

Report of the Director of City Strategy

Progress on the York City Centre Area Action Plan

Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to get input from Members at an early stage in the production of the City Centre Area Action Plan (AAP). The report outlines progress to date. The report sets out the proposed scope, purpose and content of the AAP. Members views are sought on each of these issues and Officers will be using a presentation and ‘workshop’ approach at the meeting to stimulate debate. The City Development team will report back to the Working Group in March 2008 with the draft document for approval prior to public consultation. Consultation on an Issues and Options document is timetabled in the Local Development Scheme (LDS) for March 2008.

Background

2. The City Centre Area Action Plan is one of the suite of documents that will make up York’s Local Development Framework. Its production is included in the Council’s adopted Local Development Scheme, with the aim of adoption by December 2010. The timetable is as follows:

Consultation on Issues and Options	March 2008
Consultation on Preferred Options	Jan 2009
Consultation on Submission Document	Oct 2009
Adoption	Dec 2010

3. Production of the City Centre Area Action Plan is being led by the City Development team and is at an early stage. Officers would welcome Members input at this stage in order to steer further work on the Issues and Options document. To date, the City Development team have facilitated Officer workshops to help establish the scope, purpose, key issues and potential action areas as summarised in this report, we now want to do the same with Members. Officers have also reviewed best practice in AAP production and considered emerging guidance on the soundness of LDF documents. The Scoping Report for the Sustainability Appraisal will be undertaken by the Research and Information team and will be subject to public consultation for 5 weeks from January to February 2008. The Issues and Options document will be accompanied by a Sustainability Statement.
4. Thorough reviews of the existing Evidence Base have been undertaken. A number of key Evidence Base documents are still being produced, which will

be crucial in the formulation of the AAP, for example the Character Appraisal for the Central Historic Core Conservation Area.

Options

Members have two options in relation to the City Centre Area Action Plan:

Option 1: To request Officers proceed to produce a draft Issues and Options report to address the Key Issues and Potential Action Areas as set out in this report and report to Working Group for approval of the draft Issues and Options document prior to public consultation.

Option 2: To request that Issues and Options are developed for alternative issues and action areas as recommended by the Working Group.

Analysis

Scope and Purpose

5. The LDS states that “Given the historical importance of the City Centre, its key tourism, retail and business roles and the development issues it faces, it is considered that this should be one of the first areas to be the subject of this type of DPD”.
6. Planning Policy Statement 12 – Local Development Frameworks – sets out the parameters for Area Action Plans. It states that AAPs should be used to “provide the planning framework for areas where significant change or conservation is needed”. A key feature of AAP’s is a focus on implementation. An AAP may include any of the following:
 - Site allocations for new uses and policies to guide their development;
 - Improvements to physical infrastructure and transport systems and other accessibility measures;
 - Improvements to community infrastructure (education, health, leisure) to meet additional needs arising from development;
 - Policies on urban design, conservation and landscape;
 - Details of planning obligations that will be sought and any other criteria for development; and/or
 - Strategies for maximising the positive impacts and mitigating negative impacts of development where other agencies would need to manage implementation, such as through local transport planning or the need for skills training.
7. The purpose of the Issues and Options report would be to stimulate debate and to get a fuller understanding of the public perception of the City Centre and what their aspirations are for its future.
8. The AAP would recognise the historic importance of the centre of York and reflect the civic pride in this cherished place .
9. The AAP would recognise the importance of the City Centre for the future of the York economy, as a driver for investment, and as the primary source of shopping and entertainment for York’s growing population.

10. The AAP would recognise the 'special qualities' of the city centre, those aspects that create the unique character and ambience of the area and use this understanding to prompt action to protect and enhance the Conservation Area.
11. The AAP would work in conjunction with the Conservation Area Character Appraisal to fulfil our duty to protect and enhance the Conservation Area.
12. Although the historic centre of York is a special place and is a national and international tourist destination, the City Centre could be improved in many ways. It has changed many times over its long history and there are further opportunities for enhancement and change. This must take place in a way that preserves and enhances the special qualities of York, for it is these that make York the attractive place it is, and are the key driver for its progress as a city.
13. The AAP would set out what we feel are the future pressures on the City Centre that need to be addressed including, for example: changes to the structure of the economy of York; anticipated population growth; potential continued growth in house prices; growth in tourism; climate change; changing shopping habits; changing lifestyles; changing demographics, equality and diversity challenges; traffic growth; demand for offices; finding economic uses for historic buildings.
14. It would also identify the key opportunities and advantages the City Centre holds in terms of the quality of its historic environment, its location at the heart of local and regional public transport routes. The AAP will seek to use its unique inherited advantages and future opportunities to create another layer in York's rich history.
15. The AAP would consider both how the policies and actions proposed could be achieved in the most sustainable way and what action is necessary to reduce the ecological and carbon footprint of the activities taking place in the City Centre.
16. Crucially, the AAP would provide the Council with a planning tool to progress projects and to guide development through a co-ordinated, comprehensive approach to development, enhancement and conservation. An AAP is not a reactive policy document. The focus is on implementation i.e. what can be done in the city centre to address the issues identified and how do we deliver it.
17. The AAP would also assist the Council and its partners to focus on particular issues and work together to achieve our aims. The AAP would collate, synthesise and rationalise the varying, and potentially conflicting, aims and objectives of the wide array of strategies and research which have implications for land use and conservation within the City Centre. In addition, the AAP is the vehicle to take forward many of the aims and objectives of the Council's Community Strategy, City Centre Partnership and Core Strategy. The Future York Group also made a number of City Centre specific recommendations, including the need to enhance the public realm and improve the tourist offer, which the AAP can help to deliver.

18. The AAP would not repeat general planning issues addressed in the remainder of the LDF. However, policies and proposals will need to be tested against the objectives and context of the LDF as a whole for consistency and conformity. The AAP would need to be closely aligned to the Allocations DPD to ensure strategic developments in the City Centre are supported through the wider LDF.
19. The final AAP document will need to meet the key requirements of the LDF system to be 'sound'. The document will need to set out the key issues specific to the area, be locally distinctive and outline alternative approaches for future development projects and use of the City Centre.
20. Our aim is to produce a document that is lively and focused on implementation rather than a reactive policy document. We would like the document to be creative and to focus interest and raise the profile by being led by photos, sketches and montages, as much a visual document as a text based one.

Boundary

21. We propose that the Issues and Options document would consult on the boundary for the AAP. The response to the consultation would help us to determine which areas on the periphery of the walled city need to be included in order to deliver a comprehensive spatial strategy and to facilitate the development required. The boundary will have important planning implications. In national policy terms the defined City Centre would be the preferred location for all new office, comparison shopping, health, education, casino, leisure, recreation, entertainment, cultural, public services and business services. The exact boundary of the AAP would be determined at the Preferred Options stage. This approach has also been taken with the York Northwest AAP.

Relationship with York Northwest

22. A critical issue in taking forward proposals for the City Centre and York Northwest will be to ensure that they strongly complement each other. This will cut across a range of key issues such as linkages, access, transportation and mix and type of uses. The comprehensive and common evidence base being assembled to inform the LDF (covering housing, employment, retail, open space, flooding and other studies) will help to ensure that we take forward these two AAPs in a joined up and complementary way.

Possible Content

23. The following is a summary of our initial thoughts on the content of the Issues and Options document.

Introduction

24. Relevant background information to explain what the document is all about and why we are doing it.

Understanding York City Centre

25. A portrait of the area, as we can only plan for the future if we fully understand why the City Centre is the way it is, our future aspirations for the city and what might affect it in the future.
26. As part of the spatial portrait, we will attempt to define what creates the special and unique character of the city centre – its special qualities. This will look at the elements of the historic environment and will also consider the ambience, perceptions and positive and negative factors in the experience of living, visiting, shopping and working in the City Centre. We will attempt to identify its current weaknesses and scope for improvement.

Conservation and Design

27. It is a Core Strategy Spatial Planning Objective to ensure that “York’s historical and archaeological wealth and setting is recognised, preserved and enhanced; in particular its historic centre, skyline, street patterns, views of the Minster, Medieval and Roman walls and valued open spaces, including the Strays and its 34 conservation areas”.
28. Conservation and design issues provide the context and a basis for all the issues and options. The importance of the historic environment of the City Centre cannot be overstated and this would be evident in the policies and proposals of the completed AAP.
29. Key to ensuring successful design will be the findings of the Conservation Area Character Appraisal (CACA). Work on the CACA will run in parallel with the AAP and will influence decisions on the preferred options and the submission document.
30. The CACA will give us a full understanding of the qualities of the City Centre and will provide the context for proposed actions. By understanding what is important within the historic environment we can identify what adds positively and negatively to the character of the area. From this we can then set out a series of policies and proposals to address these issues. This understanding also provides a context to determine the suitability of development projects.

Sustainable Development

31. Sustainability issues also provide the context and a basis for the issues and options. This section of the document would focus on climate change, carbon and ecological footprint, renewable energy and waste production.
32. This section would also set out the process of Sustainability Appraisal to explain how this influences the AAP and how the public can participate.

Key Issues

33. This section would set out what we think are the main issues to be addressed and would outline alternative options to enhance the City Centre and meet peoples needs, and also the main pressures for change which need to be planned for. The issues could include: -

Key Themes	Issues
Shopping in the City Centre	How to support York's role as a regional and sub-regional retail centre and to ensure that major retail and leisure development is located where it will contribute to the vitality and viability of the city.
Evening Activities and Entertainment in the City Centre	Developing the Twilight Economy, a more continental culture with a diversity of things to do at different times of the day. Helping to improve the evening ambience and perceptions.
Living in the City Centre	Provision of homes for local people, as well as investors, facilities for city centre residents, diversity, equality, accessibility, safety and well being.
Working in the City Centre	How to meet the demand for high quality offices, how to provide opportunities for Science City York and small businesses. Opportunities for the creative industries. How this will relate to the proposed new 'central business district' at York Central.
Culture and Tourism in the City Centre	How to strengthen York's international and regional role as a visitor destination and gateway to the rest of the region (5% annual growth in tourism earnings), and support the sustainable growth of the tourism sector including improvements to accommodation and hospitality provision.
Accessing the City Centre	Improving the accessibility of the City Centre. Dealing with traffic congestion, improving public transport links, improving cycle parking and routes, improving the pedestrian environment including air quality, signage, safety etc. Linking key attractions and spaces.
Streets and Squares in the City Centre	How to create spaces that will be attractive, stimulating, legible and usable for events. How to enhance the setting of the historic environment.
Green Spaces and Rivers in the City Centre	Issues of flooding, biodiversity, habitat enhancement, use of the rivers and creation of new green spaces.

Potential Action Areas

34. The Potential Action Areas section would include ideas for projects, either for new development or for improvements to existing areas including streets and squares. These areas will present a number of opportunities to address the issues set out in the Key Issues, as they become more advanced. The table below illustrates Potential Action Areas: -

Potential Action Areas	Opportunities
The Cultural Quarter	Development of links between the National Railway Museum and the Minister could enhance and promote this cultural area. Public realm improvements of the Minister Plaza, Exhibition Square, Museum Gardens, the riverside, Memorial Gardens, Marble Arch and Railway Museum plaza would improve this important part of the city.
The Castle Piccadilly area	Development of Castle Piccadilly could improve the setting of Clifford's Tower and other important buildings. It provides an opportunity to redevelop buildings that detract from the Conservation Area and could provide important links to Hungate through enhancements of the Foss.
Public realm	There are huge opportunities for public realm enhancements across the

improvements - 'Songlines'	city, for example through linking key areas and spaces through colour, materials, public art, lighting. Existing spaces are tired looking, they need to be improved and new areas provided. The ideas in the 'Songlines' Big Lottery bid could be taken into account.
Gateway Streets	Gateways to the city provide a first and last impression. Key streets include Walmgate/Fossgate, Micklegate, Gillygate and Goodramgate. Public realm enhancement and other means could improve these areas to encourage trade. This also offers opportunities to enhance the role of more 'secondary' retail areas within the city.
Enhancing and Accessing York's Riversides	There are a number of opportunities to enhance York's river frontages. Building and spaces adjacent to the Ouse between Lendal Bridge and Ouse bridge are generally poor. There are opportunities to open up/redevelop these areas, perhaps with dual frontages to Coney Street and a new river walkway. We could explore the potential for redevelopment / enhancement of buildings on the west side of the river between Ouse and Lendal Bridges.

35. The Issues and Options document would consult on which areas should be a priority for action. The AAP would explain why the areas above are considered a priority and how redevelopment of these areas would address the Key Issues.
36. Officers would consider consultation responses and undertake detailed feasibility work before presenting the Preferred Options at the next stage. This work may indicate that the areas included in this report are not feasible. In which case we will set out the reasons why we will not be pursuing those actions.

Delivery Strategy

37. The Issues and Options document would be designed to provide an initial context for the consideration of more detailed design and feasibility work and not explore all avenues available for delivery of actions at this stage.
38. The final AAP would not provide detailed masterplans or briefs for development sites / areas but would provide a clear spatial strategy, objectives, policies and proposals for the City Centre. It would also clearly identify how these will be delivered in terms of key agencies, development partners, funding, timescales etc. A number of detailed documents will therefore sit under the AAP such as development briefs for different sites, public realm and lighting strategies.
39. The adopted AAP would give actions a statutory basis and provide a strong case for funding. The AAP would provide a framework for how the City Centre should change and improve over the next 20 years. Having a co-ordinated, justified strategy is key to attaining funding from the range of agencies we would need to work with to deliver the strategy.

Consultation

Internal Consultation

40. Officers will continue to involve teams from across the Council in the production of the AAP.

Public Consultation

41. Consultation will be required on the Issues and Options report in accordance with the Statement on Community Involvement. We will bring back a report to Members on how we plan to consult on the City Centre AAP.

Next Steps

42. Subject to Members decision, Officers will complete a draft Issues and Options document and report back to Working Group in March 2008. Following this, approval would be sought from Executive prior to public consultation.
43. Work on the preferred options stage would involve more detailed work on the action areas including investigating their feasibility.
44. Further work is required to integrate the findings of the Character Appraisal as it evolves.
45. Officers will also seek to develop a working relationship with key agencies (such as Yorkshire Forward and English Heritage) to help deliver the AAP.
46. The new Community Plan will need to be incorporated into the context for the issues raised. The latest thinking from the York@Large Partnership will have significant implications for the vision and objectives of the AAP. The outcome of Core Strategy consultation will also need to be considered.

Corporate Priorities

47. The AAP has the potential to contribute towards the delivery of a number of Corporate Priorities through its policies and actions. It will aim to:
 - Increase the use of public and other environmentally friendly modes of transport.
 - Improve the actual and perceived condition and appearance of city's streets, housing estates and publicly accessible spaces.
 - Reduce the actual and perceived impact of violent, aggressive and nuisance behaviour on people in York.
 - Improve the economic prosperity of the people of York with a focus on minimising income differentials.
 - Improve the quality and availability of decent, affordable homes in the city.

Implications

48. Implications are as listed below:
 - **Financial** None
 - **Human Resources (HR)** None
 - **Equalities** None
 - **Legal** None
 - **Crime and Disorder** None
 - **Information Technology (IT)** None

- **Property** None
- **Other** None

Risk Management

49. Potential risks in the production of the City Centre Area Action Plan include the soundness of the Plan – as there is no set format or approach in the production of an AAP there is a risk that the AAP could be considered at Examination not to be sound, therefore requiring work to begin afresh. Officers have thoroughly researched best practice in the production of the AAP and are aware of soundness issues affecting other LDF documents.
50. The Central Historic Core Conservation Area and a Character Appraisal has yet to be produced. Government Office have confirmed that this does not present a soundness issue at this stage, it is however important that the Appraisal evolves alongside the AAP.
51. The Retail and Phase 2 Employment studies have yet to be completed as part of the LDF evidence base and the Community Strategy and Core Strategy are evolving. Officers will consider the objectives set out in these documents as they evolve and will react accordingly.
52. These issues are considered a low risk at this stage for the reasons given. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy. There are no risks associated with the recommendations of this report.

Recommendation

That Members:

1. Note progress to date on the City Centre Area Action Plan (AAP).

Reason: so as to be aware of the progress made on this component of the Local Development Scheme.

2. Provide Officers with input at this early stage in the production of the AAP.

Reason: to steer the direction of the AAP to incorporate all key issues relevant to the future of the City Centre.

3. Note the Next Steps and request Officers to produce a draft Issues and Options report for the Key Issues and Potential Action Areas (incorporating Members comments) and report back to the Working Group in due course.

Reason: so that an Area Action Plan can be produced for the City Centre in accordance with the Local Development Scheme.

Contact Details

Author:

Ewan Taylor
City Development Officer
City Strategy
Tel: 01904 551408

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Bill Woolley
Director of City Strategy

Report Approved**Date** 6 December 2007**Specialist Implications Officer(s)** None**Wards Affected:** Guildhall, Micklegate, Fishergate**All****For further information please contact the author of the report****Background Papers:**

None

Appendices:

None