



## FLAGSHIP BIRMINGHAM

### A case study of regeneration in Britain's second city

*"Birmingham city centre is firing on all cylinders - residential, retail, leisure and offices. There is more development activity in the city centre than for 40 years."*

Over the last 15 years Birmingham has undergone a transformation from being a manufacturing centre in decline to an internationally significant focus of business. In parallel the city has become an increasingly attractive place to live and play, with more people returning to previously derelict areas. Be it cleaning up the canals and waterways, encouraging new businesses to relocate in the city, improving civic spaces or creating a better environment for pedestrians, Birmingham represents a good example of what can be done, given the right investment and a bit of imagination, to improve urban spaces.

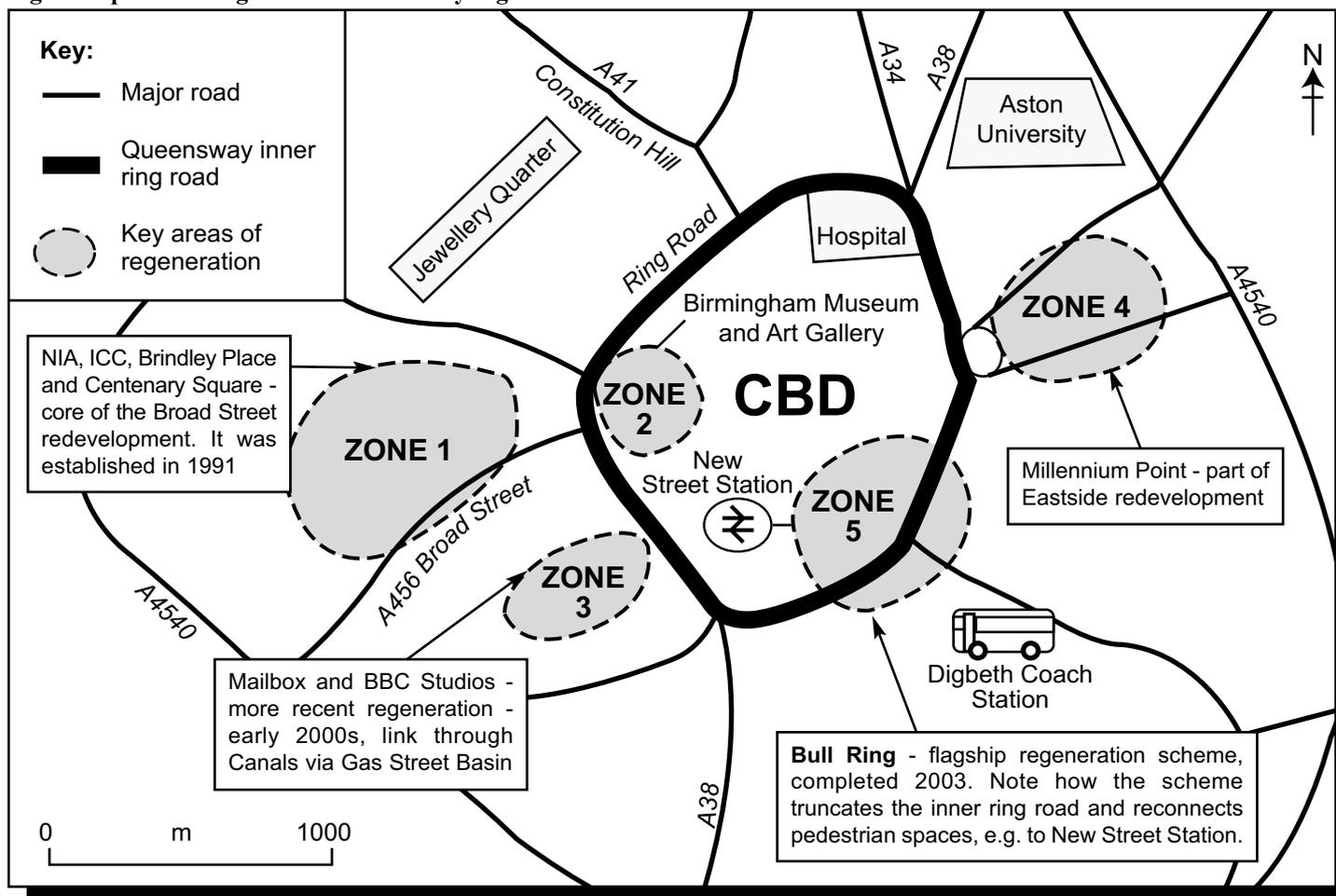
This *Factsheet* will guide you through a selection of regeneration projects that have been central in the redevelopment, re-imagining and re-culturalisation of the city. Birmingham has traditionally concentrated on **flagship** projects to drive its development, i.e. large multi-million pound prestigious projects. There is much discussion as to whether these are always value for money and really benefit all of the residents of Birmingham, especially the poor.

Fig. 1 provides a sketch map of the city and key regeneration projects which are grouped into 'zones'. Table 1 demonstrates the scale of the regeneration projects 2003-2010, totalling over £10 billion expenditure.

**Table 1 Developments by sector, Birmingham City Centre, 2003-10.**

Development Use Type	Value (£m)	No. Schemes
Business	250.00	1
Education	20.00	5
Health	2.00	1
Infrastructure	205.50	4
Leisure	31.00	6
Mixed Use	7,696.00	22
Office	1,127.00	10
Residential	680.00	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,012.00</b>	<b>64</b>

**Fig. 1 Map of Birmingham Centre and key regeneration schemes.**



**Table 2 Timeline of selected regeneration projects in Birmingham.**

1976	NEC (National Exhibition Centre) opened on greenbelt land near to Birmingham International Airport (a separate area from Birmingham city centre).
Late 1980s	Opening of the ICC and Symphony Hall (1991); development of the areas around Broad Street, including the Hyatt Regency Hotel (1990). Extension and refurbishment of Birmingham Rep theatre in 1991.
1993	Initial development of the area called Brindley Place by the Argent group. Large development costing £350 million. Now home to Sea Life Centre, Ikon Gallery and Royal Bank of Scotland.
2002	Millennium Point opened – part of the Eastside redevelopment of the city. Construction cost over £115 million. Completion of Phase 2 of the Custard Factory redevelopment (Eastside regeneration) – 100 studio offices and shops near Digbeth. Seen as a good example of arts and media regeneration.
2002	Completion of Mail Box Scheme – upmarket shopping centre.
2003	Bull Ring redevelopment opened at a cost of £530 million creating 8000 new jobs. Over 35 million visitors in a year of opening (second busiest shopping centre apart from London's West End). Redevelopment of the Quayside Tower which was originally constructed in the 1960s.
2005	Completion of £40 million redevelopment of Matthew Boulton College – teaching over 500 courses to 7000 students.
Future	Big plans for the redevelopment of New Street Station and continued investment into the Eastside area of the city. Many new city centre apartments all over central areas, e.g. urban splash.

**Background to the remaking of the city:**

**Legacies of deindustrialisation and modernist architecture**

Economic history often forms an important component of regional identity – this has certainly been true of Birmingham and the Midlands. Nationally, industrial identities have long since been viewed in a negative light. The image of Birmingham was for years determined by the events at British Leyland (who became Rover and other car makers). The impression in the press was of a city wedded to a disruptive and powerful workforce, constantly at odds with a weak management. The reconstruction of the cities image in the 1990s was caught between two competing factors:

1. *The historical importance of industry to the identity of the city and region.*
2. *A series of negative associations that had become linked to industry suggesting that regeneration should both build on yet diversify Birmingham's industrial past.*

Birmingham has also been closely identified with the failures of the 'modernist' project. Modernist refers to a style of architecture that became increasingly popular in the 1950s and 1960s. The architecture relies on a simplistic and often angular form, with use of iron, steel, concrete and glass. The modernist Birmingham offers a particularly rich example for visual study as it strives to build a new city image.

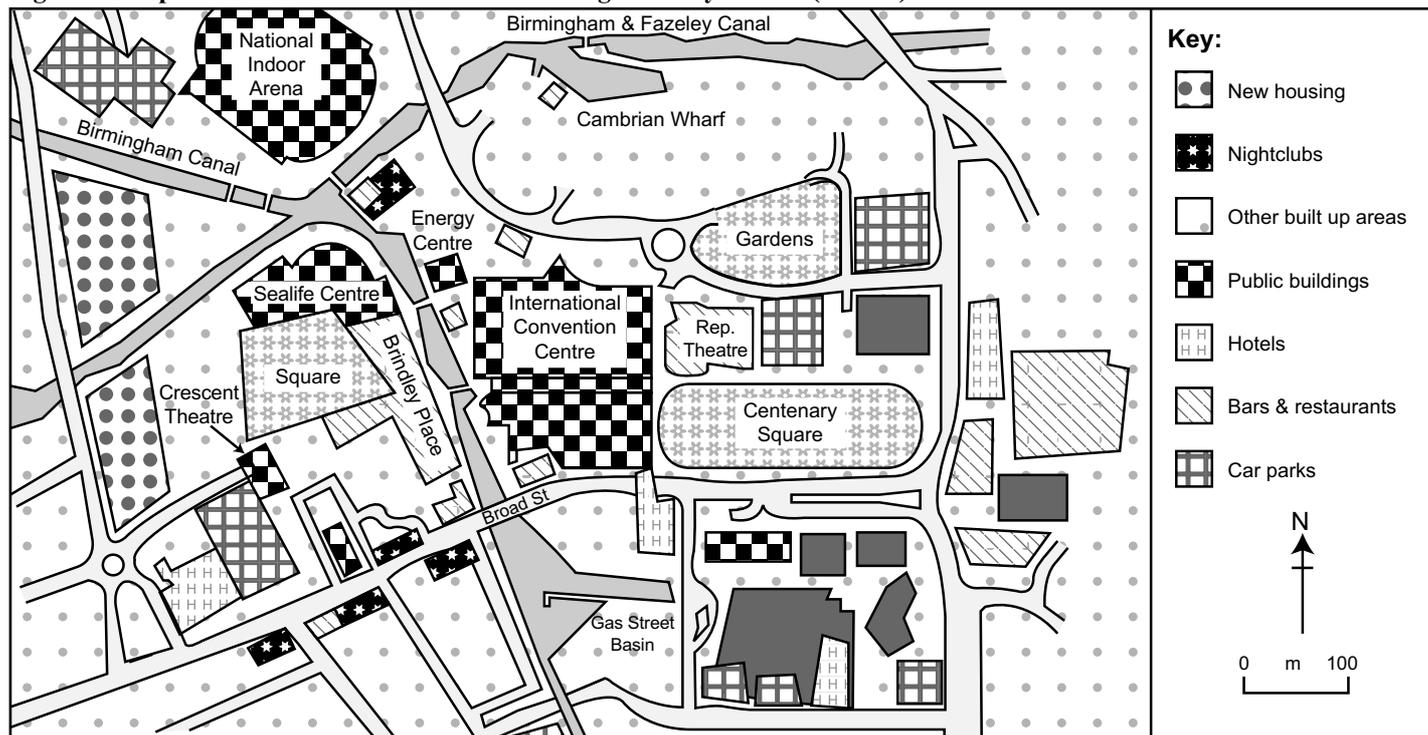
**Catalyst for change – initial regeneration 1970s and 1980s**

In the early 1970s priority was given to developing Birmingham's potential as a business tourism hub of national and international significance, and the NEC (National Exhibition Centre), which opened in 1976 was the first initiative to broaden the city's economic base. This location, whilst accessible from the motorway network, is found at Birmingham International (train station and airport) approximately 10km from the city (Zone 1, Figs 1 and 2).

The ICC (International Convention Centre) was conceived as a complement to the NEC, taking advantage of the city's strategic central location and existing expertise in business tourism to exploit a perceived gap in the conference market. Its siting in the city centre was a deliberate attempt to act as a catalyst of the regeneration of the central district which was seen to be falling far short of its potential. It was hoped that this regeneration scheme would provide an impetus for wider regeneration in the vicinity; to attract inward investment and employment growth; and to create a new image for the city in national and international markets.

Birmingham City Council claims to have regenerated the city through a heavy focus on culture and the arts. Birmingham employs more people in creative industries than any other city in Britain outside London and welcomes 24 million visitors a year.

**Fig. 2 Developments and leisure facilities in Birmingham City Centre (Zone 1).**



**'Making the ordinary, extraordinary - Brindley Place'**

Brindley Place and its immediate surrounds are one of the largest mixed-use schemes in Birmingham with nearly 7 hectares of developments. Notable tenants include Deloitte & Touche, Vodafone, Lloyds TSB, Royal Mail and BT.

In the 1960s Birmingham City Council saw the amenity value of the waterways in the city and commenced a programme of repair and conservation with limited development (*see box - Miles of Canals*).

**Miles of Canals -  
Birmingham's 'USP' (Unique Selling Point)?**

The canal network remains a testament to Birmingham's early industrial growth and is today a major resource enjoyed by visitors and residents. Until recently much of the canal network lay hidden and forgotten but the programme of environmental improvements carried out over the last two decades, and new canal-side development, have brought about recognition of its value. In particular canals are important to the city for their:

- development potential and focus for waterside development;
- regeneration potential;
- leisure, tourism and recreational role;
- nature conservation value;
- built conservation and heritage value;
- educational value; and
- transport value.



The initial schemes at Farmers Bridge and Cambrian Wharf mainly comprised refurbishment of cottages, landscaping and limited leisure development and successfully revitalised these inner city areas. Other areas in the city followed. At Gas Street Basin a larger development was completed. Here buildings and the canal-side were repaired and new development carefully planned to incorporate pubs, restaurants and visitor facilities.

The basin is now a successful, colourful and lively area in the heart of the city. Brindley Place an extension of the Gas Street basin is the focus of a large development of pubs, cafes, restaurants, offices, sports, theatre and conference facilities, and is hugely popular.

This was to be the 'final piece of the jigsaw' to transform the Broad Street area into a commercial and leisure development.

**Eastside - A 10 year vision (Zone 4, Fig. 1)**

Eastside is one of the largest urban regeneration projects in the UK, covering 170 hectares of Birmingham City Centre. Historically viewed as being outside the main city centre, the regeneration of Eastside is expected to significantly boost the profile of the community. The new city centre quarter of Eastside will focus on the themes of learning, heritage and technology. It will draw on the characteristics of the area, which contains two Conservation Areas, Aston University, Aston Science Park, canals and the River Rea.

The initial regeneration impetus is predicted to take ten years and result in billions of pounds of investment. It is a ten-year project regenerating 170 hectares, expanding the size of the city centre through the development of high quality urban design. The project will also extend the network of public squares, spaces and streets that have been successfully developed across other parts of the city centre.

The key components of the Eastside regeneration include:

- landmark developments such as Masshouse, City Park Gate and Martineau Galleries.
- the attractive urban boulevard which has replaced Masshouse Circus and opened up the Eastside area.
- the new City Park.
- the heritage of the area including the canal network and the River Rea.
- the learning quarter where Aston University, UCE, Aston Science Park, Matthew Boulton College, the New Technology Institute and Millennium Point will be the focus for new technology and educational-based uses.

An important philosophy of the Eastside development is its emphasis on sustainability and integrated planning, in particular mixed use zones (*see box*).

**Mixed Use Developments**

- Mixed use developments (where people are able to live, work, shop and enjoy leisure time in one area) are being promoted throughout Birmingham.
- When well-designed, these can reduce the need to travel and boost a sense of local community.
- These encompass a range of housing from loft apartments to 3-bedroom houses.
- Care needs to be taken with all mixed use developments to ensure that they include social housing and cheaper properties to cater for all budgets.
- In addition, walking, cycling and public transport facilities need to be put in place from the start to discourage car use.

**Millennium Point - a centrepiece in Eastside regeneration**

Millennium Point, Birmingham's landmark millennium project, was officially launched in the summer of 2002. The project, which received a lottery grant of £50 million from the Millennium Commission, was set up as an inspiring centre for science, technology and learning. It comprises:

- Thinktank - a visitor attraction which offers visitors a hands on opportunity to discover how science and technology shape our lives.
- the region's first large format IMAX Theatre.
- the Hub - Millennium Points social centre with shops, cafes, offices and a public mall.
- the Technology and Innovation Centre - a national centre of excellence for technology-based learning focusing on life long learning opportunities and building on expertise developed by the University of Central England.
- the University of the First Age which aims to raise the achievements, self-esteem and motivation of young people through new learning experiences and teaching styles.

Millennium Point represents an important cornerstone of the Eastside redevelopment. In particular it demonstrates how regeneration projects can successfully develop outside of the CBD core as long as they are physically well connected for pedestrians. The project also reinforces the concept of mixed land-uses within a single geographic area to create a mosaic of appeal to different audiences and user groups.

**Re-imaging the CBD – Flagship status (Zone 5', Fig. 1)**

The original Bull Ring Centre (opened in 1964), built by Laing Developments, has been described by various authors as “a disastrous failure both in design and economic terms”. It is one of the most infamous icons of Birmingham's city centre landscape. The Bull Ring area has an interesting history which is briefly described in the box below.

**Birmingham's Bull Ring – shifting CBDs**

The Bull Ring is where the markets of Birmingham have been situated since a royal charter in 1166 – in effect a 'market square'. The open-air market drew around itself a supportive network of other traders, inns and businesses. But during the nineteenth century the centre of the town migrated westwards leaving the Bull Ring isolated.

The growth of other shopping areas and alternatives (combined with increased personal mobility and suburbanisation) meant the markets became more important for the elderly and for poorer working class families who were less mobile.

In 1959 modernist replanning began with the simultaneous building of the inner ring road (the Queensway) and the Bull Ring Centre, Britain's first city-centre indoor shopping mall. Arguably these two developments destroyed the coherence of the urban space of the Bull Ring. Access to the adjacent outdoor market was restricted by roads and could be reached only by unpleasant and disorientating subways and passages.



In the late 1990s work began to knock-down and redevelop the immediate area of the Bull Ring. The (new) Bull Ring was a £500 million scheme – one of Europe's largest city centre regeneration schemes ever. It has brought in new retail and leisure opportunities as well as a new public square around St Martin's Church. Public transport access has been improved along with thousands of city-centre car parking spaces.

It is interesting to note that this 21<sup>st</sup> century design statement has been based on traditional planning ideas: a mixture of land uses, a traditional 'marketplace' enclosed by buildings, conventional outdoor streets and all pedestrian and vehicular movement at ground level. These ideals in some ways are opposed to the developers 'pure' retail model which can be seen at out-of-town developments such as Meadowhall (Sheffield) and Bluewater (Kent). The new Bull Ring is more radical than you might first imagine. Whilst shopping is very important (hence the flagship store of Selfridges), it is the celebration of access and connectivity for the pedestrian which makes this development so noteworthy and interesting and so popular!

The Bull Ring has certainly changed the geography of central Birmingham by realigning and extending the CBD of the city into a more south-central location. This has partly been facilitated by the termination of the Queensway inner ring road and by improving pedestrian access to the area.

One sobering thought is that the new Bull Ring is estimated to have a rate of obsolescence similar to the Bull Ring Centre which it replaced – perhaps leading to demolition by about 2040.....

**Conclusion**

Birmingham's current wave of remaking is not principally defined as a project of urban planning and building. Rather, along with so many urban centres it is looking to culture and consumption to drive regeneration and advertise an image that will attract investment and tourism. Cities competing on the global stage tend to highlight their symbolic economies: making use of culture and the arts to promote the city image, supporting flagship architectural projects and designing spectacular shopping and entertainment attractions.

The extensive regeneration of Birmingham's central areas from the mid 1980s onwards was an ambitious attempt to capture inward investment and rejuvenate the cities built environment and to improve its weak image and restore its battered civic pride.

It is important to recognise that the success of Birmingham's redevelopment is not only due to high profile flagship projects. It is also due to the accomplishment of planners and urban architects who have established an interconnecting map of housing, workplaces and education that have redefined the quality of the city.

**Review**

The £1.5 billion redevelopment of Birmingham city centre has been supported by massive investment in flagship projects such as Brindley Place, the renovation of iconic industrial buildings such as the Custard Factory, the Mailbox and Fort Dunlop, and a major investment in public arts programmes. The city centre has been redefined in terms of 'Quarters', each being connected by walkways and public spaces / squares.

**Question**

*“The urban regeneration process is complex and the reasons for embarking on large scale regeneration projects are varied.”*

Outline some of the main reasons why this regeneration process may be started in some cities.

**Answer hint**

Regeneration may form part of the governments' agenda for the economic and cultural redevelopment of former industrial cities that have fallen into decline; the enhancement of external image may be viewed as a means of attracting inward investment and tourism; or projects may be a way of initiating wider environmental improvements and infrastructure developments. A key factor is that the initial funding should act as a catalyst for further inward investment and the development of other initiatives.

**Useful websites**

- [www.locatebirmingham.com/birmingham\\_offer/key\\_developments](http://www.locatebirmingham.com/birmingham_offer/key_developments) outlines the key regeneration features and components of the city centre
- [www.beinbirmingham.com](http://www.beinbirmingham.com) informative site about the city, good maps
- [www.birmingham.gov.uk/GenerateContent?CONTENT\\_ITEM\\_ID=3184&CONTENT\\_ITEM\\_TYPE=0&MENU\\_ID=1637](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/GenerateContent?CONTENT_ITEM_ID=3184&CONTENT_ITEM_TYPE=0&MENU_ID=1637) planning information about the city zones from Birmingham City Council

**Further reading**

- *Regenerating City Centres*. Speake, J & Fox, V. (2002) Geographical Association, Sheffield.
- *Tourism Culture and Regeneration*. Smith, M. (ed) (2007) CABI Publishing, Oxfordshire
- *Remaking Birmingham*. Kennedy, L. (ed) (2004) Routledge, London
- *Urban Geography*. Hall, T. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (2005) Routledge London

**Acknowledgements**

David Holmes works as a freelance geography consultant and advisor to the Field Studies Council. He also works part-time as a Gifted and Talented co-ordinator in Somerset. Curriculum Press, Bank House, 105 King Street, Wellington, TF1 1NU. Tel. 01952 271318. Geopress Factsheets may be copied free of charge by teaching staff or students, provided that their school is a registered subscriber. No part of these Factsheets may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any other form or by any other means, without the prior permission of the publisher. ISSN 1351-5136