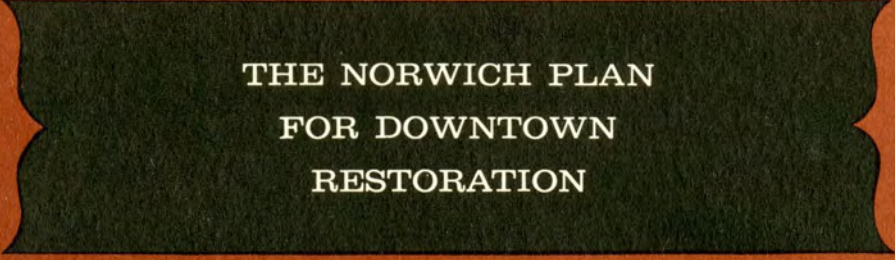



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THE NORWICH PLAN  
FOR DOWNTOWN  
RESTORATION

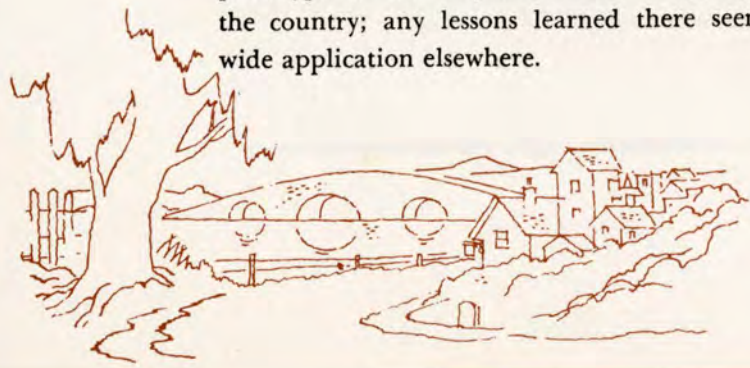


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## HOW IT BEGAN IN NORWICH, ENGLAND

In the summer of 1957 the Civic Trust proposed to the Norwich City Council a joint project which would show how the appearance of some given area in the city could be improved, without major alteration or expense, if all concerned could be persuaded to work together. The local authorities were enthusiastic. The City Engineer and Planning Officers suggested a number of suitable areas, a Consultant Architect, Mr. Misha Black, O.B.E., R.B.I., P.P.S.I.A., was appointed by the Trust and after careful consideration, it was decided that a part of Magdalen Street offered the best opportunity for this kind of experiment.

Why Magdalen Street? In the main, because its problems were felt to be typical of other streets in many other areas. Magdalen Street, like so many other streets, had slowly, through the years, through carelessness and thoughtlessness and haphazard development lost much of its charm and character. The street with its branches of chain stores, local shops large and small, banks, public houses, and two churches could be said to be the prototype of mile upon mile of shopping street throughout the country; any lessons learned there seemed likely to have wide application elsewhere.



What was needed was that the street be looked at as a whole by an experienced eye. Its potentialities needed appraising. Then, if everyone were willing, a plan of renovation and re-decoration should be prepared. The good points would be emphasized, the bad points camouflaged, and a pleasing new face presented to the world. Such Plans had previously been carried out by big landlords. But never before, so far as is known, had it ever been attempted in the much more complex conditions presented by multiple ownership.

At a joint meeting of all concerned, the Plan was explained and an exhibition of the proposals was shown, followed by an open discussion. The "feeling of the meeting" proved to be overwhelming in favour of the scheme. This was borne out during the next few weeks as the questionnaires began to be returned. These asked each owner or occupier whether he was prepared, in principle, to support the scheme. If so, whether he wished to use an architect of his own choice, etc. It was made quite clear that all matters of cost and design treatment would be subject to consultation with the owners and occupants concerned.

The Trust had previously decided that it would not be worthwhile pursuing the project unless two-thirds of the traders would



co-operate. Within two weeks three-quarters of them had signified their readiness, in principle, to do so. Eventually, those declining to participate dwindled to four out of 85. (After the completion of the Scheme even some of these changed their minds).

### WHAT WAS DONE TO MAGDALEN STREET ?

The scheme itself was not a re-building. It was simply a restoration and re-painting project. As a matter of record, 66 properties facing the street, together with a number of alleys and courtyards, were repainted in a co-ordinated scheme; 17 sign-boards over the shops were redesigned and 38 were relettered; 22 projecting name signs and advertisements were removed; 26 shops installed new blinds; 16 added new curtains to their upper windows; 6 lamp standards were removed and replaced by new street lighting; 2 new bus shelters of a standard design prepared by the city architect, and 1 especially designed crush barrier were erected; five new bus stop signs superseded the old ones; 11 pairs of No Waiting and No Loading signs were redesigned as one; another pair was removed altogether; overhead wires were resited so that they would not cross the street; St. Saviour's Church was floodlit, and a corner lot was planted by the City Park Depart-

ment. Some 40 other structures and objects in the street were removed, replaced, or repainted — an electricity box here, a notice board there, a fence somewhere else, and so on. A great many of the changes are not readily apparent. But they all contributed to the changed appearance of Magdalen Street. Today, the first impression a stranger gets is made by the strong colours and gay effect of the street as a whole. The removal of the wires and lamp posts and the use of brighter colours caused one citizen to remark: "The street looks half as wide again."

Upon completion of the restoration of Magdalen Street, it was found that the average cost to the merchant was less than some \$200 each. Restoration of Magdalen Street cost a total of \$22,500. The municipalities' portion and that of Civic Trust was about \$15,000., of which \$5,000 would have been necessary within a year or so in the normal course of repainting.

The results obtained in Magdalen Street were even greater than had been hoped for, in that some of the store-keepers reported sharp increases in sales. As might be expected, those relying on casual trade were even more favourably affected. The Magdalen Street Traders Association expressed their opinion through their Chairman, Mr. S. J. Cross: "The general feeling of our members is that the Scheme has been a huge success. They are anxious now to get it extended to the northern end of the street".



as different as possible with a personality and appearance all its own, that will reflect and accentuate its history and its surroundings. All that is required to implement the Norwich Plan is that the Street or area be examined by an experienced eye and an organized plan set up to bring out the points of beauty, to cover the ugly blemishes or to remove them entirely.

Nor is the Norwich Plan a purely aesthetic idea of beauty for beauty's sake, rather it is recognition of the well known merchandising fact that people like to shop where the surroundings are pleasant. This may sound simple, but like anything worth doing it requires time, work and some money. The cost should be in the region of normal redecorating costs for the premises unless very drastic alterations are called for. The Norwich Plan is an investment more than an expense. When it has been tried — principally in Norwich, England and Oakville, Ontario — the merchants have reported an increase in trade. There are other dividends from this investment besides the increase in trade; a greater pride in the community and more attractive working conditions.

One of the most important features of the Norwich Plan is the fact that it is adaptable to any community or street regardless of background or locality. The only thing that one street may have in common with another is that it is used by people.



## HOW IT WORKS

In recognizing that no two areas present the same problem it is easily understood that no hard and fast recommendations can be made. The precise form of the most suitable machinery must inevitably vary from place to place according to local circumstances. The initiative for a scheme of this kind may come from one of several bodies —

- a) the local authority. In the case of absence of incorporated towns or cities initiative may come from the township or from the county council,
- b) the local Board of Trade, Chamber of Commerce or a particular street association,
- c) a local civic or planning association,
- d) a local group of Architects,
- e) the local press, radio or television station,
- f) occasionally it may come from a non-local organization concerned with some general aim such as a promotion of tourism, or the restoration of historical sites.





From whatever source the idea has sprung, the first mentioned authority and the Local Chamber of Commerce or Street Association are essential parties to any scheme in other than purely residential areas. An informal exploratory meeting with them, or between them, should therefore be called at an early stage by the initiating body. Such a meeting might include, according to the circumstances, the Mayor, the Chairman of the Planning or other appropriate board, The Town Manager or Clerk, the Planning Director, The City Engineer, The County Planning Officer, the President or Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, representatives of the Planning Association, the local association of Architects, or others concerned with the well being of that particular area. If there appears to be a sufficient measure of agreement at this meeting, those attending should report back to their respective organizations with a view to setting up a joint committee representing the parties concerned, which can become the sponsoring body for the scheme. Nothing more is called for, at this stage, than an agreement in principle to explore the possibilities further.

The first task of the joint committee must be to consider — (a) the most suitable area or streets for improvements, if the initiative has not come from a street association, (b) The most

suitable machinery for co-ordinating the scheme architecturally, (c) The financial commitments of the operation, and (d) Its timing.

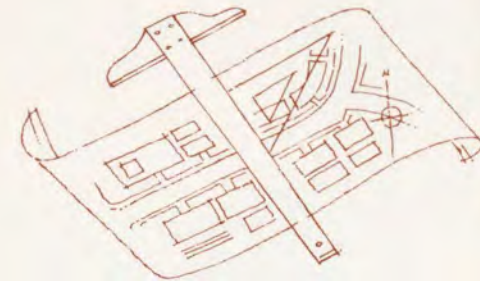
One point to remember is that the street or area concerned should be as far as possible, an entity with a definite beginning and end, or with a clear-cut perimeter. There should be some grounds for believing that the property owners and occupiers within it will be favourably disposed to such a scheme. It should not be subject to road widening or partial demolition in the near future nor include piece-meal re-development which may entail unsightly gaps and bill-boards, unless such re-development can be brought directly into the scheme. If, on the other hand, the scheme can be made to embrace some permanent improvement such as a car park or public gardens, its value will be greatly enhanced. It may be felt that a scheme embracing fewer than 30 properties is scarcely worth tackling, villages excepted. More than 150 properties would prove difficult to handle in one operation. Other things being equal, it should be a street or area that is widely used, the improvement of which will be an asset to the whole town. In some communities it is possible for co-ordination to be carried out by the City



Architect or Planning Director. Usually the local authority officials concerned are able to assist in such ways as administration, photographic surveys, etc.

From whatever point the co-ordinating architect is appointed, he should be asked to prepare the initial report on the area, the draft proposals, and later to co-ordinate the work of the other architects working on the scheme. This appointment is vital to the success of the project. After acceptance of the initial report by the sponsors and the formulation of draft proposals by the co-ordinating architect, a public meeting should be held, where the scheme and its probable cost may be explained to everyone potentially interested. The co-operation of the local Press is invaluable at this stage in stimulating interest in, and support for, the scheme.

The next step is the circulation of questionnaires to all owners and occupiers, to enable precise information about participation in the scheme to be compiled. These questionnaires should ask each owner or occupier whether he is prepared to support the scheme in principle; whether he wishes to use his own architect, or one nominated by the sponsors for that group of buildings of which his forms a part. If the former, whether he agrees



to his architect working in consultation with the co-ordinating architect; whether he wishes to employ a contractor of his own choice, or as a result of public tender; whether, subject to agreement on the design and cost of the works, he is prepared to carry out the work to a given timetable.

When the answers to the questionnaires have been tabulated the appointment of additional architects should be considered, depending on the size and nature of the scheme, to prepare detailed proposals for the groups of properties and to supervise the work. It is normally convenient for an architect to be in charge of about 12 properties. In a very small scheme the details might be worked out by the co-ordinating architect himself; or alternatively, this work might be done by the architectural department of the local authority, with reimbursement of the costs involved.

After the preparation of detailed proposals for the individual premises, consultation takes place with the co-ordinating architect to make sure the plans follow the agreed scheme; the proposals are then submitted to owners and occupiers for approval. On full agreement being reached, drawing specifications are prepared in the normal way, tenders are obtained and

contracts placed by the architects concerned on behalf of the individual property owners and occupiers, who pay for their own work. While this process is going on in regard to the buildings, a close examination must be made, in conjunction with the local authority and the statutory undertakers, of every other man-made object in the area with a view to its repainting, redesign, resiting, or removal altogether if redundant.

### WHAT CAN THE NORWICH PLAN DO FOR YOUR COMMUNITY?

Before the question of what the Norwich Plan can do for your community can be answered, merchants and the citizens of the community must decide what results they wish to obtain; whether it is to improve business, to attract tourists, to re-awaken the spirit of civic or community pride, or merely to make the community a better place in which to live. If properly handled, and thoroughly thought out, the Norwich Plan can do all of this, and more. However, haphazard implementation of the plan must be avoided. The residents of the community must be in thorough agreement with the plans and proposals. They must understand the objectives and costs involved, for it is only with this understanding and professional help that the Norwich Plan can make a community a better place in which to live, and work.





Photos courtesy Civic Trust

HIGH STREET, WINDSOR, ENGLAND



Photos courtesy Civic Trust

MAGDALEN STREET, NORWICH, ENGLAND



Photos courtesy Civic Trust



Photos courtesy John Seymour



COLBORNE STREET, OAKVILLE, ONTARIO

Photos courtesy Kolart Studios







*Drawing and Photo courtesy Don Pinker;  
Planning Consultant, Robert Fairfield Associates*

ONTARIO STREET, STRATFORD, ONTARIO



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