



Catherine Bell, listed buildings caseworker at the Council for British Archaeology, presents examples from the council's files

63. St Margaret's Works, Leicester



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Big employment sites add a lot to the identity of a place from being central to the lives of so many within a community. Nineteenth-century industrial complexes were a root cause of the growth of many British cities. Their pull of mass employment triggered urbanisation across the country and the building of terraced housing for the growing populations. In the 20th century economic shifts led to industrial decline. What were once conceived of as "palaces of industry" are now derelict sites that cast a gloomy presence on urban areas; a run-down reminder of past pride and a magnet for anti-social behaviour.

An example is St Margaret's Works, the Corah factory site in Leicester which is a substantial industrial complex that developed between 1865 and the early 20th century for making hosiery. It is a physical representation of Leicester's success and productivity as a manufacturing city. The site's location by the Grand Union Canal highlights how advances in transport and manufacturing technology combined to shape Leicester's 19th-century industrial growth and development.

The Corah brand's prestige, as

demonstrated by royal appointment, is echoed in the finely articulated brick ranges with sandstone dressings. Different ranges were constructed in various styles with an attention to details and materials that present successive phases of the site's development. It was an industrial complex, but its architecture referenced fine country houses and civic structures such as town halls, law courts and university complexes.

The factory buildings, locally but not nationally listed, are now largely derelict and highly vulnerable. Their condition makes these once handsome buildings a blot on the streetscape, and the brownfield site is ripe for redevelopment. Sadly, the current proposals seek to largely clear the site and erect an almost entirely new-build scheme. The Council for British Archaeology (CBA) has registered a strong objection to this.

The Corah site is an expression of industrial strength and importance. Opportunities for heritage-led regeneration, embracing historical greatness in a creative reworking of the site, could adapt the structures into commercial and domestic uses in a way

that retains the legibility of an industrial past, and demonstrates resilience and sustainability in the city.

National and local planning policies stress the important role that the character and significance of the historic environment plays in regeneration, and the benefits created around identity and sense of place. Imperatives to reach net-zero targets strengthen arguments for heritage-led regeneration. Reusing and retrofitting an existing building can result in a 70–85% reduction in embodied carbon emissions compared to new construction. Currently, building construction and material procurement is responsible for about 40% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

The Corah site offers great opportunities for heritage-led regeneration that would reinvigorate civic pride in the city's significant textile heritage. The CBA is urging Leicester City Council to realise the potential heritage and carbon benefits that the adaptive reuse of this factory site can deliver. As ever you can find lots more information about this casefile by searching on our database at <https://casework.jcnas.org.uk>. ■

