

**The Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (1987-2000).
Regeneration- success or failure?**

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Chapter 1. Introduction

By the start of the 1980s much of the southern industrial area of Cardiff, previously devoted to docks for the shipping of coal and steel production, had become derelict.¹ This is well illustrated by the aerial photograph at Appendix 1. In conjunction with the Welsh Office, South Glamorgan County Council promoted the establishment of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (CBDC) in 1987 to regenerate a designated area, covering some 1,092 hectares, which is illustrated in Appendix 2.² CBDC operated until 2000 during which time it received £500 million of public money and raised about £1,065 million of private investment.³ It then handed back responsibility for the Cardiff Bay area to Cardiff County Council and the Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council, working in conjunction with the Welsh Development Agency and the Countryside Council for Wales.⁴ This dissertation will examine the performance of CBDC over its lifetime in its mission to regenerate the designated area, review its successes and failures in its aims and assess its contribution to the history of Cardiff.

The mission statement of CBDC was to put Cardiff on the international map as a superlative maritime city which would stand comparison with any such city in the world, thereby enhancing the well-being and image of Cardiff and of Wales as a whole. To do this it identified five key aims:⁵

1. To promote development and provide a superb environment.
2. To re-unite the City of Cardiff with its waterfront.
3. To bring forward a mix of development to create employment and reflect the hopes and aspirations of the communities of the area.
4. To achieve the highest standards of design and quality
5. To establish the area as a recognised centre of excellence in the field of urban regeneration.

This mission, together with the aims, have been described as “taking boosterism to new levels of exaggeration in a bid to sell the location to investors”.⁶ This dissertation will review the facts behind the hyperbole and examine the extent to which the CBDC was successful in

¹ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, (2000), *Renaissance: The story of Cardiff Bay 1987-2000*, Westdale Press, Cardiff, p. 9.

² Cardiff Bay Development Corporation p.9

³ Auditor General for Wales, *Securing the Future of Cardiff Bay*, (2001), National Audit Office Wales, Cardiff, p. 9.

⁴ Auditor General for Wales, p. 1.

⁵ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 28.

⁶ Punter, J (2006) Chapter 8, Cardiff Bay: an exemplar of design-led regeneration, in *Capital Cardiff 1975-2020 Regeneration Competitiveness and the Urban Environment*, Eds Hooper, A and Punter, J (2006), University of Wales Press, Cardiff, p.149.

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achieving its objectives during the period of its existence. It will not examine in any detail aims 4 and 5 above, since assessing the quality of the design and comparing the regeneration with other similar projects cannot be accommodated in a dissertation such as this. No comment will be made likewise on the developments which have continued since the CBDC transferred its responsibilities to the successor institutions, though Appendix 6 sets out a description of the state of the development at the time of writing.

There are a number of existing helpful primary and secondary sources in relation to the performance of CBDC. It published its own account of its achievements in 1999 shortly before it was wound up and this is helpful in documenting the events it oversaw.⁷ But, perhaps unsurprisingly, it is a self-congratulatory account. Other authoritative sources have sought objectively to assess its achievements, notably academics such as John Punter and Kevin Morgan from the School of City and Regional Planning in Cardiff University.⁸ There was a detailed official report by the Auditor General for Wales issued at the end of CBDC's existence.⁹ The archived documents of the CBDC, official reports and contemporary accounts of the development, also give insight into the facts that underly the development. Since the events described are relatively recent there is little reference to the detailed activities of CBDC in modern histories of Wales or Cardiff¹⁰. This dissertation therefore adds to the limited historiography about CBDC's effectiveness or otherwise in regenerating Cardiff's docklands.

The next chapter briefly reviews the history of Cardiff Bay area, then known as Tiger Bay, from its development as a coal exporting dock and steelworks in the nineteenth century through to its decline and dereliction in the first half of the twentieth century. It explains why an Urban Development Corporation, an invention of the Margaret Thatcher Conservative governments of the 1980s, was chosen as the best way to finance it.

In the third chapter the achievements of CBDC will be reviewed. The most visible legacy is the barrage to create an attractive waterfront, which was completed in November 1999. This was always at the heart of the project but the development and marketing of the waterfront and hinterland, and the subsequent negotiation with inward investors to give the basis of an economic core, were equally important. At the same time as building the barrage, CBDC was engaged in significant marketing activity and succeeded in attracting new investors and businesses to the area. In partnership with construction and property companies it developed significant numbers of residential homes. CBDC was created by a Conservative government with free market ideals and the local political voices were Labour

⁷ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 5.

⁸ Hooper, A and Punter, J Eds (2006), *Capital Cardiff 1975-2020 Regeneration Competitiveness and the Urban Environment*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff.

⁹ Auditor General for Wales, *Securing the Future of Cardiff Bay*, (2001), National Audit Office Wales, Cardiff

¹⁰ Martin Johnes, in Chapter 11 of his *History of Wales since 1939* refers to it in passing p.321 without giving much detail. Davies J in the 2007 edition of the *History of Wales* comments on "the lack of a coherent overall plan" for the Bay p.698 but gives little other information about it.

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controlled local authorities and Labour voting parliamentary constituencies. The way in which the CBDC negotiated a path through this challenging political landscape and was able, in most important areas, to work towards its aims effectively with other interested parties will then be considered.

CBDC was only ever intended to be in existence for a limited period and, due to the significant delays in getting Parliamentary approval to the barrage and other factors, such as the property recession of the early nineties and the political changes in the late 1990s, it did not have time to complete many of its planned developments within its lifetime. The fourth chapter will focus on these headwinds and their effect on the achievements of CBDC. Reference will be made to the report of the Auditor General for Wales to the National Assembly in 2001, which detailed the planned developments in Cardiff Bay which had not been completed.¹¹ The extent to which the City of Cardiff had been reunited with its waterfront by 2000 by reference to the transport links will be assessed. The reasons behind the failure to get funding to build the National Opera House, which had been an important part of the initial vision, will be reviewed.¹² Consideration will also be given to the contribution of the CBDC's work to the existing residents of the area in Butetown and the extent to which, to reference aim 3, employment was created and their 'hopes and aspirations' met.

In its lifetime there were many critics of CBDC, equally there were many admirers. The conclusion will attempt to make a balanced assessment of its performance by reference to the empirical data available and also by reference to its loftier mission and aims. Its wider influence on the history of Cardiff in general will also be considered.

¹¹ Auditor General for Wales (2001).

¹² Crickhowell, N (1999), *Westminster, Wales and Water*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, p. 207.

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Chapter 2 Background history

The first development of Cardiff Bay was undertaken by the second Marquess of Bute seeking to exploit the proximity of the port to the newly developing coalfields and ironworks. The West Bute Dock opened in 1839, and the East Bute Dock in 1859.¹³ By 1880 Cardiff had grown to be the most important coal port in the world.¹⁴ The area between the city centre and the sea was dominated by the Bute East and West docks, together with the associated railway sidings and coal storage areas. It also contained the Butetown residential area and the various commercial offices of the shipping companies. The East Moors Steelworks was opened in the area immediately to the east of the docks in 1890 by the Dowlais Company to take advantage on the availability of coal and the proximity of the port.¹⁵ However, by 1963, as a result of the closures of most of the mines in South Wales, coal exports had ceased from Cardiff docks. The Bute West dock closed in 1964, followed by the East Dock in 1970. The parallel decline of the steel industry resulted in the closure of the East Moors Steelworks in 1978. While the more modern docks at the mouth of the bay continued to operate, the whole of the southern industrial area of Cardiff previously devoted to coal and steel became derelict.¹⁶

The formation of the Welsh Office in 1964 by the newly elected Labour government to take control over government activities in Wales, promised much but delivered little.¹⁷ However, the reorganisation of local government in 1974 imposed the supervision of the newly created South Glamorgan County Council (SGCC) over the Cardiff City Council.¹⁸ The overriding policy of the ruling Labour Group of SGCC was economic regeneration.¹⁹ It drove forward some regeneration initiatives in the docks including the development of the Atlantic Wharf area, previously the East Bute Dock, and sited the new County Hall there in 1988.²⁰ Following the Conservative election victory in May 1979, Nicholas Edwards (later Lord Crickhowell) had been appointed Secretary of State for Wales. He sought to prioritise economic development, and in this he found himself in agreement with the Labour

¹³ Davies, J (1981) *Cardiff and the Marquesses of Bute*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff p.246-255.

¹⁴ Davies, J (2007) *A History of Wales*, Penguin Books, London, p. 427.

¹⁵ Davies, J (2007) p. 457

¹⁶ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, (2000), *Renaissance: The story of Cardiff Bay 1987-2000*, Westdale Press, Cardiff, p. 9., Crickhowell, N (1999) p.90.

¹⁷ Goberman, L (2016) Welsh Office exceptionalism, economic development and devolution, 1979 to 1997, in *Contemporary British History*, 30:4, p.566, Routledge

¹⁸ Morgan, K (2006) Chapter 3, Governing Cardiff: politics, power and personalities, in *Capital Cardiff 1975-2020 Regeneration Competitiveness and the Urban Environment*, Eds Hooper, A and Punter, J (2006), University of Wales Press, Cardiff. p. 32.

¹⁹ Morgan, K p.34

²⁰ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 21.

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controlled SGCC as well as the Cardiff City and Vale of Glamorgan District Councils.²¹ At that time the Thatcher-led Conservative government was channelling public money into regeneration through Urban Development Corporations in a number of other areas of the UK. ²² Edwards is credited with persuading the Prime Minister to set up CBDC in 1987 to regenerate Cardiff Bay, with the full support and participation of the SGCC. With an annual grant of some £60 million of public money, CBDC was one of the larger Urban Development Corporations (UDCs), and the only one in Wales.²³ The programme of creating UDCs to regenerate British towns and cities was intended to leverage private sector investment into development and give the UDCs more power than would be possible through the local authorities. For example, in the early 1980s UDCs were responsible for the regeneration of London Docklands and the Liverpool waterfront.²⁴

CBDC was constituted with a Board of Directors representative of the local interests. As a quasi non-governmental organisation (commonly known as a quango) it was not answerable to voters but operated with finance and authority delegated from the Welsh Office. The Chairman was Geoffrey Inkin (later knighted for his work), an ex-army officer with experience gained in regeneration in Cymbran. His deputy was a Labour peer, Lord Brooks of Tremorfa, who was also the leader of South Glamorgan County Council.²⁵ There were another four members representing the local authorities affected and the remaining seven members with appropriate experience were drawn from the private sector.²⁶ CBDC operated from an office in Baltic House in Mount Stuart Square and at its peak employed about 100 members of staff, though it also employed many consultants in specialist and advisory roles.²⁷

Its operations were wide ranging and in return for an annual grant from the Welsh Office it was expected to develop the barrage, buy up and clear land for development, market the area to attract incoming investment. It also had the power to make grants to encourage investment to private sector businesses and local community groups. In addition, it had to comply with all the requirements of a Development Corporation including keeping meticulous records of public money spent and undergoing examination of its records by external and internal auditors. All available audit reports support the fact that CBDC was very competently administered. ²⁸ The final minutes of CBDC contain a valedictory statement from its Vice Chairman throughout its existence, Lord Brooks, that “CBDC had

²¹ Crickhowell, N (1999), *Westminster, Wales and Water*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, p. 93.

²² Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 26.

²³ Thomas, H. and Imrie R. (2012), *British Urban Policy: An Evaluation of the Urban Development Corporations*, London, Sage Publications Limited, p. 6.

²⁴ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 26

²⁵ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 29.

²⁶ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 29

²⁷ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 29

²⁸ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 124. The Cabinet Efficiency Office cited its corporate planning processes and procedures as an exemplar.

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been one of the finest organisations that he had ever worked with”.²⁹ The next two chapters will reflect on how effectively it confronted the challenges it faced.

²⁹ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, *Board minutes*, Glamorgan Archives, Docs DCBDC/1/1/1. Minute dated 10 March 2000.

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Chapter 3 Successes.

The Barrage

The idea of a barrage across the estuaries of the rivers Taff and Ely to create a freshwater lake with a constant water level originated from officers at the Welsh Office in its plans to make South Cardiff a more attractive area for incoming investment.³⁰ This proposal was adopted by South Glamorgan County Council (SGCC) as part of their regeneration plans.³¹ Studies were made of other maritime developments, notably that of the inner harbour at Baltimore, Maryland USA, which bore some similarities to the geography of Cardiff Bay.³² Appreciating the scale of the funds that would be required for such a project and also that, in view of the potential impacts an Act of Parliament would be required, in 1985 SGCC approached the Welsh Office with a view to development funding and political support.³³ The Secretary of State for Wales, Nicholas Edwards (later Lord Crickhowell) became an enthusiastic supporter of the idea and, after initial opposition from HM Treasury, eventually obtained approval for the establishment of CBDC, with the construction of the barrage as its main initial objective.³⁴ By the time that CBDC was wound up the barrage was complete, though its formal opening did not take place until 2001. During the time of its construction, it was the largest civil engineering scheme in Europe, and it broke new ground in engineering construction techniques.³⁵

The successful completion of the barrage did not come without much difficulty and delay.³⁶ Firstly, detailed viability studies were carried out, both into the financial risks of the development and of the engineering complexities. These needed to be approved before the Parliamentary process could be started. The CBDC Board met for the first time in April 1987 and the minutes for the next eighteen months are dominated by these topics. A financial viability report was commissioned from a national accounting firm, KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock (now KPMG), and civil engineering and water management studies by external consultants.³⁷ The parliamentary bill was lodged in December 1988 and at that time the Board had identified several potential contentious issues. The Barrage Bill was a Private Members Bill sponsored by the SGCC and CBDC and so its progress through Parliament was dependent on parliamentary time. Any prolonged debates could effectively defeat it since without government support it would have no priority over government-sponsored

³⁰ Crickhowell (1999) p.91, Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 27.

³¹ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 27

³² Punter, J (2006) Chapter 8, Cardiff Bay: an exemplar of design-led regeneration, in *Capital Cardiff 1975-2020 Regeneration Competitiveness and the Urban Environment*, Eds Hooper, A and Punter, J (2006), University of Wales Press, Cardiff. P.149

³³ Crickhowell (1999) p.91

³⁴ Crickhowell (1999) p.96

³⁵ Anon, (2001), The Cardiff Bay Barrage: South Wales, *Concrete Magazine*, October 2001

³⁶ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 54

³⁷ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, *Board minutes*, Glamorgan Archives, 26 May 1987

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legislation. This duly happened and by the end of 1991 it was clear it would not get Royal Assent as then drafted.³⁸ There was significant and vociferous opposition from a number of institutions and local MPs. The main objections were ecological issues, ground water levels and quality, navigation issues and potential sewage problems.³⁹ The determined and flexible way in which CBDC addressed each of the areas of difficulty enabled the Government to be persuaded to adopt the Bill as a Government Bill and as such it received Royal Assent in November 1993.⁴⁰

Available evidence shows that CBDC negotiated the challenges to its plans in a proactive and responsive manner. For instance, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) mounted a vociferous campaign to protect the winter-feeding grounds of dunlin, redshanks and other wading birds which would be lost once the barrage was in place.⁴¹ CBDC minutes show that serious consideration was given to an alternative barrage to leave some of the mudflats in place.⁴² When that was found not to be feasible, an alternative wetland site was acquired in Gwent to compensate for the loss of the Cardiff Bay wetlands and comply with the UK's responsibilities under the EU Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.⁴³ Whilst not being sufficient to satisfy the RSPB, it enabled CBDC to demonstrate its ecological credentials and meet the EU Ramsar Convention. It dealt with complaints regarding the fish stocks in the rivers by insisting on sophisticated fish gates on the barrage to enable existing species to continue inward and outward migration to the sea from the rivers.⁴⁴

Ground water issues were potentially more problematic for the Board. Low lying areas around the river Taff had suffered flooding in 1979 and reports from the hydrological engineers suggested that the enclosure of the Bay behind a barrage could raise the water table by up to 2 metres in certain areas and heighten the risk of more regular flooding.⁴⁵ Cardiff Residents against the Barrage (CRAB) was an umbrella group coordinating the opposition of a number of residents associations to the scheme. It submitted many petitions against the scheme during the parliamentary process. Norman Robson, the founder of CRAB, was ultimately satisfied with the compensation packages offered and drainage improvements made but still believed that the Bay should have been developed without

³⁸ Crickhowell (1999) p.97

³⁹ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, *Board minutes*, Glamorgan Archives, Minutes of 8 September 1989 mention that 22 petitions had been made against the bill at the Committee stage in Parliament.

⁴⁰ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 54

⁴¹ Moreton, A (1993) 'The ecology: migrant birds are to be given new stopover flights diverted to Llanwern.' *Financial Times*, Monday 26 July 1993.

⁴² Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, *Board minutes*, 2 September 1988.

⁴³ Edwards, S and Nowell, D (1994), 'The Development of British Environmental Management: Lessons from Cardiff Bay', *Area* Vol. 26, No 2. (June 1994) p 159, The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers)

⁴⁴ ⁴⁴ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 58

⁴⁵ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, *Board minutes*, 8 July 1988.

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enclosure.⁴⁶ Reports were commissioned at great cost and CDDC were able ultimately to demonstrate that, providing the barrage functioned as designed, the occurrence of flood events would in fact be lessened since incoming high tides would be blocked from surging up the rivers.⁴⁷

Another challenging technical issue was the maintenance of a correct balance of oxygen in the captured fresh water in the bay. This dominated the planning and execution of all stages of the project and water quality monitoring measures were stipulated in the 1993 Barrage Act. The National Rivers Authority (now the Environment Agency) stipulated a minimum Dissolved Oxygen (DO) factor of 5mg per litre, that being the level below which salmon would have difficulty surviving. This measure was chosen as the existence of salmon and other migratory fish in the bay would reassure the community that the water was of good quality. When the bay was tidal the influence of two tides a day would keep oxygen levels high but as an enclosed lake the DO factor could drop, especially if hot weather restricted the flow from the feeder rivers. In order to satisfy the conditions of the Barrage Act, CBDC invested significantly in an array of water monitoring buoys throughout the Bay, an oxygenation system to pipe oxygen to maintain levels and an oxygenating barge which could be deployed to top up depleted areas.⁴⁸

The issues concerning marine navigability were handled quickly by adapting the barrage design to fit with the needs of local mariners, and the potential problems with sewage disposal were dealt with once CBDC had, in conjunction with Hyder, the Welsh water authority, diverted the sewage outfalls.⁴⁹ CBDC's preparedness to work with the objectors and invest in ways of overcoming or at least ameliorating difficulties enabled it to successfully meet its principal objective. The effect of the delays and extra costs on its other plans will be considered in chapter 4 below.

Marketing and awareness

An early initiative of the CBDC was to adopt a marketing strategy to raise awareness of the plans.⁵⁰ With a substantial budget, an award-winning visitor centre was constructed in the Bay and free events were staged to bring visitors and local residents to the Bay.⁵¹ In 1993 CBDC sponsored a boxing heavyweight contest in Cardiff between Lennox Lewis and Frank Bruno on the basis that it was shown on cable TV internationally and would have an

⁴⁶ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 54

⁴⁷ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, *Board minutes*, 7 October 1988. Also see Appendix 6 for an intriguing modern twist to the saga.

⁴⁸ Anon, (2011), *Welsh Water Wonder, Water and Effluent Treatment News*, November 2011 p. 14, Faversham House Ltd

⁴⁹ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 58.

⁵⁰ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.37.

⁵¹ Designed by Will Alsop, the visitor centre won the RIBA award in 1991 and 1992.

<https://all.design/wilalsop/cardiffbay>

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audience of many millions.⁵² Once the Barrage Bill was assured of approval, a high-profile launch event was arranged in London at the Mermaid Theatre.⁵³ This was attended by the Princess of Wales, and the Welsh National Opera gave a performance. This was followed three years later with a series of presentations at BAFTA to show how the development was progressing.⁵⁴ Even though there was some criticism by local politicians of the amounts of public money being spent on marketing activities during the 1990s, the South Wales Echo was able to report in 2010 that Cardiff Bay brand had become globally recognised and become “one of Wales’s flagship tourist attractions”.⁵⁵

Commercial property developments and jobs

Even before the passing of the Barrage Act in 1993 considerable progress had been made by CBDC in initiating collaborative developments on the waterfront. In a special supplement in the *Financial Times* in July 1993 the Chief Executive of CBDC, Michel Boyce, commented that new buildings were already rising, notably Crickhowell House, the Head Office for the Welsh Health Common Services Authority (WHCSA), and a new headquarters for the Dutch insurance company, NCM.⁵⁶ Both these buildings were developed in conjunction with Grosvenor Waterside Limited, a subsidiary of Associated British Ports, the owners of the land, with financial support from the CBDC. NCM received a grant of £2.5 million and WHCSA received one of £480,000.⁵⁷ A notable success of CBDC was its ability to work effectively with the relevant planning authorities (principally Cardiff City Council). This was necessary because it had never been granted the power of a planning authority on its own account. In cases of conflict, the Welsh Office stood ready to mediate. However, the involvement of local Councillors on the Board of CBDC ensured that communications were generally good, and it is reported that over three thousand control decisions only five needed to be referred to the Welsh Office.⁵⁸

The CBDC had been given a strong brief to ensure high quality design of the new developments and the two buildings referred to above were both highly acclaimed.⁵⁹ In view of its relatively late and brief period of coal-dominated prosperity Cardiff Bay did not have the extensive historic waterfront warehouses and structures of other maritime cities, such as Liverpool and Bristol. With the exception of the impressive Pier Head building and

⁵² Mike Lawley, chairman of Cooke & Arkwright, reflects on the legacy of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation' (2017) *Western Mail* [Cardiff, Wales], 15 Nov, 10. He reflects on the fact that the marketing budget of CBDC was the envy of many citing the Lewis-Bruno fight and the visibility of the CBDC mermaid logo at Paddington Station.

⁵³ Appropriately the Mermaid was the logo of CBDC.

⁵⁴ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p. 38

⁵⁵ Aled Blake, “Cardiff Bay’s huge effect on our city”, *South Wales Echo*, 31 March 2010, MGN Limited.

⁵⁶ Moreton, A (1993) ‘A Covent Garden by the Sea’, *Financial Times*, Monday 26 July 1993.

⁵⁷ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.72.

⁵⁸ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.29 and Hooper, A and Punter (2006), p151.

⁵⁹ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.42

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the rebuilt Norwegian Church, the only heritage buildings to be restored and conserved occupied a relatively small area around Mountstuart Square, some way back from the waterfront.⁶⁰ With a relatively blank canvas the CBDC board established a Design and Architecture Review Panel (later to become the Development Review Panel) comprising eminent external experts in building design. CBDC had been given a statutory veto on any building design which did not fit in with its plans and was able thereby to persuade developers to use suitable architects to deliver good design. Such buildings as were built or sanctioned during its existence were accordingly of high design merit. The St David's Hotel beside the graving docks, the new debating chamber for the Senedd and the Millennium Centre for the Performing Arts are a testimony to the success of this policy, even though they were not completed until after CBDC had been wound up.⁶¹

The Mermaid Quay development, completed in 1999, was a mixture of speciality shops, theme bars and restaurants as a draw to attract visitors to the waterfront. It was promoted with a £2.76 million grant from CBDC in conjunction with Sovereign Land with funding from Schroder Exempt Property Investment Trust.⁶² It is adjacent to the outdoor performance area, Roald Dahl Plass, and has been the focus of popular use of the Waterfront, drawing crowds from the City Centre by day and night.⁶³

Residential property developments

CBDC made progress in developing additional residential areas within the early years of existence, notably in the Atlantic Wharf development adjacent to the former Bute East Dock and at the Penarth Marina Village.⁶⁴ The target of CBDC was 6,000 new units of which 25% were to be affordable or social housing.⁶⁵ CBDC did make a significant effort to deliver affordable housing and invested some £38 million in the early 1990s.⁶⁶ Despite the property recession of the early 1990s, the area became popular with young working people as a convenient and desirable place to live and attracted further property developers who have created developments at Adventurers Quay and Penarth Haven.⁶⁷ Although at the end of its life CBDC had only completed 3,130 residential units, after taking account of the completion of developments which were then transferred to the successor institutions, the total is 5,780.⁶⁸ The Welsh Audit Office commented that CBDC's residential developments proved extremely popular with buyers and commanded premium prices.⁶⁹

⁶⁰ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.42

⁶¹ Punter, J (2006) p162.

⁶² Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.101

⁶³ Punter, J (2006) p161. The Roald Dahl Plass is on the reclaimed site of the former Oval Pool which formed the entrance lock for the Bute West Dock.

⁶⁴ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.82

⁶⁵ Punter, J (2006) p.152

⁶⁶ Punter, J (2006) p.167.

⁶⁷ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.87

⁶⁸ Punter, J (2006) p.152

⁶⁹ Punter, J (2006) p.167

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Chapter 4 Failures

Headwinds

The CBDC faced significant headwinds during its existence. Though its creation was strongly supported by local politicians, as an organisation it was a creation of a Conservative government and with a focus on interaction with the private sector and an emphasis on profit creation, it naturally found itself at odds with the local, predominantly left-leaning, residents and authorities. On a number of occasions, it was accused of creating a playground for rich people with little to offer to local communities. The expression “toffs v taffs” was used in the debate about the National Opera House (see below). One of its principal opponents was the Labour MP for Cardiff West, Rhodri Morgan, who later became First Minister of the Welsh Assembly. He was a strong critic of the barrage and frequently criticised CBDC for its, in his view, extravagant spending on marketing.⁷⁰ In his autobiography Morgan is unapologetic for devoting so much of his energy opposing the Barrage Bill but argued that he secured huge improvements in compensation for his constituents.⁷¹

The delays and additional costs arising from the barrage project significantly impacted on its ability to work towards its aims with the result that some important components of the strategy received reduced priorities. Another unforeseen difficulty was the deep recession in the property market in the early 1990s, which impacted also on the appetite for commercial developments. In the CBDC accounts for 1990/1, the Chairman reflected that “the property market nationally has suffered the worst investment condition for more than 30 years”.⁷² Furthermore, the landslide Labour victory in the 1997 general election provided further uncertainty, since the new Secretary of State for Wales almost immediately announced that, as part of the Labour Government’s assault on quasi non-government organisations, CBDC would hand over its responsibilities to the local authorities on 31 March 2000.⁷³ This caused the focus of its activities to be on the transference of responsibilities rather than their completion. The additional reforms of local government in 1996 resulted in the formation of a new unitary authority with overall responsibility for Cardiff and, as CBDC neared its winding-up date, relations with Cardiff City Council deteriorated over a number of issues.⁷⁴

Notwithstanding the challenges faced by CBDC, the report of the Auditor General for Wales in 2001 included an analysis on the extent to which it had achieved the numerical objectives

⁷⁰ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, *Board minutes*, 2 April 1993..

⁷¹ Morgan, R. (2017). *Rhodri: A Political Life in Wales and Westminster*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff. P89. He also expressed great pride that he was able to talk continuously for two- and three-quarter hours to thwart the parliamentary passage of the Barrage Bill.

⁷² Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.71.

⁷³ Crickhowell (1999) p.93, Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.130.

⁷⁴ Thomas, H. and Imrie R. (2012), p.21. The issues were the responsibility for the Barrage and the water in the Bay.

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set. Appendix 3 is a table showing the CBDC expenditure and investment targets compared with the achievements on 31 March 2000.⁷⁵ Whilst at the date it ceased to exist, most of its targets had not been met, there had been sufficient progress that the audit report could conclude that all except one would be met by the successor institutions.⁷⁶ The only target ultimately missed was the housing target of 6,000 homes and this was missed by only 220 units. However regardless of its achievements against the statistical targets it set itself, it has faced criticism for its failures in certain of its specific aims and objectives; notably, in its goal of linking the city centre with its waterfront, constructing an iconic National Opera House, and improving the lives of the residents of its area, especially in Butetown. These will be considered separately below.

Re-uniting the City of Cardiff with its waterfront.

No commentator on CBDC has considered that this aim was achieved. John Punter has described it as CBDC's greatest failure in urban design and planning terms.⁷⁷ Sir Geoffrey Inkin, the Chairman of CBDC, was quoted in the *Western Mail* as saying that the failure to remove the railway embankment was one of his greatest regrets.⁷⁸ At the commencement of the project the only road link from the City centre to the waterfront was Bute Street, a relatively narrow street running between the rundown, and deprived, Bute Town housing estate and the railway embankment, carrying the branch line connecting to the bay to Queen Street station. The original plans envisaged a new broad tree-lined boulevard called Bute Avenue connecting the waterfront with the City Centre.⁷⁹ The second phase of the project envisaged the levelling of the existing railway embankment and creating a light rapid-transit system with links to the Central Station as well as Queen Street.⁸⁰

The first phase of the project was limited by the financial impacts of the barrage delay and by the need to agree the road infrastructure with the highway engineers from the City and County Councils. The resulting road, now named Lloyd George Avenue, was described as "a one-sided road to nowhere" and the rail embankment continued to provide a considerable barrier between the Bay developments and Bute Town (see below).⁸¹ Only by July 1999 was progress made by signing a public financing arrangement with a consortium involving Norwest Holst and MEPC to build a dual carriageway road with town houses and apartments at the western side and an industrial development called Bute Square at the northern end.⁸²

⁷⁵ Punter, J (2006) p.152.

⁷⁶ Auditor General for Wales, *Securing the Future of Cardiff Bay*, (2001),p.9.

⁷⁷ Punter, J (2006) p.163.

⁷⁸ Kelsey, C. (2017) "The turbulent life and times of Cardiff Bay", *Western Mail*, 27 December 2017, MGN Limited. p.4.

⁷⁹ Thomas, H. and Imrie R. (2012), p.10. and Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.63.

⁸⁰ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.64.

⁸¹ Punter, J (2006) p.164

⁸² Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.63.

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The progress (or lack of it) in 1999 is illustrated by the photograph at Appendix 4. At the time of writing no progress at all has been made on the rapid transit link and the embankment still forms a barrier between the Bute town community and the residential and commercial developments.

National opera house.

CBDC adopted as a central policy objective the construction of a Welsh National Opera House and in December 1990 agreed to fund a feasibility study. A steering group chaired by Sir Geoffrey Inkin, Chairman of CBDC, was set up with representatives of relevant local authorities, Associated British Ports, the Welsh National Opera and the Welsh Arts Council.⁸³ Once the feasibility study had shown that there was a business case for this, the Cardiff Bay Opera House Trust was established with funding from CBDC in 1993.⁸⁴ An international design competition was arranged which attracted 270 entries.⁸⁵ This was won by the Office of Zaha Hadid with a modernistic, asymmetrical design. This proved controversial with both the public, and some directors of CBDC.⁸⁶ Lord Crickhowell reports in his account of the architectural debate that CBDC became implacably opposed to the Hadid scheme.⁸⁷ Despite this, the Trust pressed ahead with the Hadid design and submitted a bid to the Millennium Commission for the necessary grant to proceed.

At the same time, the Welsh Rugby Union submitted a bid for a new National Rugby Stadium to be constructed in the City Centre. In view of the public interest in the debate, the local authorities commissioned a poll, which found that 71% of those polled favoured the rugby ground.

In December 1996 the Millennium Commission rejected the Hadid bid on the basis that the project was too risky with uncertainties in the design, construction and business plan.⁸⁸ It did however provide funding for the rugby stadium.⁸⁹ CBDC reports that Lord Crickhowell had accused it of betrayal for not wholeheartedly supporting the plan, though CBDC said that it had always backed the project and invested £2.3 million in it.⁹⁰ Lord Crickhowell described being told that CBDC would cease to back the project following the failure to get funding from the Millennium Commission. He blamed CBDC for “rampaging around and trying to do the work of the Trust”.⁹¹ Despite the strengths of the design and business case, the fact that the Cardiff Bay Opera Trust was unable to successfully develop the Opera House owes much to the conflicts which arose between the Trust and CBDC, and also with the local authorities. But in the end the local argument seems to have been one of a clash

⁸³ Crickhowell (1999) p.208.

⁸⁴ Crickhowell (1999) p.208 and Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.106.

⁸⁵ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.106.

⁸⁶ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.106.

⁸⁷ Crickhowell (1999) p.212.

⁸⁸ Crickhowell (1999) p.224

⁸⁹ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.108.

⁹⁰ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.108

⁹¹ Crickhowell (1999) p.233.

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between two great Welsh passions, singing and rugby; and rugby won.⁹² Lord Crickhowell is quoted as saying about the debate for the opera house “it helped to encourage that ever present tendency of my fellow countrymen to fight among themselves”.⁹³

Effect on local communities

The principal residential district in the area covered by the CBDC development was Butetown, also traditionally referred to as Tiger Bay. This was one of the most deprived areas in Cardiff and is described by CBDC as having “fewer than 6,000 residents living in 2,000 households... an unappealing area characterised by social problems”.⁹⁴ It contained a high proportion of black, Asian and other minority ethnic families. Neither the name Butetown nor Tiger Bay appear in the mission statement or detailed aims of CBDC.⁹⁵ In fact, the name Cardiff Bay supplanted that of Tiger Bay as a conscious marketing decision to distance the development from the unsavoury associations of the past.⁹⁶ At the commencement of the redevelopment, it was made clear that no houses in Butetown were to be demolished and the residential area together with its small businesses would be preserved.⁹⁷ While this may have avoided any significant objections from residents it did nothing to break down the existing barriers between the area and the new residential areas. The most striking physical barrier was the railway embankment running along the length of Bute Street to the East. CBDC had the opportunity to remove this “dramatic physical expression of a deeply felt social apartheid”. The failure to do was symptomatic of the tendency to prioritise the barrage and waterfront development over the hopes and aspirations of the existing residents of the area.⁹⁸

While there was a representative of the Butetown residents on the Board of CBDC, and there were some token improvements to some of the Butetown area, its situation in the development has been described as an island “in a sea of rising values and upmarket developments”.⁹⁹ The development cannot be seen as anything other than a failure for the residents of Butetown, who remain marginalised, although CBDC regarded its progress in

⁹² Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.107

⁹³ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.107. See also appendix 6 for a happy postscript. Shortly before its demise CBDC participated in a project to build a new performing arts centre. The Millennium Centre was completed in 2004 and is a striking addition to the waterfront. One of its principal users is the Welsh National Opera.

⁹⁴ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.82.

⁹⁵ Thomas, H (2004) Identity building and cultural projects in Butetown, Cardiff, City, 8:2, 274-278, DOI: 10.1080/1360481042000242238

⁹⁶ Thomas, H (2004) p.275.

⁹⁷ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.37.

⁹⁸ Punter, J (2006) p.164. and Rhodes, M. (2021) Cardiff and the contentious landscapes of postindustrial, urban and transnational memory work. *Fennia*, 199(2) p.209.

⁹⁹ Thomas, H (2004) p.275

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establishing the area as a desirable place to live as a success, having filled most of the land set aside for residential development.¹⁰⁰

An important aim of CBDC was to create employment and reflect the hopes and aspirations of the communities of the area. An early initiative of CBDC was the creation of the Senior Training Group, later re-named the Cardiff Bay Training and Employment Group, to coordinate the agencies working in training and employment.¹⁰¹ The Chairman of the Docks Residents Association and Labour County Councillor, Ben Foday, served as a Trustee of CBDC for three years and acknowledged that CBDC benefitted Butetown as a ward but did not feel that the training programme worked for Butetown residents so much as it did for residents of other of areas of Cardiff.¹⁰²

CBDC can claim some improvements in other social projects. The team of Community Development officers established good relations with some local groups such as the Butetown History and Arts Centre. CBDC also pushed for a Community Trust to be established to provide grant funding for community projects once CBDC had been wound up.¹⁰³ However the proportion of the CBDC budget allocated to social projects was only about 2%.¹⁰⁴

CBDC claimed in 1999 that it reduced unemployment in Butetown to half the level of that in 1987.¹⁰⁵ Other commentators have been more critical of its lack of progress in involving the residents in its development of the area.¹⁰⁶ Whilst its developments brought many new residents, this benefitted the other areas of Cardiff rather than the Bay area and Butetown has remained a deprived ward, physically isolated from the rest of the Bay. Moreover, the historical heritage of Tiger Bay was suppressed by the developers in their re-imaging of the area.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.88.

¹⁰¹ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.113.

¹⁰² Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.112.

¹⁰³ Thomas, H. and Imrie R. (2012), pp. 20-21.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas, H. and Imrie R. (2012), p 12.

¹⁰⁵ Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, p.114.

¹⁰⁶ Punter, J (2006) p.165 criticises CBDC for “largely bypassing the existing residential community to create a new social composition in the Bay”.

¹⁰⁷ Punter, J (2006) p.149.

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Chapter 5 Conclusions

The performance figures in Appendix 3 show that, while CBDC did not meet its numerical targets during its lifetime, it was not expected to, and under the successor institutions they were all but met within a year or so of its demise.¹⁰⁸ Of particular note is that CBDC was successful in attracting £1.1 billion of private sector investment into the area and 31,000 new jobs were created. In purely empirical terms, CBDC succeeded in meeting its targets and clearly, despite the headwinds it faced, it significantly changed the face of Cardiff and added a modern new angle to the capital city.¹⁰⁹ The photographs in Appendix 5 illustrate the transformation of the Waterfront that had been achieved by 1999.

However, it must also be judged against its stated mission and aims. The grandiose goal for Cardiff to become internationally regarded as a superlative maritime city was always, in retrospect, going to be susceptible to failure and in several of its aspirations it has fallen short. No commentator has felt that the City has been re-united with its waterfront, and few residents of Butetown have felt that their hopes and aspirations have been met by the development.

The successful completion of the barrage against many difficulties is likely to be regarded as its principal success, notwithstanding that it still has many critics. The partnerships CBDC fostered with private sources of finance introduced, eventually, over £1.8 billion of investment into property and infrastructure projects. Through its existence it was granted £500 million of public money, but when it was wound up it was able to transfer property with a value of £300 million to the successor institutions, and so it can be argued that it gave good value for money over its life.¹¹⁰

In the final report of the Auditor General for Wales comment is made on the deterioration in the final years of the relationship with Cardiff County Council.¹¹¹ This deterioration masks one of the unique achievements for CBDC as an Urban Development Corporation that, even though a product of Conservative party regeneration policies, it was, for most of its existence, able to work collaboratively with the local Labour controlled councils and Labour MPs in planning and implementing its development strategies.

The failure to build the promised National Opera house can be attributed to bad management of the project leading to a fallout with the Opera House Trust, together with bad luck, in that the timing of the application for the building of the Millennium Stadium effectively prevented the project from having access to the funds it needed at the time. The delays in getting Parliamentary approval for the barrage impacted on the improvement of

¹⁰⁸ Auditor General for Wales (2001) p.9.

¹⁰⁹ Kelsey, C. (2017) p.4. Quoting Leon Gooberman he says the Cardiff Bay environment has been completely transformed from its state in 1987.

¹¹⁰ Auditor General for Wales (2001) p.1.

¹¹¹ Auditor General for Wales (2001) p.26.

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the road and rail links to the city centre such that even today the Bay and the city centre cannot be said to be reunited.

Critics still point to the lack of improvement in Butetown as the biggest failure.¹¹² At the end of CBDC's existence it was little changed from its state at the beginning, and substantially remains so to this day. The Tiger Bay heritage has been retained only in an occasional work of art on the waterfront. The jobs created were mainly taken by incomers, the new houses mainly too expensive and the area remained hidden behind a railway embankment.

However, in summary, Cardiff Bay has clearly been regenerated and is presenting a new modern face of Cardiff (and Wales) to the rest of the United Kingdom and the world. It is difficult to imagine that this complex project could have been managed wholly by the private sector or the public sector, since the financial requirements would have made it impossible for the various local authorities to carry it out. CBDC's blend of business leaders and politicians were successful in driving the development forward in the face of both the recession in the early 1990s and the delays in getting Parliamentary approval for the Barrage Bill. Despite the failures mentioned above, CBDC deserves to be remembered as a notable success.

7696 words

¹¹² Thomas, H (2004) p.274.

The Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (1987-2000). Regeneration-success or failure?

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Appendix 1

Picture of part of Cardiff Bay before development circa 1987.

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Appendix 2

The Designated Area for the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

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Appendix 3

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation expenditure and investment targets and achievements by March 2001

<i>Regeneration element</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Achieved by</i>		<i>Eventually achieved</i>	
		31/03/2000			
Investment (£millions)	£1,200	£1,065	89%	£1,815	151%
Employment jobs	29,000	13,270	47%	31,000	107%
Residential units	6,000	3,130	52%	5,780	96%
Non-residential space (sq m millions)	1.147	0.532	46%	1.349	118%
Open space (hectares)	54	57	106%	81	150%

Source: Welsh Audit Office 2001 in Punter, p.152.

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Appendix 4

Lloyd George Avenue in development 1999 (top right quadrant in photo).

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Appendix 5

The waterfront in 1999 compared to 1991

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Appendix 6

Cardiff Bay today

In an interesting re-writing of history, the tourist commentary audio system on the Penarth to Mermaid Quay ferry announced on passing the barrage that it had been built to control flooding in Cardiff. No mention was made of the controversy over its building nor that one of the main criticisms that delayed development came from Cardiff residents claiming that it would cause flooding. Viewed when approaching the Pier Head building, the waterfront is now clearly more developed than it would have been in 2000 (see Appendix 5). The Senedd Building has appeared since then, together with the imposing Millenium Centre for the Performing Arts together with a cluster of buildings surrounding it. All this would have been in line with the expectations of the CBDC Board of Directors. While never perhaps becoming 'a superb maritime city' Cardiff does enjoy increased tourism and Cardiff Bay, with its panoramic views and iconic buildings, has become an important symbol of the city. The imposing steel-clad dome of the Millenium Centre, with its poetic inscriptions in English and Welsh, has become a modern symbol of Wales and Welshness.

That said, there are still empty sites waiting for development including a large area next to the Senedd. As one moves back from the waterfront there is plenty of evidence of shuttered, often derelict, buildings. Indeed, the once famous Coal Exchange in Mount Stuart Square is only partially restored and surrounded by scaffolding. There is still no light rail link to the City Centre and the infamous embankment continues to isolate the drab Butetown estate from the modernity of Lloyd George Avenue. It is however a bustling and lively area and a far cry from its situation in 1987.

The regeneration mission continues. At the Cardiff Council Cabinet Meeting on 10 March 2022, the minutes acknowledge that, since the early closure of the CBDC, momentum had been lost in the regeneration programme and the Council recognised that a new strategy was necessary. The minutes set out the strategy as being to revitalise the Atlantic Wharf area as the gateway to the Bay and improve the transport connectivity by implementation of a tram to serve the Bay (known as the Cardiff Metro). Also, in conjunction with the developer, an upgrade has been planned for the Mermaid Quay area with the possible establishment of a Lido in the graving docks. Above all the minutes emphasise that the local communities should feel the benefit of, and be a part of, the continuing regeneration story.

The Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (1987-2000). Regeneration-success or failure?

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