

BBC Tees Coverage of Bishop Auckland

Ian Wood - BBC Tees Presenter
Wayne Baister - Property Owner/Developer
Alistair Coey - Alistair Coey Architects
Annalisa Ward - Bishop Auckland Heritage Action Zone Project Manager

Introduction:

Ian Wood

It was the home to family run McIntyre's, Bishop Auckland's prime shoe and leather goods shop until the 1990's. After which fashion retailers occupied the premises and when Dorothy Perkins turned out the lights for the last time in 2016, 25 Northgate Street was staying put, largely as it is. It's a Grade II listed building and Wayne Baister, Director of Initial Group would love to bring it back to life as a shop.

Wayne Baister

People often refer to it now as the McIntyres Unit, I believe there's still family around in Bishop

Auckland and we're trying to get in contact with them to get more details. There's substantial work to do to get it back to its former glory. It's obviously quite dated, the fittings are sort of tired so were really just looking to do a full refurbishment and whether that means splitting it into two units or keeping it as one remains to be seen, depending on the demand.

Ian Wood

It'd be great to have it back in action wouldn't it

Wayne Baister

It really would there's not many units of this size, it's quite a rectangular shape, it's a good trading area. I've got a background in retail and this was always the sort of thing I'd look for.

Ian Wood

McIntyre's is one of three buildings which are the subject of expert scrutiny; the other two are the old Co-op building also on Newgate Street and the Mechanics Institute on Victoria Street. All of them are inside Bishop Auckland's Heritage Action Zone, recognised for its character and potential by Historic England. Now it's funding a 5 year research project to understand the history of those buildings and of the town in general. And to present this proud story to the public whom Jules Brown of Historic England is keen to involve.

Jules Brown

We've got activity going on already with schools and we're looking to publish books on the history of Bishop Auckland. There'll be exhibitions and there'll also be online information as well during this five year project.

Ian Wood

Its kind of haunting really, you do feel the weight of history on your shoulders as you walk in.

Jules Brown

Bishop Auckland is a very ancient town, back to Roman and probably earlier than that so there is a weight of history here, you can feel it in the streets and when you come into empty buildings you suddenly realise just what historic interest there is in the buildings in this town that we want to try and use to get people back into economic activity here.

Ian Wood

Crossing the water from Belfast to have a good look at the towns Heritage Action Zone and its three buildings in particular, is Alastair Coey Architects they specialise in conversion, here's Alistair Coey himself.

Alistair Coey

To understand the historic fabric how the building has been put together, why the very interesting bronze shop front is the way it is, looking at the structure and really unpicking it and trying to understand how it evolved. Now this building is unusual in that the front of it is original and most of the back of it has been completely rebuilt it probably has had a number of iterations over the years but it's the contribution really that the building makes to the street scape that's so important here. It's a very fine shop front and very interesting building, people probably remember coming here to buy their shoes when they were children with their parents and part of the affection also is that these buildings are very, very distinctive. Most of our new shop developments don't have much distinction.

Ian Wood

Annalisa Ward is the Heritage Action Zone Project Manager working for DCC, she's overseeing around 50 projects with a view to making the most of a proud history and Annalisa's already seen a keen appetite for this history to be unearthed.

Annalisa Ward

There's a great sense of pride in the town and whilst perhaps it's not gone through the best of times recently, I think people do see there is a brighter future coming and if we can get more buildings back into use and we're seeing new businesses making enquiries so I think people will be really pleased to see the town brighter and more vibrant.

Ian Wood

Is there any opportunity for people to maybe have a look at the empty buildings before they are brought back?

Annalisa Ward

There will be opportunities, certainly, we participated in Heritage Open Days. Last year we did a walk around the town and looked at some of the buildings from the outside, and actually, I would encourage people to look up, there's nothing better than looking up and seeing the beauty and the architecture of Bishop Auckland.
