Channel 4 decided in 2003 to make a programme about urban regeneration. Production company Talkback Thames commissioned AZ Urban Studio to help select an appropriate town and, after researching many UK towns, established The Castleford Project to deliver a series of town-centre and neighbourhood projects in Castleford, where eight coal pits had closed. A four-part TV series was broadcasted in September 2008.

AZ Urban Studio was commissioned to analyse the town condition and identify opportunities for projects that met the requirements of budget and programme. AZ led the procurement stage of the project to deliver designers and schemes in an open architectural competition, with the people of Castleford as the jury – all live on camera.

Projects included a new town centre improvement strategy, a bridge over the River Aire, the refurbishment of a local park, a new playground for a neglected suburb and the revitalisation of a town centre neighbourhood. In a process orchestrated by AZ, the community and stakeholders short-listed a team of some of the best young architects working in the UK today. These practices were invited to prepare outline designs for the schemes. Eight practices were then selected to design detailed schemes in a nail-biting, robustly debated, public forum, which was also filmed.

There was an incredible dynamism on the Castleford Project, with the involvement of the cream of young British designers. The project delivered some startling results, fascinating insights into the regeneration process, and some interesting reactions – mostly positive – from the public.

Some real community champions emerged from the process and fought hard to see their town changed. The results say it all.

Architects: Various
Design Management: AZ Urban Studio