



case study

historic environment



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The Objective One Partnership
for Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly

CORNWALL & SCILLY URBAN SURVEY (CSUS)

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the project

The Cornwall & Scilly Urban Survey (CSUS) is a pioneering initiative aimed at harnessing the quality and distinctive character of the historic environment for successful and sustainable economic regeneration.

The Programme has invested £211,396 from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in the project which has a total cost of £454,346. Match funding has been provided by English Heritage, the South West Regional Development Agency and Cornwall County Council.

The survey has created a comprehensive information resource and characterisation-based assessment for each of 19 towns across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly which will contribute positively to regeneration planning.

sustaining the historic environment

The Cornwall & Scilly Urban Survey is an innovative project aimed at directly cutting across the boundary between conservation and economic development. It is a national exemplar, being the first project of its kind to carry out a characterisation-based assessment of the historic urban environment specifically to inform and support a regional economic regeneration programme.

The project has investigated 19 historic towns and created an information base and character assessment for each, providing a framework for regeneration activity whilst ensuring that the unique character of each town is protected. It complements English Heritage's Extensive Urban Survey which aims to improve knowledge, understanding, conservation and management of the historic environment of historic towns.

The 19 towns in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly were identified in consultation with planning, conservation and economic regeneration officers within the County Council and the seven district, borough and unitary authorities in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, as those most likely to be the focus for economic regeneration.



The Town Hall in Hugh Town, Isles of Scilly, one of 19 historic towns investigated as part of the Cornwall & Scilly Urban Survey project

Cornwall has an unusually high density of historic towns. All are small by English standards, the largest being St Austell which contained only 28,000 people in 2001, but all have a full range of urban components. These include commercial, administrative, community and ecclesiastical buildings; public and private spaces, and varieties of residential areas.

Whilst having these components in common, each town has its own particular history and its own complex form and unique character. The project promotes the importance of recognising and understanding the essential elements of this unique character, and the particular character of the town's constituent parts: its Character Areas. This knowledge is then used to inform the planning and design of regeneration initiatives to ensure that each town retains its distinctiveness in relation to other Cornish towns and the variety of historic character within itself.

CSUS has successfully defined the distinctive characters of 19 Cornish towns using the principles of characterisation which have been applied to both the visible historic character of the present day landscape and the buried landscape of archaeological remains. This approach goes beyond the detail of a particular building or archaeological site to create wider models of urban character. It comprehensively opens up the way to a more equal dialogue between heritage professionals: the planner, the elected member, the developer, local residents and tourists alike.



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The major findings of the project are presented in report form. These are complemented by computer-based digital mapping and data recorded using ArcView GIS software and together the two sources provide comprehensive information on historic development; urban topography; significant components of the historic environment; archaeological potential and historic character. Importantly, the reports also identify opportunities for heritage-led regeneration and the positive management of the historic environment.

The results have been widely disseminated and have already challenged some perceptions of Cornwall's towns. The reports and associated digital resources have been shared with local authorities, funding agencies, community groups and members of the general public. Great emphasis has been placed on making information easily accessible and each of the 19 survey reports and associated mapping is available for downloading from the project's dedicated website, www.historic-cornwall.org.uk.

economic benefits of sustaining the historic environment

- CSUS provides advice for developers and design teams on the historically sensitive and sustainable development of towns.
- CSUS offers clear and concise guidance on maintaining and enhancing the quality and distinctiveness of the local built environment.
- CSUS delivers specific regeneration proposals for towns based on an understanding of their historic character and assets.
- CSUS promotes the positive management of towns as a result of community understanding and celebration, a key principle in Power of Place and Force for Our Future.

lessons learnt

The CSUS reports have been used in a variety of ways since their launch:

Partnership working

The project has been used to foster partnership working between Objective One, English Heritage and South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA).

"SWRDA has welcomed the opportunity to work with Objective One and English Heritage on this ground-breaking project. CSUS is a reminder to us all that the historic environment can be used as a catalyst for

change and a powerful driver for sustainable economic regeneration. The CSUS reports will be a valuable resource for future RDA initiatives in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly." - Stephen Bohane, Head of Operations, South West Regional Development Agency.

"English Heritage is delighted to have been able to work with Objective One and SWRDA on such a successful project. It shows what can be achieved when heritage and regeneration agencies work together to pursue shared aims." - Roger M Thomas, Head of Urban Archaeology, Characterisation Team, English Heritage.

A national exemplar

The CSUS methodology and reports are now promoted by English Heritage as an example of best practice for similar projects elsewhere in the UK and internationally.

"This was an innovative and ambitious project. The value of its results will be strongly felt in Cornwall's towns, but also far more widely as a demonstration of the importance of characterisation and its key role in maintaining the distinctiveness of places." - Roger M Thomas, Head of Urban Archaeology, Characterisation Team English Heritage.

Development control

the CSUS reports are proving to be a valuable tool for planning authorities in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Tony Lee, Policy and Major Developments Manager at Restormel Borough Council, explained that the Newquay and St Austell reports *"are regularly referred to in development control reports for significant proposals"* and have been used to support the council's case at public enquiry.

Veryan Heal, Historic Environment Advice, Policy and Information Manager at Cornwall County Council has noted that *"at last it is possible to demonstrate clearly, and in straightforward language, the distinctiveness of different towns in a way that is extremely helpful when assessing the impact of large scale proposals for development on the historic character. Development is essential for the health of a settlement and these reports help to bring out those heritage values that can be used to guide and / or complement the construction of the heritage of the future."*

Regeneration funding

CSUS reports and recommendations have been used to support applications for regeneration funding.

Russell Luscombe of the Heritage Lottery Fund confirmed that *"the CSUS reports have helped the*



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HLF assess the heritage merit of Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) grant applications for Penzance, Camborne and Launceston grants totalling £2m have since been awarded to two of these projects."

Urban regeneration

Architects and developers are using the CSUS reports to inform the planning and design of regeneration initiatives. The Hayle report has been warmly welcomed by Michael Franklin of FSP Architects and Planners Ltd who have used it to support the urban regeneration plan for Hayle harbour, to develop the conservation management plan for the site, and to inform the design of a significant private-sector mixed-use development there.

Talking about the development of the Hayle harbour scheme, Michael Franklin confirmed that the CSUS report had been *"a key element in the design process"* and explained that *"we see the understanding of Hayle's history valuable not only in terms of context but also as a marketing tool history is not an obstacle to development, it is a plus."*

Elsewhere reports have been used to inform environmental enhancement initiatives in St Austell, Hugh Town, Launceston, Falmouth and Penryn. Tony Lee, Policy and Major Developments Manager at Restormel Borough Council has described how the CSUS report for Newquay has been used to validate regeneration proposals for several key sites in the Newquay Action Framework which is expected to be published in May 2006.

A tool for the developer

With their emphasis on high quality design and local distinctiveness the CSUS reports are being used by the private sector to inform the design of new development.

Roger Carson, Director of Rosemullion Homes has praised the reports. *"Tragically house building in Cornwall in the late 20th century largely ignored the rich heritage of fine older buildings which grew out of the landscape, and many stretches of coast and countryside are blighted by ill-considered modern buildings of little architectural merit. When we founded Rosemullion Homes in 1994 our mission was to start – in a small way – to reverse this trend. By looking carefully at historic houses in Cornish towns and villages, we try to capture the atmosphere of their surroundings. Using locally sourced materials we build houses of traditional character that 'go with the grain' of their landscape. There is no doubt that CSUS reports could be used to assist and encourage other developers in Cornwall to understand local historical context and pay close attention to proper architectural*



St Austell, the largest historic town being investigated as part of the Cornwall & Scilly Urban Survey project

detail in their schemes. We also see CSUS reports as a tool for planning officers to encourage good housing design from developers and where this is not successful, to refuse schemes which lack any attempt to properly relate to their surroundings."

Conservation Area Appraisals

CSUS reports and information have been widely used by local authorities to support and inform the production of Conservation Area Character Statements and Appraisals, for example in Camborne, Launceston, Penzance, Truro, St Austell and Newquay.

Improving access and education

Across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly the project is successfully raising awareness of the value of the historic environment and promoting physical and intellectual access to this fantastic resource. The reports, the website and numerous talks and walks have built on the work of CSUS, enhancing local communities' awareness of the interest and value of the complex historic environments of their towns.

Nicholas Johnson, Historic Environment Manager, Cornwall County Council has found that *"from feedback at many talks, that local people are always very pleased that the quality and character of their towns have been recognised. There is also an unexpected but strong consensus amongst local people on which aspects of urban design over the last 30 years*



have degraded the historic character of their towns. Audiences are appreciative that the underlying themes of the CSUS reports are those of quality and distinctiveness.”

A tool for community groups

The reports are helping to optimise the contribution that heritage makes to sustainable communities. The Market and Coastal Towns Initiative has encouraged town partnerships in Newquay and St Ives to use the reports when producing their 20 year community strategic plans. Ray Tovey, Community Agent for MCTI described the reports as *“excellent sources of reference”* and confirms that *“they have been essential to the work we are doing.”*

Elsewhere the project has empowered local community groups to make informed decisions about the management of their town and local historic environment. In Newlyn the local community has formed an action group to seek environmental improvements for each of the defined character areas in the town. Likewise the St Ives Trust has welcomed the report as an extremely valuable document. Sebastian Halliday, Chairman of the Trust, said: *“This report has already been very helpful in responding to planning applications and it will serve as a basis for the extension of the present Conservation Area and a new Conservation Area Statement. It is also full of fascinating information and is very well produced.”*

further sources of information

www.english-heritage.org.uk

www.HEL.M.org.uk

www.hlf.org.uk

www.historic-cornwall.org.uk

For more information about how you can help sustain the historic environment in your project please contact the Objective One Partnership Office on 01872 241379 or email objectiveone@cornwall.gov.uk.