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Building students' skills in the Land of Oak and Iron

Northumbria Architecture students could see their designs become concrete in a new project that shines a light on Derwent Valley.

Their ideas for a heritage centre to act as a gateway to the valley's history were unveiled at a public event in Gateshead this month. Northumbria is part of the Oak and Iron Partnership, run by Groundwork North East and Cumbria, a £3.4m scheme, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, which aims to highlight Derwent Valley's natural, cultural and industrial history. The Land of Oak and Iron centre will focus on the valley and the surrounding area from

County Durham to the Tyne at Gateshead. This could include an exhibition of the Land of Oak and Iron, with information about the area, a café serving locally sourced produce as well as office space and a meeting room.

This heritage centre has been developed for Winlaton Mill, Gateshead, at the site of Ambrose Crawley's iron works; arguably one of the birthplaces of the industrial revolution. The proposed facility has been designed by students of the Master in Architecture programme at Northumbria University. [Professor Paul Jones](#), who has co-ordinated and led this initiative, believes that this engagement with authentic and socially-oriented projects reflects the department's teaching, service and research philosophy.

He said: "Working with the Land of Oak and Iron and Gateshead Council has been fantastic for the students. These partners have welcomed the collaboration and been extremely generous and supportive of the students' endeavours, believing their work to be exemplary.

"At Northumbria we are committed to developing projects that support and enhance the built environment within the region, whilst giving the students authentic real-life scenarios as vehicles for their learning. The more authentic opportunities that we provide for our students to engage with clients, consultants, and the realisation of high quality architecture, the more effective they will operate in future professional practice.

"Our department is simultaneously developing design inquiry as a strand of practice-based research; involving our students with real life research projects is fundamental to how we conceptualise our curriculum. We currently have a number of ongoing, regionally-based projects where our students are working side by side with the architectural staff as co-creators of knowledge.

"This diverse and rich set of projects, includes the design of an innovative Eco development in Sunderland, which is about to start on site; the restoration and refurbishment of 28 World War II bunkers in Durham; and the design of a cultural quarter in Kiev for the Izolyatsia Art Foundation.

"This collaborative approach is instrumental in our course achieving the highest average National Student Satisfaction scores in the country for architecture since its inception in 2007, as well as our outstanding employment statistics for graduates of our programme."

[Architecture and Built Environment](#) at Northumbria University encompasses architecture, interior architecture, building surveying, quantity surveying, real estate, and housing programmes. Northumbria is the only UK University to have Architecture, Building, and Land and Property Management, all in the Top 13 in the Complete University Guide.

Groundwork North East and Cumbria's development manager, Lisa Stephenson, said: "The designs at the exhibition give people an initial flavour of what a centre could look like. It is an exciting idea and could act as a gateway facility which brings everything together and tells people what is on offer in the valley."

The Oak and Iron Partnership also includes Gateshead Council, Durham and Northumberland County councils, DEFRA agencies, the Pont Valley Network, North East Cultural Partnership, Durham Wildlife Trust, SCA Hygiene and publicrelationsconsultancy.com.

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