



Town centres and neighbourhoods have been in the environmental news recently. Oddly enough, the Government's initiative on reviving town centres seems to me to have a modicum of credit to it. I have to admit at this point to never having seen anything on TV with Mary Portius, the lady behind the latest scheme, in it – the epithet 'Queen of Shops' makes me uncomfortable as I am temperamentally anti-shopping.

However, the idea of bringing the centres of towns back into use and encouraging traditional shops and community groups to use the buildings that are already there has to be applauded. The idea that you run some kind of competition where some win and others lose out completely is another story.

Two of the towns that will benefit from the largesse are well-known to me. Stockport is the home of this publication and has a wonderful centre by the banks of the Mersey, with an 'Underbank' that dates from the Middle Ages, as you can see from the picture. Sadly, over the past few years the shopping offer has declined, with the major names moving out towards the M60.



Nelson is another town with which I have a passing acquaintance. Again, passing is sadly the story, as people head elsewhere – this time down the M65. If towns such as these can be revived with the addition of community organisations, which in turn should stimulate commercial activity, it could act as a catalyst for more funding and more bootstrap activity. The benefits go

beyond the 'feel good' factor – carbon used for car journeys is cut and goods bought become more relevant to a local economy. We can only hope.

Reviving neighbourhoods by taking local action is what US environment expert Majora Carter is all about, following her Greening the Bronx activities. The Architect's Journal reported on a talk she gave in London organised by the US Embassy. Her achievements in her native South Bronx are an example to us all. As her slogan goes: You don't have to move neighbourhood to live in a better one.

Planners have been assiduously trying to improve neighbourhoods for decades, but people don't seem to want to be 'improved'. That is the crux, of course. People need to improve their environment in a way that fits with their own vision, not somebody else's.

I did plan on making a light-hearted reference to the rain, but the floods that are wreaking havoc on parts of Wales and elsewhere are far from frivolous, so I have amended this blog accordingly.

**Chris Stokes**