

Falmouth Conservation Area

While Falmouth may now be seen as a thriving example of a Cornish maritime town 16 years ago it faced an uncertain future and attracted an extensive package of economic support and investment.

Falmouth is located on a peninsula within a peninsula and its history and development has been irrevocably linked to the water, located on the Fal Estuary and forming one of the best natural harbours in the country. The functional links with sea remain, with the Falmouth Docks a significant presence.



Falmouth Harbour. © Historic England

The development of the National Maritime Museum in Falmouth and the strong leisure market added to the links. The seafront and beaches both explain the reasons for the development of the town as well as forming one of its opportunities for a future vision.

In parallel with this Falmouth has a history of innovation and learning from the Royal Polytechnic Society (first Polytechnic in the UK), the Gardens of the Fox family to the former Scholastic Seat of Learning in pre-reformation times at Glasney college in Penryn. This tradition continued with the Falmouth School of Arts, Cornwall College Marine School and perhaps most significantly the hub of the new Combined Universities in Cornwall at Tremough on the edge of Penryn.

With these assets and strengths also came challenges. Falmouth included significant pockets of deprivation with Falmouth Penwerris ward then in the top 20% most deprived wards in the South West. Key industries such as the Docks, while still vibrant, were at a crossroads, while the town centres and waterfronts suffered from inadequacies in terms of infrastructure and a lack of cohesive vision for their future.

Falmouth had also seen one of the most significant increases in house prices of any town nationally in recent years and with it the issue of provision of affordable housing of all tenures had grown.

Access to and within Falmouth was seen as a major constraint to its on-going regeneration and economy.

Within this context and as a complement to a wide range of regeneration activities English Heritage agreed a Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme for the Falmouth Conservation Area, to run for 3 years from 2001.

Over the scheme's lifetime English Heritage contributed £190,561 to a public sector common fund of £930,405 in partnership with what was then Carrick District and Cornwall County Councils, the Single Regeneration Budget, and the European Regional Development Fund. When private sector contributions were levered in £1,475,213 was spent on restoring buildings (both commercial and residential) in the retail heart of the town, together with the distinctive 'opeways' or alleyways that run up the hillside from the town centre. The active engagement of the community throughout the process ensured local input and evaluation of the project demonstrated that over £3m of gross additional sales were generated as a result of the commercial space brought back into use, while almost £4m of sales were safeguarded.

The benefits and uplift created a sustainable legacy which is reflected in how the town and its conservation area performs and are perceived today. In March 2017, only months after winning a Great British High Street Award, Falmouth won the reader vote to rank the Sunday Times Best Places top 20 perennials. This celebrates the places that have that have appeared in almost every best place list over the past five years.

Outputs

- 20 buildings improved
- 1005 sqm of underused residential/commercial floor space returned to productive use
- 84.10 sqm additional extra commercial floor space generated
- 4829 sqm of commercial/residential space improved
- 51 habitable rooms improved
- 7 vacant commercial buildings brought back into use
- 3 residential buildings brought back into use
- 8 new shop fronts

Other beneficial outcomes, results and impacts:

- Active engagement of the local community and property owners in the regeneration process, creating a more sustainable community.
- Increased awareness of sustainable energy principles and practical application of these

- Encouragement of further private and public sector investment in Falmouth.
- A more vibrant town centre in which people want to live, work and shop.
- Attraction of new business and the improvement of existing business competitiveness.
- Enhanced local and external perceptions of Falmouth as a high quality, distinctive historic location with a strong sense of civic pride.

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