

Report of the Director of City Strategy

## **TOWARDS A YORK ECONOMIC VISION**

### **Summary**

1. This report seeks to note the publication of the York Economic Vision and to forward this to the Local Development Framework Working Group for further consideration. An Executive Summary is attached as an annex to this report, and copies of the full report are available in the Members' library and on-line.
2. The report has been prepared by Professor Alan Simpson and his team following public engagement in the city, including a charette in March and numerous meetings with key stakeholders. It presents a good strategic fit with the long-term aspirations of the city, particularly in relation to the Thriving City themes within the Sustainable Community Strategy. It is believed that the ideas and propositions coming from the report will help York to step up its game in terms of a focus on quality of place as a driver of economic competitiveness. It is recommended that, following consideration by the Local Development Working Group, some of these ideas are tested with residents and key stakeholders in the city, prior to developing a practical delivery plan to take this initiative forward.

### **Background**

3. The original proposal to undertake an economic masterplan for the city for the delivery of major projects came out of recommendations contained in the Future York Group report, which was that the City of York Council should prepare a Masterplan, reflecting the Future York vision, to guide development and investment decisions, and to promote development.
4. The proposal was reported to Executive in November 2009, where it was agreed to establish a York Renaissance Team and to create a York Regeneration Academy to provide a programme of training and development in place-making for existing staff and the new team, to be funded by Yorkshire Forward. The attached Executive Summary, together with the full report, represents the first part of this work – the upfront Economic Vision.
5. The York Economic Partnership is established as the strategic thematic partnership with responsibility for the objectives set out for "Thriving City" and to consider how best to take forward the recommendations of the Future York Group. Economic conditions have changed since the Future York

Group report and the Centre for Cities report on York has provided a further insight into the prospects for a prosperous local economy.

6. There are an unprecedented number of major projects underway or in the pipeline in York, which will shape the city for generations to come. These include the expansion of the University of York, major city centre mixed use schemes such as Hungate and Castle Piccadilly, the York Central and York Northwest sites and an Area Action Plan for the City Centre that will seek to regenerate gateway streets and enhance York's economic competitiveness through improving the quality of the public realm and accessibility.
7. The City is likely to grow and change significantly in the forthcoming years, and it is important to ensure that new developments leave a positive legacy in terms of both economic impact and high standards of design. Agreement for renaissance funding from Yorkshire Forward towards the end of last year focused on three distinct but related elements:
  - an economic visioning exercise, funded by Yorkshire Forward. This work was led by Alan Simpson with support from an expert panel including an economist, cultural planner and transport specialist;
  - the creation of a York Renaissance Team consisting of 6 additional posts for 3 years, with part funding for one post by English Heritage and the remainder of funding for these posts to be provided by Yorkshire Forward (nb. recent announcements on regional budget cuts conclude that there will be 3 year funding for two of these posts – now in place - together with additional staff support from Yorkshire Forward); and
  - the development of a Regeneration Academy in York, which will enhance staff skills in “place-making”, again to be funded by Yorkshire Forward, and run by Integreat Yorkshire who run Regen Academies in other parts of the region such as Bradford.
8. The purpose of the Economic Vision is to examine the economic potential of the city and consider how the various major projects, current and proposed, can be pulled together into a coherent strategy that will provide greater certainty for future investment. The work has a strong focus on the delivery of major developments, ensuring these take account of York's attractiveness and heritage, as well as maximise their economic, social and environmental potential.
9. The work is also helping to inform future work with the preparation of the Local Development Framework, particularly in relation to the City Centre Area Action Plan. The Local Development Framework will set the land use and planning framework for planning future developments in the City; the Economic Vision will help the delivery of major projects and give a physical expression to the policies and proposals set out in the LDF.

## **Proposals**

10. The Economic Vision acknowledges that York is an attractive place to live, to study, and to work and says that this has, in part, fuelled recent growth. However, it also says that it has a constrained transport infrastructure network, constricted movement, street clutter and disorder, lack of quality spaces and green infrastructure, and it largely turns its back on its two rivers. Fractured connections limit the effectiveness of the undoubted city assets, including the railway station (the main city gateway) and the University of York. This has occurred slowly, almost imperceptibly, over decades and this study makes a strong economic and cultural case for this change to be arrested now.

### **Quality of place and economic competitiveness**

11. Quality of place is key to economic competitiveness because it influences where people choose to live and work. The Economic Vision notes that private sector business, together with the Universities, will drive growth in York and the clear message is that a successful and competitive York will be one that can retain and attract high quality human capital - those individuals comprising the skilled and talented knowledge pool that can drive the local economy. This human capital is not attracted by the power of higher wages alone. Quality of place and the rich diversity of activity are factors that affect personal and business location decisions.

### **Competing with others**

12. The City is competing with smart new city centre investments in places such as Hull, Leeds and further afield in Manchester and Newcastle Upon Tyne, but also faces competition from its own 'out of town locations'. Whilst the City Centre has a lively and diverse range of activities, including some of the most attractive small, niche retailing environments in the country, the physical fabric within which it sits presents challenging movement and accessibility issues. Investment to improve this, together with facilitating new development proposals at Castle Piccadilly and Hungate which will bring additional retail and commercial floorspace into the City Centre, is important to encourage a greater proportion of the City's residents to spend time in their City.

### **Access and movement**

13. Addressing accessibility and movement in and around the City Centre has been identified by local businesses as a fundamental issue to resolve. Making the City more 'business friendly' will increase demand and therefore private sector confidence. Facilitating this and achieving greater levels of private sector employment as result, is a key principle for the vision.

### **Partnership working**

14. The City could, the report suggests, maintain a higher level of economic competitiveness through embracing its neighbours and extending its range of partners (broadening its relationships with institutions such as its

universities and the private sector, closer collaboration with neighbouring authorities). Engagement with neighbouring areas through the Local Enterprise Partnership model, particularly the roman heritage to the north and the coastal areas to the east, also provides an opportunity to sit York at the heart of a wider cultural experience.

### **Streets, park and public spaces**

15. The Economic Vision reflects the Council's commitment to improve the distinctiveness, vitality and sustainability of York. It puts forward a long-term plan which can be delivered over the next 20-30 years as funding and investment are secured.
16. To achieve these principles the Vision reasons that a key task over the next 20 or 30 years will be to create high quality squares, public spaces and development opportunities which will provide long-term focus for high quality external investment. The report looks to encourage more vibrant and diverse public life within the streets, spaces, parks and strays of the city and along the riversides and walls to create new opportunities for social interaction, creativity and play. This will benefit local people, give confidence at a time of economic downturn, and stimulate economic investment and business growth.

### **High quality development opportunities**

17. Specifically, the report imagines economic opportunities in York through a series of key themes, namely the City as Park, The City Walls, the Rivers, and Parks, Streets and Squares. The opportunities for York are graphically illustrated throughout the document, together with persuasive economic, movement (sustainable modes of transport) and cultural rationales.
18. The important role that this vision plays is to identify those interventions across the City that cumulatively reduce the risk to the private sector of investing in York - by providing high quality development opportunities, set within a high quality urban environment, in a City where there are high levels of skills and a growing innovation and knowledge sector. Set within the context of a world heritage location, with strategic accessibility, these interventions will assist in reducing the risk of the York location to high value businesses, therefore enhancing yield and supporting the prospects for private sector investment and employment growth.

### **Working with the private sector**

19. Many inspiring and challenging ideas are set out in the vision, and a robust action and delivery plan is being developed to accompany the recommended interventions and priorities for the city. The City Council, together with the new Renaissance Team and Yorkshire Forward, will further develop the ideas through existing strategies – namely the LDF Core Strategy, LTP3 and City Centre Area Action Plan.

## **Next steps**

20. The study includes dozens of key recommendations and proposed interventions (both short and long-term), as well as wider strategic opportunities to develop through existing CYC strategies. It presents a long term vision but recognises that further work will be required to be undertaken by the City of York Council, working in partnership with others, to develop a delivery plan to take forward these recommendations, taking account of time scales and funding opportunities. Prior to the development of such a delivery plan, it is recommended that the report is considered in detail by the Local Development Framework Working Group because of its importance for the LDF and City Centre Area Action Plan. Following this, it is likely that there will be a need to present some of the findings set out in the vision to a wide public audience, ensuring this is carried out in a cost effective way.
21. The economic vision has been developed in line with the aims and objectives of both the Local Development Framework and the City Centre Area Action Plan. Through these, the economic vision will also help to deliver the spatial aspects of the Sustainable Community Strategy. There is therefore the opportunity to take account of the economic vision in the preparation of the City's key strategic planning documents and the refresh of York's Sustainable Community Strategy.
22. The York Renaissance Team has put in place a work programme to focus on delivering economic impact and promoting high design standards on key sites in the city. Again, the economic vision will be useful in shaping and influencing this work programme.

## **Consultation**

23. It is envisaged that, following consideration by the Local Development Framework Working Group, early adoption of the vision by the York community is facilitated to gauge ownership of the key aspects set out in the economic vision. The renaissance vision represents an opening, not a final offer to the community. Significant consultation has already taken place to date. Professor Simpson and his team of expert advisors have met with numerous groups, organisations and individuals over the last 9 months or so. A weekend of discussion and debate about the work was held in March of this year, and all of this consultation has fed very much into the work of the team and influence their Economic Vision.

## **Corporate Priorities**

24. The actions in this report support the Thriving City element of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Council's Corporate Strategy and will also support other key elements such as City of Culture, Sustainable City, Healthy City and Inclusive City.

## **Implications**

### **Finance**

25. The costs associated with undertaking and publishing the York Economic Vision – as well as the salary and on costs for the York Renaissance Team - are being fully funded by Yorkshire Forward and English Heritage. There are some associated costs in relation to providing accommodation and associated costs for the staff, which are being borne by the Council. These will need to be funded from existing budgets.

### **Human Resources (HR)**

26. The council will be responsible for the employment of the 2 new posts to be created within the York Renaissance Team on a 3 year fixed term basis.

### **Equalities**

27. This initiative will seek to address equalities issues, particularly through examining the potential for accessibility improvements in the city centre and through major developments.

### **Legal**

28. The funding arrangements between Yorkshire Forward and the City of York Council have been set out in a contract.

### **Crime and Disorder**

29. This initiative will seek to address crime and disorder issues through consideration of crime prevention through good quality of design in the city centre and major developments.

### **Information Technology (IT)**

30. There are no strategic IT implications.

### **Property**

31. There are no direct property implications, although the outcome from the work of the York Economic Vision and Renaissance Team may enhance the Council's commercial portfolio.

### **Risk management**

32. The purpose of this initiative is to seek to provide greater certainty to the development industry with the planning of major developments within the City, which will enhance the future local economy. This programme will therefore look at risks regarding all aspects associated with the viability of major developments in the city.

## Recommendations

33. That the Executive refers the report for further consideration by the Local Development Framework Working Group.

Reason: To support future investment in the City and encourage high standards of design

### Contact Details:

#### Author

Author: Derek Gauld  
Principal City Development  
Officer  
01904 551470

#### Chief Officer Responsible for the report

Bill Woolley  
Director of City Strategy

Report Approved  Date 6/10/10

### Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Financial: Patrick Looker, Finance Manager, 551633

Wards Affected: ALL

All

For further information please contact the author of the report.

### Annexes:

Annex 1: York Economic Vision – Executive Summary August 2010

A copy of the full report on the York Economic Vision is attached to this report on-line; copies are available in the Members' Library.