

Places and reputations – building Peterborough's profile.

It isn't just organisations that need to protect and promote their reputations. Places do too. In my capacity as Director of the Greater Peterborough Partnership (GPP) the reputation of Peterborough is one of the issues raised time and again as a major barrier to the economic success of the city. All too often people complain that at best prospective employees have no awareness of Peterborough. At worse they have a negative impression and are reluctant to relocate to work here. As a result skilled professionals chose to take jobs elsewhere, companies don't invest because they don't believe they can recruit here and Peterborough's economic growth is constrained.

This is not a new phenomenon. I remember when I was first offered a job in the city over eleven years ago, my prospective employers told me that it really wasn't as bad a place to live as I might think!

In fact, of course, Peterborough is far from a bad place to live. For once we have an example of a product which is consistently undersold – in other words the place is much better than its reputation. Which is why the new city marketing campaign that Opportunity Peterborough are planning is so important. Peterborough not only has ambitious plans for the future, but it also has a solid track record of recent achievement. We need to do much more to promote that ambition and to make people aware of just what is going on in our city.

It was good therefore to see that track record receive acknowledgement in last week's report by the Work Foundation asking '*How Can Cities Thrive in a Changing Economy*', which rated Peterborough as one of the enterprise powerhouses of the country with a strong private sector and a highly productive economy. This supports earlier reports that indicated Peterborough was top of the league for business start up.

And Peterborough has other successes to point to as outlined at the recent GPP Forum – a 20% decrease in crime; the opening last year of two state of the art secondary schools; the construction of the new super-hospital; the highest rates of recycling of any unitary authority; the largest carbon challenge site in the country on the South Bank; a university coming on stream; a new innovation centre and more.

Personally I hope that we will all get behind the Peterborough story and start to talk up our city, recognising the issues we still have to overcome, but trumpeting our successes much more loudly. That can only be good for Peterborough and for business. A strong and confident city is the kind of place that will attract high quality employees and business investment. It will also be a high quality place to live.

The challenge ahead will be to maintain this momentum and to continue the transformation of our city and its surrounding rural areas. This will not be easy given current economic conditions, but it is vital for us all that we do get behind the increasing momentum of Peterborough's transformation and give it the support it deserves.

Richard Astle is Director of Athene Communications, a Peterborough based communication consultancy, and also Director of the Greater Peterborough Partnership – the body that unites all those involved in Peterborough's transformation together.