

BORN AGAIN

THE RESURRECTION OF CARDIFF BAY

Over the past 13 years, the southern district of Cardiff has been subject to one of the biggest and most impressive regeneration programmes of modern times. Richard Tibbott, Seán Young and other members of the Locum professional team are proud to have assisted in the creation of a great new destination in Cardiff Bay. When Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, the organisation behind the project's development, was wound up on target in March 2000, *Locum Destination Review* talked to Commercial Director **Duncan Syme** about the project's aims, objectives and achievements.



Business is blooming in Cardiff Bay
Picture courtesy of Graham Davies

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In April 1987, the Government established Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, with an ambitious mission set by the Welsh Secretary of State: 'To put Cardiff on the international map as a superlative maritime city, which will stand comparison with any such city in the world, thereby enhancing the image and economic well-being of Cardiff and Wales as a whole.'

The Corporation's task was to regenerate 1,092 hectares of the dockland area of South Cardiff, around a Bay formed by the estuary of the Taff and Ely rivers. Much of the designated area, totalling a sixth of the Welsh capital, suffered from serious dereliction as a result of the long-term decline of its port and associated industries.

From the outset, and given its demanding objective by the Welsh Secretary, the Board of Cardiff Bay Development Corporation recognised that its task was not simply a case of repairing a ravaged industrial environment: it had to have much higher aspirations. As Duncan Syme, then Commercial Director of CBDC, explains, 'While the priority was to create good-quality jobs, with a high ratio of private to public investment, the regeneration must not only benefit South Cardiff: it should become an asset for the whole capital and for Wales.'

The Baltimore model

The Corporation decided to develop and adhere to a highly researched, long-term and visionary strategy, rather than one driven by prevailing property market forces. Locum Chairman Richard Tibbott was brought in to advise on how to incorporate a tourism and entertainment dimension in the regenerated Cardiff Bay. The overall development strategy sought to create a new social and economic centre of gravity for Cardiff, aided by flagship projects which could be marketed nationally and internationally. Water was to be the focus of the vision. The regeneration of Baltimore's Inner Harbour, on the eastern seaboard of the United States, was used as an inspirational model.

Like Cardiff, the Maryland port had been in long decline. A programme of renewal, driven by a group of business people and a cross-sectoral partnership, proved the springboard for a renaissance. A circle of attractions was put in place around Baltimore harbour, including shops, restaurants, museums and a science centre. The success of Baltimore's regeneration resulted in the arrival of millions of visitors, as well as companies in search of a leading-edge location from which to pursue their



Decades of decline had taken their toll
Picture courtesy of Graham Davies

international business activities.

The Corporation realised that, while the strategy in Baltimore should not be copied slavishly, bustling cosmopolitan activity could be generated around its own, much longer waterfront in similar fashion. This, however, would require the replacement of the tidal mudflats with a new body of water, around which the whole redevelopment process could proceed. This would be achieved by erecting a barrage between Penarth Head and Queen Alexandra Dock, thus creating a freshwater lake adjacent to the sea.

The new Bay, according to Syme, would have a dual purpose. 'First, it would enhance the environment, making it visually appealing to companies considering relocation to the area. Second, it would be an asset to the city and the region as a whole, bringing in visitors and tourists to the leisure and cultural attractions that could be established, with an "arc of entertainment" around the Bay's Inner Harbour, as advised by Locum.' South Glamorgan County Council agreed to the joint promotion, together with the Corporation, of a private parliamentary bill for the proposed barrage to impound the Taff and Ely rivers.

Regeneration strategy

In 1988, after public consultation with local authorities, business interests and local communities, the Corporation adopted what Duncan Syme describes as an 'innovative, visionary and flexible' strategy that was also achievable. This strategy set out to provide:

- a vision of a new future for the Bay;
- a clear structure for organising development and responding to opportunities;
- an urban design concept creating a sense of place, 'with superb development sites and

an attractive environment, blending the best of old and new in a unique landscape setting';

- a marketing image for attracting local and international investment in new activities and lifestyles;
- a stimulus to the creation of jobs, houses, leisure and a better environment for local people and residents.

Principal schemes to act as catalysts for investment were identified. These were:

- major projects around the Inner Harbour and Bay, such as the Oval Basin, a spectacular event space, delivered by a partnership between Locum and the architect Nicholas Hare;
- a north-south continental-style boulevard to reunite the waterfront with the city centre, creating a new linear centre;
- open spaces with public art;
- linkages in terms of development, landscaping and infrastructure to bring the outlying areas into the overall scheme;
- completion of the peripheral distributor road from the M4 motorway, with a section near the waterfront in a tunnel, to avoid creating a barrier with the rest of the city.

Attracting investors

The Corporation, which had not been vested with any land at its birth, initiated a study on land ownership to enable its strategy to be implemented. Much of the land was in numerous small parcels. 'After assembling sites and, when necessary, relocating existing businesses,' recounts Syme, 'the policy was to sell these sites under agreements which stipulated that development took place as soon as possible.' The Corporation also began environmental work to smarten up the area and enhance its perceived potential.

Also helping to encourage private sector investment was the Bay's Objective 2 Assisted Area Status, which enabled new or expanding companies to apply for government aid. In addition, the Corporation was able to offer urban investment grants for big projects and discretionary financial assistance. This included rent relief, grants for building conversion and measures to improve the appearance of sites and premises.

The Corporation set itself targets which, it calculated, would need to be achieved if its mission were to be fulfilled. Without imposing time limits, it aimed for:

- private sector investment of £1.2 billion;
- 29,000 permanent jobs;
- commercial/industrial floorspace of 1,150m²;

- 54 hectares of open space;
- 6,000 residential industrial units.

With the help of consultants, planning briefs for nine geographic areas were devised to give detailed guidance on proposed developments. Ben Thompson & Associates of Boston, a leading international urban designer for waterfront developments, prepared the brief for the heartbeat of the regeneration area, the Bay's Inner Harbour, which is now the focal point of what the Corporation has named the Millennium Waterfront.

Winning over the public

During 1990, consultation on the briefs took place with the local authorities, other bodies and the community. It emerged that local people were wary of the large scale of the projects. Many inhabitants lacked the skills required by new employers and feared that jobs would go to outsiders. 'The reaction of residents varies from scepticism over the benefits which are being promised to outright hostility,' the *Western Mail* reported.

In response, Geoffrey Inkin, the Board's chairman, sought to give reassurance: 'The fears of the existing population are understandable – that their interests may be adversely affected by an overwhelming and insensitive programme. The Corporation is determined that this fear should not be confirmed by its performance.' To avoid the disturbance to residents that would be caused by relocation, the Corporation did not plan to clear any of the existing housing stock. No home was ever demolished.

The Corporation said that, while its regeneration strategy was robust, it was 'a process, not a plan' which would be reviewed annually in the light of available resources, changing requirements and new opportunities. It stressed that 'the philosophy of partnership imbues all aspects of the strategy – a partnership of the private and public sectors and the communities, national bodies, local authorities, development agencies, academic and funding institutions, each of which has a major role to play.'

When doubts were raised over the time taken to evolve and implement the strategy, the Corporation suffered a credibility problem, with criticism that it 'didn't appear to be doing anything.' But CBDC's Board was determined it would not start with a flurry of piecemeal development. As Syme says, 'We wanted to ensure that our concepts should be thoroughly considered to ensure a long-term framework for subsequent decisions. In our view, we were dealing with the legacy of the previous century in order to create the inheritance for the next century.'

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The Visitor Centre played a critical role in explaining the ideas and scale of the regeneration project
Picture courtesy of Graham Davies



St David's Hotel and Spa, typical of the Bay's leading-edge architecture
Picture courtesy of Graham Davies

Promoting the plan

As an integral part of the policy, a marketing strategy was adopted to raise awareness of what was planned. A visitor centre was opened to show the ideas and scale of the regeneration, which attracted over 1.4 million visitors during the lifetime of the Corporation. Areas were given more evocative names such as Ocean Park (the former East Moors estate), Penarth Haven and Pengam Green. Public interest was aroused and maintained by the staging of free events, such as open-air concerts and powerboat racing. (In recent years, there has been an annual 'Art Around the Bay' exhibition.) By taking advantage of the ample space for car parking, the Corporation could market the waterfront as an events venue.

This marketing strategy, supported by a substantial budget, had twin benefits: it encouraged the people of Cardiff and South Wales to come to the waterfront; and it showed to the outside world, including potential investors, that 'things happen in Cardiff Bay'.

In 1993, the Corporation was ready to promote the Bay nationally and internationally with the brand image represented by its newly adopted 'mermaid' logo. A high-profile launch, attended by the Princess of Wales and with the Welsh National Opera, was held at London's Mermaid Theatre. It attracted a full house of over 700 potential investors, property and commercial agents and members of the media.

This was followed three weeks later by a 'London Week' of presentations, held at the British Academy of Film & Television Arts (Bafta) in Piccadilly. 'By then,' Syme explains, 'the Corporation's marketing team was able to show how the Bay was fast changing. In 1993, there had been plans and ambitions; in 1996, there were identifiable achievements. Two messages were highlighted: Cardiff Bay was not just virtual – it was reality, and it was set to become Europe's most exciting waterfront.'

Cardiff Bay today

The Cardiff Bay Development Corporation was officially wound up on 31 March 2000. By this time, it had received a total of approximately £500 million in grant aid, which was used to secure private investment of around £1.8 billion. The revitalised Cardiff Bay is already recognised as a thriving destination for business, leisure and living. It is also, of course, the home of the National Assembly for Wales.

Over 16,000 permanent new jobs have been created: admittedly, in Syme's words, 'just over half of the target set out in the official regeneration strategy document at the project's birth, but an admirable achievement nonetheless in the light of



High-profile events are being staged on the Millennium Waterfront
Picture courtesy of Graham Davies

the national economic recession of the early 1990s'. Not all those employees working in Cardiff Bay companies are Cardiff residents: nearly a third of all employees in the Bay travel to work from the Valleys and the Vale of Glamorgan. It is not just jobs which have been created in their thousands. A total of 4,500 new homes have been built or are under development.

Complementing the commercial appeal of the destination are the leisure and culture facilities for visitors and residents alike. In addition to the restaurants and hotels on offer, a national ice-rink has been developed, along with an international arena, a centre for visual arts and a constellation of attractions on the waterfront. A number of high-profile events have been held on the waterfront, including a royal gala concert which was staged in May 1999 to celebrate the opening of the National Assembly. With CBDC's job done, Duncan Syme is happy to reflect on the project's many and varied achievements and to forecast a bright future for the Bay. 'Not long ago, outsiders tended to consider Cardiff to be no more than a typical provincial city. Today, Cardiff is on the world map, a credible and attractive destination for tourists and businesses alike.'