to forward Bognor Re-Creative.

Through relocation of facilities in public ownership to a combined site then no capital land purchase would be required.

The capital cost of these new facilities can be mitigated through partnership with developer of residential accommodation in the three sites outlined, and application of Lottery and EC ERDF funds, as an addition, the 2014 round of Coastal Communities Fund has provided £2.4M fund for cultural redevelopment in Margate and Littlehampton. There is no reason why Bognor could not also have benefited from such a fund.

Any capital investment from Local Authority can be assured that its investment in creating Bognor Regis as a tourist hub that supports its community will be sound investment in the long term economic future.

It is critical to state that by linking to William Blake's legacy, Bognor Regis could attract funding through an internationally significant icon.

Retail and commercial units would generate rental return on investment, and existing funds for public facilities such as the Library would be diverted to the new site.

5.0

Partners

Funding Sources;

ADC, Developer, Central Government, EU and Lottery Funding

Potential Stake-holders

The Tate, University of Chichester, Alexandra Theatre, Technology Enterprises, Retail and Commercial tenants, Bookshop, Hotel chain, Big Blake Project, The Blake Society, Creative England, Arts Council England, NESTA, IXIA, BT

6.0

Market Testing

On 10/10/14 The Big Blake Project and HNW Architects presented a scheme to members of the Bognor Regis community and their respective Councillors outlining a vision for a new 'Centre for the Imagination' for Bognor Seafront.

The presentation was then published in the local media and positive comments were recorded both by the community and the councillors. Particularly the proposals for a cultural centre linked both with the Town's heritage and opportunities for creative engagement with the community were positively received.

7.0

Timescale

We propose a two phase approach whereby residential development can be undertaken while the lengthy process of funding applications are secured. We anticipate completion of Hothampton Site earliest 2017 and Regis Centre and Library site 2018.

8.0

Constraints and Risks

Interference to Local Town economy during Construction; Town Hall listed Status. Planning Constraints in adjacencies to Conservation areas.

9.0

Land Requirements

Our three Sites for Proposal are publicly owned. They are The Regis Centre Site, Hothampton and the Library Site.

10.0

Drawings, Plans and Artists Impressions