

# Rebranding as a Tool for Regeneration

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Rebranding has long been used as a tool for marketing places. Used smartly, the rebranding of towns, cities and places can also reap rewards for urban regeneration. Locum Associate Sarah Jarvis suggests four steps to success.

Britannia Village is a name conjured up by marketers, and you may or may not know that it is in London E16. Eric Sorensen, the man charged with leading the delivery of the Thames Gateway London Partnership, thinks that calling it after West Silvertown, which is where it is – would have

term economic investment or short break city tourism, is fierce, and cities like Glasgow and Manchester have proved the worth of campaigns for cultural and sporting events. Of course, actually winning a cultural title such as European Capital of Culture, or a sporting event like the Olympic Games will push your city even further up the international league table. For smaller places, dressing your town or city in new 'jewels' of design shows a confidence that can help you rise above the rest. Even if the title is not actually won, or those

“ Should you re-brand before you regenerate or after? ”

helped to establish the area's distinctiveness, its sense of place. But despite his warning about the 'menace' of such marketing, there is clearly an appetite among many in the public sector in particular to learn more about the lessons of rebranding, and how it could help them turn around their towns and cities.

In this age of footloose capital and individual rootlessness it might seem that 'places' matter less. Yet evidence such as Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* shows that for those with choice, place is more important than ever. So competition to get your place noticed, whether for long-

iconic images are not actually built yet, creating a strong brand identity can be key to building a stronger economic future.

However, urban regeneration does not always mean working with those who have choice, or with places that have a major event or a provocative new building to draw attention. For many places the more pressing question is whether the tools of rebranding can be used in communities without those unique selling points. How do you re-brand a place that has lost its old role, with nothing to replace it? Should you re-brand before you regenerate or after? Can you even re-brand without any change at all? Here are four steps to consider.



1.

It is sometimes difficult to avoid the ubiquity of aspirational mission statement phrases such as 'we will make this a better place to live, work and visit'. The key is to identify what makes your place distinctive and to build on what is special about it. Ambition is important, but so is a realistic assessment of what is possible, both for the place and the people who live there.

2.

Images and designs are powerful and can be critical to the credibility of a project. Just as headline funding figures can raise unrealistic expectations, so too can iconic images if they are released without making clear they are not going to happen overnight. The timing of communication is key to keeping the brand message consistent and making what is happening more real to people.

3.

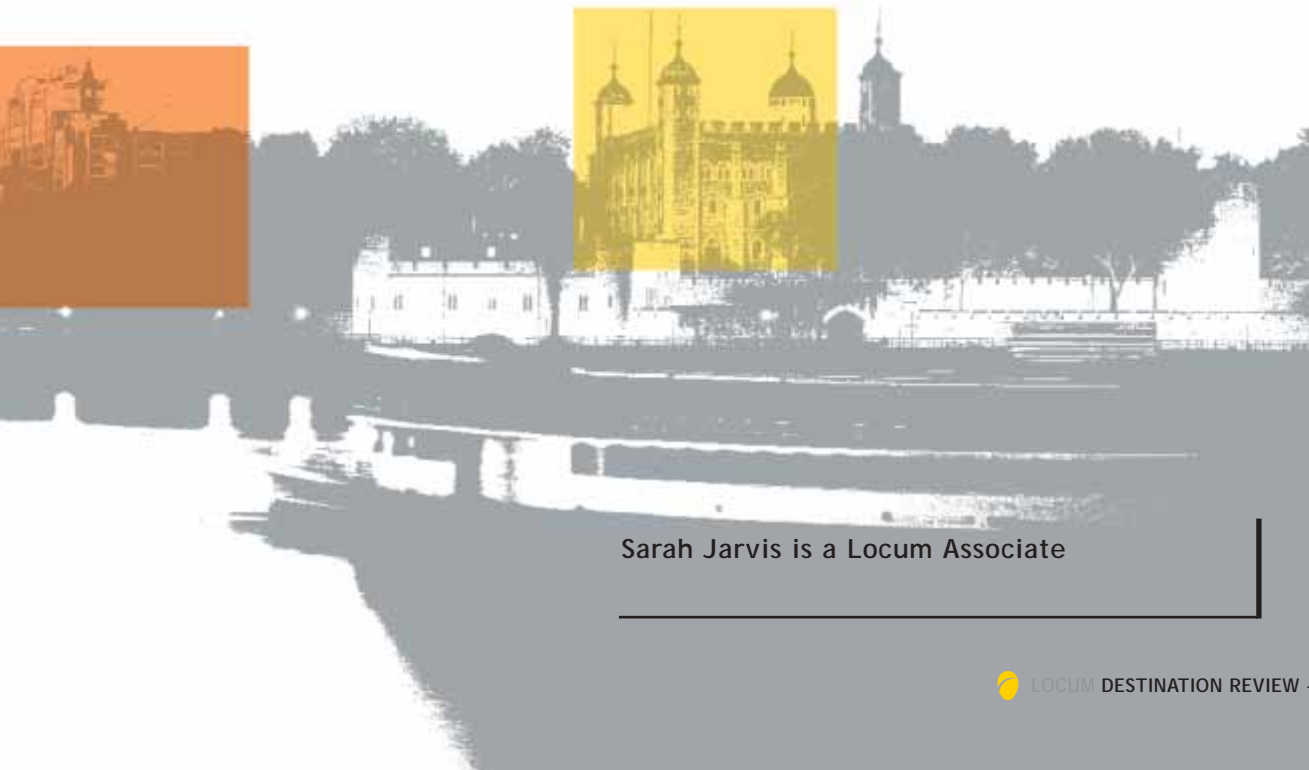
Engaging with businesses and local residents alike is crucial. It requires being clear both about the brand – your values and ambitions – and shifting and raising aspirations in your audience. Who engages is important, but more important is that someone does – finding an individual project champion can be the key to the success of a project.

4.

Experience from developers, urban designers and public sector chief executives alike suggests that rebranding should not be seen purely as a way to get a good press and to solve a problem of perception. Rather than seeing rebranding as being something that is 'done to' a place, creating and sustaining a brand identity should be a continuing, long-term process – just as regeneration itself should be. It is far more than a logo and a slogan. However, by being clear about what it is and what it wants to achieve, developing a brand identity can be useful to any town, any size.

Of course, the reality for most people will not be dazzling new architecture or an international festival. But if 'identity' is developed based on distinctiveness and strong regeneration and design principles such as good circulation patterns, permeable streets, mixed-use and mixed incomes, these can all reinforce a brand image. Neither is wiping away every vestige of an industrial past usually the best way forward, as Eric Sorensen ruefully recalled. Obsolete cranes from London Docklands had to be bought back, after they had been sold off too quickly.

[www.thames-gateway.org.uk](http://www.thames-gateway.org.uk)



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