

# RE-ACTIVATING OLD BUILDINGS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE'S BENEFIT

## Key information

- Location: **Caen (France)**
- Population: **108 950**
- Involved in URBACT network: **2nd Chance**
- More information: <http://urbact.eu/2nd-chance>



Over the decades, Caen's 600-hectare industrial and port wasteland, known as the Peninsula, has become overgrown and its buildings dilapidated. Through the URBACT 2nd Chance network, the city mobilised local stakeholders and citizens and identified new uses and services in abandoned buildings that would serve the needs of the surrounding population.

When the city joined the URBACT 2nd Chance network, they set up a group of committed activists, councillors, business people and the Greater Caen District Council (URBACT Local Group). Their objective was to reflect on how to redevelop the Peninsula site having in mind the lack of housing as one of the main problems that slowly makes families leave the city.

The URBACT Local Group shifted the approach to thinking first about what residents might like to live around and what makes a place attractive before housing is built rather than adding it in as an afterthought.

So first, Caen accessed expertise and inspiration to identify two abandoned post-war industrial buildings, 'The Barrels' and 'The Tunnel'.

### Getting inspiration from existing practices

The URBACT Local Group decided to meet and work in the Peninsula in order to be more connected to the ground. The members of the group used to gather in 'Le Pavillon', a vacant building being reused as an information and discussion 'space' where the city exchanges with citizens on the development of the peninsula and city-planning in general.



The abandoned Barrels



The Barrels of the future: an urban farm

'Le Pavillon' is an example of the potential use of similar buildings since it has developed a variety of artistic and cultural activities to draw the attention of the city's inhabitants to the pilot site and get their ideas about how the site could be better used. Activities included 'Drawing walks' to help people discover the vacant site; a street art festival; workshops for children to raise the awareness of the abandoned place; and even a 'Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism' about the development of the Peninsula and the reactivation of the buildings.

The successful reconversion project of Le Pavillon was of great inspiration for the URBACT Local Group. Using the participative OPERA methodology (Own, Pair, Explain, Rank, and Arrange) to gather, rank and prioritise ideas of stakeholders, the Group managed to define specific uses for other buildings.

### An Integrated Action Plan for the site

This is how, in June 2018, the city with its URBACT Local Group presented their newly published Integrated Action Plan focusing on the reconversion projects of two buildings in front of 'Le Pavillon', the so-called 'Barrels' and 'Tunnel' buildings. The plan proposed that The Barrels, formerly a warehouse, would become an urban farm. A survey commissioned by the URBACT Local Group had shown that its light metal framework was in good condition even if the stone walls were not. The second building, The Tunnel, an old prefab concrete factory, would become a cultural lab welcoming various artistic associations.

Several complex decisions were made to arrive to this point. First, the right building had to be chosen from the

many existing ones in the wider former port area. A new masterplan was developed in February 2016 by Dutch architects MVRDV for the entire area, allocating where the housing would go, before Caen joined 2nd Chance network. In September 2016, the local group met to take what they called an urban promenade through the site to find buildings that were suitable for reuse and might work well within the masterplan aiming to preserve traces of the past. Caen chose two face-to-face buildings to be at the heart of the new development area. As a result, in March 2017, Caen City Council bought The Tunnel from a private owner at the request of the URBACT Local Group – without yet being sure what it would be used for. Regarding The Barrels, Caen signed an agreement with the owner for three years, allowing further reflection on the project, a test-phase and its feasibility in the long-term.

Since September 2018, the buildings identified for reuse by the URBACT Local Group are being converted by the council's building services department. Funding requests have been submitted to national funds as well as ERDF to convert the Tunnel and the Barrels for their intended use. It will take years to build out the wider masterplan for the Peninsula area but this investment is what the area needs now.

- The Tunnel cultural project will be operational within 3 years. In the meantime, the first 300 dwellings will be delivered.
- The 'Urban Farm for the Barrels' project is the focus of the new URBACT Transfer network RURBAN to support its successful implementation.



The Tunnel before transformation



An artistic factory for The Tunnel