

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Newcastle University		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Poetry as a Driver of Business Innovation: Westpark Residential Development		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2002-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Professor W. N. Herbert	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Creative Writing	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: September 2002-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>An important strand of literary research at Newcastle involves close collaboration with regional companies. These partnerships have developed novel methods of deploying texts to generate increased competitiveness for business. The collaborations, which include partnerships with Bloodaxe Books, and Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books, have been underpinned by some of the first Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) to be awarded nationally in literary studies and creative writing. Funded by Innovate UK, KTPs are designed to help businesses develop by applying innovative academic research to deliver specific strategic benefits to the non-academic partner.</p> <p>One such partnership is the focus of this case study, comprising Bill Herbert's work with local construction companies to embed text-based creative practices in house-building projects. In partnership with Bussey & Armstrong (B&A), Herbert devised and implemented an arts strategy for a major, 49-hectare residential property development at Westpark, Darlington, using vernacular poetry as a resource for the regeneration of the landscape for residential use. The arts strategy he developed has had a significant beneficial effect on those who purchased houses at Westpark and now live there, but the major impacts claimed here are on housebuilding companies and ongoing guidance and policy. Herbert's approach has been adopted as standard practice by Darlington Borough Council, and has now been implemented by other construction companies on other sites.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Herbert's poetic practice has long been concerned with the role of poetry as a vital point of connection with the lived environment and as performing an important civic role. As the first appointed Dundee Makar or official poet (2013-18), for example, Herbert celebrated the city's literary heritage. Herbert's poetry collection, <i>The Wreck of the Fathership</i> (PUB1), is a formally inventive re-imagining of Dundee's history and residents, paying particular attention to the city's cultural and industrial environs, and asking how poetry can attend to and inhabit its own place of residence.</p> <p>Herbert's poetry collection <i>Omnesia</i> (PUB2) likewise examines, through tensions between formalism and experiment, English and Scots, what it is we mean by home and belonging. Published in two versions, the collection is structured around recurring images that cumulatively create a sense of the poem as environment. The same technique of layering and building up key images provides the principles that underpin Herbert's text-based arts strategy, which argues that poetry and building development share the same 'grammar', as situated responses to environment and place.</p>		

Since 2002, Herbert has produced the text-based arts strategy for Bussey & Armstrong (B&A) to develop Westpark, a large 'brownfield' site north-west of Darlington, comprising over 700 residential properties, plus a school, shops and a hospital. Connection to place is central to B&A's company ethos. Westpark was constructed on a 120-acre site adjoining the A68, which included 60 acres of the former Darchem Darlington Chemical & Insulating Company. Demolished in 1995, it left a 33-acre tip of a million tons of calcium carbonate, a chalky material left over from the process of making pharmaceutical pills, mixed with asbestos. Herbert's research has allowed the building company to creatively map and inscribe into the built landscape a form of urban regeneration that would have been impossible to achieve at the level of bricks and mortar alone. The text-based arts strategy has enabled a re-connection to, and a re-imagining of, place, breaking with the negative associations of industrial heritage not by rejecting or building over them but by recovering them in ways that have prompted a re-evaluation of that past.

Herbert created a text-based sculpture project that drew on the ecology, archaeology, history and social networks of the site, and related these to each other through a combination of physical materials and rhetorical forms. The poetic scheme itself, integrated throughout Westpark from sculptures to street signs and pub names, constitutes a significant body of creative-practice research and has been presented here in the form of a portfolio of text-based artworks, spanning 2002-2020 (**PUB3**). The work has been conceived as a poetry collection, so that in traversing the estate you will have read a series of poems as well as individual works that stand alone and speak for themselves.



Herbert's arts strategy has informed every aspect of the development at Westpark. The principles of Quaker industrialists in Darlington led to the formulation of a central three-part statement, 'Caring, Sharing, Daring', which was combined with, and refracted through, other key images in patterns of three. Three species were selected to be planted throughout the development – alder, maple and birch – and Herbert created a series of tree poems that were incorporated into the fabric of the village centre, from enamelled nameplates to metal archways. A park/nature reserve was created at the heart of the development to protect three threatened species that were found on the site – the water vole, the little ringed plover, and the dingy skipper butterfly. Herbert incorporated related text-based imagery into the windows and design features of the school and hospital, and worked with architects Nightingale Associates to embed the imagery into the design of the hospital, which was built around a central courtyard shaped like a plover's egg with flowerbeds in the form of a butterfly. The environmentalism of these motifs responds to the ecological regeneration of the once heavily-polluted post-industrial setting.

Herbert's KTP (2016-18: **GRANT1**) focused on formalising the arts strategy as the 'Westpark Approach'. More recent construction activity has centred on the expanded hinterland of Westpark Garden Village, which has trebled the size of the development, and is co-ordinated by B&A in conjunction with Darlington Borough Council. Herbert's design principles for this phase gather the elements of water, fire, metal, wood and earth, to co-ordinate a series of features that connect residents to the reservoirs, engines, mines, forests and farms that lie at the core of the identity of the people who have settled in the area, dating back to the Iron Age.

3. References to the research

In determining whether the underpinning research is of at least 2* quality, we can confirm that the following have either (a) gone through a process of rigorous external peer review, (b) received public funding based on exacting peer-review, or (c) received local council approval. Outputs are available on request.

PUB1. W. N. Herbert, *The Wreck of the Fathership* (Bloodaxe, 2020).

PUB2. W. N. Herbert, *Omniesia* (Bloodaxe, 2013)

PUB3. W. N. Herbert, Portfolio of text-based art installations at various sites (Newcastle city centre; Newcastle University campus; Dundee city centre; Westpark), 2002-2020

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4. Details of the impact

The impact of Herbert's research has evolved over many years, coming to a culmination from 2016. It is underpinned by the belief that art should be integral to the ongoing life of those who live at Westpark. While key stakeholders, including Darlington Borough Council, recognise that 'Westpark's arts strategy gives residents a meaningful connection to place that could not be achieved otherwise' (**IMP7**), the primary focus of this case study is on the *organisational* impacts of Herbert's research in generating business innovation in North-East based construction companies:

1. Integrating a text-based arts strategy into residential property development company B&A via the Knowledge Transfer Partnership (2016-18), creating a unique selling point that connects residents more closely to the cultural, industrial and ecological context of their environs; and
2. Enabling the uptake of the strategy, via Darlington Borough Council, by other construction companies, including Elliston, Steady & Hawes (ESH), Gentoo and Thirteen.

1. Impact on Bussey & Armstrong

Herbert's arts strategy has enabled B&A to realise its ambition, which dated back to the company's acquisition of the derelict land, 'for true innovation in community development'.

A key aim of the 2016-18 Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) with B&A was 'to develop themes, text and sculptural pieces in the new areas that build on the established language and imagery of Westpark' (**IMP1**). Herbert's design principles for the expanded development of Westpark Garden Village have responded to the new site, which 'borders on three areas of historical importance to Darlington: the medieval villages of Archdeacon Newton and Whessoe, and a site [in Whessoe Parish] where Romano-British remains have been discovered' (**IMP2**). Herbert's text-based arts plan built on the first phase of the Westpark development, which centred on the industrial history of Darlington, to explore how the region has been experienced as home by people settling there from the Roman era to the present.

The embedding of the arts strategy throughout Westpark has led to an enhanced sense of place and community among the residents. The 'Art in Westpark Report' highlighted that in a resident focus group all participants felt the positive effects of the arts features in joining up the built environment with its immediate historical and geographical setting, providing what one resident calls 'a sense of permanence. They are robust and meaningful ... connecting Westpark to the surrounding areas' (**IMP3**). It was the capacity of the poetry to change people's relationship to their location that was identified by B&A as constituting the value of the arts strategy to the company: 'it was recognised that what perhaps differentiated Westpark and B&A from our

competitors was not simply the arts strategy, but how that strategy spoke to a larger sense of care and investment in the community on the part of the developer.’ (IMP4).

Using insights gained from the KTP, the importance of the arts strategy was used by B&A to ‘inform design, marketing and the company’s digital profile’ (IMP4). Herbert’s artwork in the residential areas of Westpark has taken the form of naming all the streets and placing short couplets on each street sign. Each area of housing has a separate theme, relating to the history of Darlington and the surrounding area. This unique approach to the street names, which contrasts with the customary practice whereby a company’s sales and marketing teams would produce a list of anonymous names that might have little or no association with the site on which the houses were built, has been foregrounded in the marketing materials for Westpark, contributing to the company’s branding and identity. The materials explain that Herbert is ‘lead poet for the text used throughout the project’, which together comprises ‘one of the largest public art projects in Britain’ and is ‘grounded in a local history that changed the world’ (IMP5).

A second key aim of the KTP was ‘to embed into B&A a permanent capability in how best to implement an arts strategy into their future developments’ (IMP1). This was achieved through the reorganisation of the company as the arts strategy was embedded at all levels of its operations. In particular, the implementation of the strategy led to ‘the evolution of job roles, due to its impact on B&A design principles, digital presence and marketing strategies’. It enabled ‘all branches of the company to work more cohesively and effectively, with sales, marketing and development teams more closely united in their aims’. Moreover, a greater awareness of the impact of its work in the community and its uniqueness amongst current developers has produced ‘a greater sense of pride in the company and its projects’ at all levels (IMP4).

The Director of B&A has recognised the commercial benefits of Herbert’s research to the company, noting that the distinctiveness of the offer means that ‘in February 2017 the average asking price for a Westpark home was GBP209 per square foot, whereas the average asking price of the closest competitor was GBP190 per square foot’ (IMP6). The KTP has enabled B&A to identify its impact on residents’ sense of belonging and well-being, which are important alongside the financial impacts. Both dimensions are included in the company’s new publicity, marketing and branding strategies, which have been rewritten to ‘strengthen this narrative’ and reflect on how ‘those factors can be maximised to increase sales’ (IMP4).

2. Impact on Darlington Borough Council and other construction companies

A significant challenge identified by the KTP to the implementation of Herbert’s arts strategy in future developments was ‘interaction with the local authority’, and the ‘overcoming’ of the ‘authority’s concerns’ (IMP1). As a solution, the Landscape, Arts and Biodiversity Strategy (LABS) document was created, by Darlington Borough Council (IMP2). Herbert’s art strategy is ‘one of three foundational aspects of the document’ (IMP7), which lays out a series of design guidelines for companies to follow in bidding for permissions to build on Westpark Garden Village, providing a lever for enabling the arts strategy to influence the practice and ethos of other companies.

The Council formally approved the outline planning application for the expanded development of Westpark Garden Village in 2017. The LABS has been used by the Council as a benchmark to test proposals from construction companies to build on the land, ensuring that ‘the attention to detail in the design of spaces, residential areas and features within them at the Westpark development provides the high quality objectives which are to be transferred over to Westpark Garden Village, whilst exploring the added opportunities that the existing farm sites currently contain’ (IMP2).

The LABS has also defined the design code for other developers applying for permission to build on land elsewhere in Darlington, acting as a blueprint for best practice in residential development. Darlington Borough Council notes: ‘The integration of the arts strategy into the competition to develop the land of Westpark Garden Village means that it has now extended into

the practice of Homes by Esh on the construction of the Stag House site, and Barratt Homes, Thirteen Homes and Gentoo Homes, who signed up to Westpark's arts strategy as part of their contracts' (**IMP7**).

These building companies have now been awarded contracts by Darlington Borough Council to develop units on the Westpark Garden Village site. The Director of B&A has highlighted that Herbert's art strategy has encouraged new companies to develop land in the area: 'Neither Thirteen nor Gentoo has previously built in Darlington and it is the first time that either company has built private rather than social housing' (**IMP6**). The leverage provided by the LABS has produced a significant innovation in business practice, such that developers beyond B&A have now integrated Herbert's street names into their developments. Executive Director of 'Homes by ESH' observes: 'Herbert's text-based strategy has been foundational to our designs for Westpark Garden Village, and has informed our conversation with our architects, with planners, and with the council ... Herbert's street names and couplets are informed by research into the local cultural history and heritage of the site ... The bridges we are building in the area and the sculpted earth feature respond to elements of the phase two arts strategy developed during the KTP' (**IMP8**). Similarly, the Land and Planning Co-ordinator at Gentoo Homes notes 'by adopting the design guide and principles, and the arts strategy's informational approach' the 'text-based artwork inscribes at every level of Westpark Garden Village the cultural and industrial heritage of the site'. (**IMP9**). Thirteen Homes note that: 'Bill Herbert's poetic engagement with place allows us to embark on this new phase with confidence, creating a direct, distinctive and meaningful connection with the sites on which our homes are built' (**IMP10**).

Over a period of years, Herbert's creative-practice based research has produced an innovative, and ongoing text-based arts strategy for the regeneration of industrial wasteland, which has enabled residents to re-imagine their relationship to their heritage and surroundings. His creative practice research has led to an arts strategy that has clearly set the work of B&A apart from their regional competitors and enabled the company to develop a stronger sense of coherence and identity. Through Darlington Borough Council, Herbert's strategy has also now been adopted by construction companies more widely. The Director of B&A has noted that Herbert's research has given the company 'a unique selling point, which distinguished our work from housing developments both regionally and nationally. Herbert's bespoke poetic engagement with place allows us to avoid the reproduction of anonymous, undifferentiated housing, by creating a direct, distinctive and meaningful connection with the sites on which new homes are built' (**IMP6**).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- IMP1** Knowledge Transfer Application, Bussey & Armstrong, 2015.
- IMP2** 'Landscape, Arts and Biodiversity Strategy', Darlington Borough Council, 2018.
- IMP3** Marleen Vincenten, Art in Westpark: The Influence of Public Art on Buyers' Impressions of a Housing Development', 2017.
- IMP4** Knowledge Transfer Partnership Final Report, Bussey & Armstrong, 2018.
- IMP5** 'Westpark Street Names', Bussey and Armstrong, 2019.
- IMP6** Testimonial, Company Director, Bussey & Armstrong.
- IMP7** Testimonial, Head of Property Asset Management, Darlington Borough Council.
- IMP8** Testimonial, Executive Director, Elliston, Steady & Hawes (ESH).
- IMP9** Testimonial, Land and Planning Co-ordinator, Gentoo.
- IMP10** Testimonial, Thirteen Homes.