

That little bit 'Moore'



Credit: HUDSON Architects

When it comes to reality television shows, the infamous Big Brother house and a competition for wanna-be popstars are more likely to come to mind than a council's attempts at revitalising a town centre. *Laura Sharman* finds out how a new public square in Castleford is putting urban design on prime time television.

Local authorities are often accused of keeping people in the dark when it comes to implementing policy and improvement works.

However, Wakefield Metropolitan District Council has not only committed to an ambitious plan to redevelop the Town Centre but has agreed to host the first ever televised regeneration project in conjunction with Channel 4's *Grand Designs*.

The Castleford Project, situated in the former mining town of Castleford in West Yorkshire, is an urban renewal initiative delivering a series of different projects across the Town. The area was chosen out of 100 other UK towns, and has seen the completion of 10 projects valued at over £12 million.

To date, the project has not only won praise for its best practice in urban design, but it has also improved the economic and social standing of the Town. It is also estimated that it will bring an additional £200 million of new investment into the area.

Local people have been involved in the development from the beginning, having input into the new schemes planned and

contributing to decision making. The project also recognises the important of art in urban design and has incorporated innovative installations, such as the *Cratehouse* for Castleford, a landmark sculpture made out of shipping containers and bottle crates.

One of the most dramatic aspects of the project has now been completed: the *Henry Moore Square*. Once a neglected and run-down public space, the new square provides a modern central meeting place that reflects the city's historic setting.

Costing £1.1 million and designed by Hudson Architects, the square was formally a semi-pedestrianised zone that had poor paving and inadequate seating. Now, Hudson Architects have created a new design based on a circle extending from the commercial centre in concentric waves to the wider environs of the town.

Allison Drake, Chair of the Castleford Heritage Trust, explained: "The scheme is contemporary in its design but also reflects the town's industrial heritage through the motif of the

back granite circle and cultural heritage in the naming of the square and celebrates the life of this close community."

In order to encourage people to use the area to socialise in, swivel seats and two-seater benches have been installed throughout. The benches are made of tubular steel and wood weave and are positioned on white granite 'mats' that act as locators for other street furniture such as cycle racks and a telephone box. The benches also replace street bollards to delineate trafficked areas, but a concealed locking device enables the Council to move them during busy public events.

The lighting of the square has also been improved to create a safe and attractive nighttime environment. Uplighters are embedded within the paving and floodlights deployed at strategic locations, creating focused light points.

Peter Box, Leader of Wakefield Council, believes the project is especially innovative because the scale of development is taking place in such a small area. He feels that because people can see work being carried out fairly quickly, it

helps instill a feeling of public confidence in the project. The Council has put community planning at the heart of the development to create a sense of ownership and community pride.

However, Box does admit regeneration on this scale has caused some concerns from the local community. "In a couple of areas, people almost get frightened by the pace of change. But the concerns are more to do with the detail than the big vision.

"You'll get this for a regeneration of this scale. The big scheme – people have brought into those. For example, there was general consensus about the £50 million supermarket coming in. But traders had concerns, so we had a meeting recently to allay their fears."

Although the public square may just be one part of a larger project, there can be no doubt that it dramatically enhances the Town Centre by providing a social and cultural space.

However, maybe the true test will be when the programme is broadcast in Spring 2008, allowing the public themselves to judge Wakefield's efforts firsthand. [LGN](#)