

APPENDIX 10

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

York Northwest Area Action Plan Issues and Options

Focus Group consultation 9th January 08

The following views were shared at a focus group for residents of York about the York Northwest Area Action Plan. The focus group was part of the public consultation on the first stage of the Area Action Plan, where the emphasis has been on considering as many issues as possible and identifying possibilities for how the area could be developed.

The ten people that attended the focus group were recruited through the Talkabout Panel. The Talkabout Panel is a representative panel of residents who live within the city. The Panel comprises over 2000 residents who make comments on a wide range of issues. The panel members attending the session were randomly selected from the Panel. The focus group was facilitated by an independent company called Icarus.

Views about the mix of uses on the sites:

Points upon which there was general agreement:

- These are 2 sites with different characteristics and should therefore be treated differently.
- A mix of uses is preferable for both sites, but each could have a predominant use / purpose to reflect its particular characteristics.
- There is some argument for British Sugar to be predominantly residential and York Central predominantly commercial to reflect current uses.
- The sites must be viable in their own right, with a vibrant economy.

Other mix of uses related points:

- The existing residential communities on the fringes of the sites do not have good services and provision / access for them should be considered.

Views about transport on to and around the sites:

Points upon which there was general agreement:

- Traffic volume and congestion is a city wide problem already; this is a very important issue to address when considering re-development of the sites.
- It is important not to blight the existing residents with increased traffic due to the re-development of the sites.
- Some potential uses may have to be discounted due to traffic issues e.g. warehousing, community stadium.

Other transport related points:

- People are wedded to their cars; cars cannot be designed out of proposals.
- A 'non fussy' transport system is required that links this area to the city.
- A bus terminal next to the railway station is desirable.
- The existing cycleways should be incorporated into the new schemes.

Views about housing:

Points on which there was general agreement:

- Mixed housing type and density is desirable; this mix brings about a diverse set of residents.
- A sense of community is required; different kinds of people, different ages and the range of facilities and services associated with community life. Create a “village”.
- A degree of affordable housing will be required, possibly on a shared ownership basis and aimed at families (3 bedroom), enabling them to stay in York.
- Housing for transient populations should be avoided.

Other housing related points:

- Leasehold flats can include restrictions regarding sub letting, therefore restricting investment purchasing.
- The area is too far out for students.
- High density housing should be limited.
- Housing for families should be close to / have good access to the school.
- Avoid the temptation to build quick and cheap.
- The viability of affordable housing quotas for developers needs to be a consideration.
- New housing should be near the existing residential development in York Central.
- There are potential benefits in having housing nearest to the city centre in terms of reduced car use.
- Public open space needs to be provided alongside housing developments.
- Would the flood risk affect what could happen here?

Views about the overall ‘feel’ of the 2 sites:

Points about which there was general agreement:

- Be daring and different; celebrate contrast and difference.
- Developments need to be high quality.
- Be ecologically pioneering; be at the forefront of good practice. Incorporate high environmental values in terms of the physical design, overall sustainability and transport solutions.
- Look elsewhere, especially overseas, for examples to learn from.

Other design related issues:

- Avoid pastiche architecture; there is an opportunity to contrast with the historical perspective of the city.
- A worry that modern architecture can look shabby very quickly.
- No more ‘orange’ housing estates.
- Not another Fulford Road

Views about employment on the sites:

Points about which there was general agreement:

- A mix of business uses is required.
- There is a particular need to provide the businesses required by a viable community, both service providers and retail provision.
- The area would be blighted by large retail developments and such provision is not needed.

Other employment related issues:

- There is scope for high tech business developments to make use of the university's graduates.
- There is a need for low skill jobs to replace those lost in the area already.
- There are enough IT / Business Park provisions in York; what's needed are facilities for small engineering / manufacturing facilities.
- Any manufacturing provision would need to be high value and niche markets.
- Sustainable, long term jobs are required.
- There is scope for some city centre based businesses to relocate to these sites, thus impacting positively on traffic into the city.
- Warehousing is inherently problematic due to potential traffic volume, low number of jobs created, large amounts of space required etc.
- "Avoid the curse of the mall".
- Individual retail provision and not corporate brands are desirable.

Views about community facilities:

Points about which there was general agreement:

- Some sort of community building would be a positive asset.
- Properly managed public open space is required; space that is near where people live, that can be accessed easily and used by everyone.

Other points relating to this theme:

- There is general lack of public leisure facilities and private provision can be prohibitively expensive.
- Public provision of leisure facilities can be prohibitively expensive and "low tech" options should therefore be explored e.g. public parks.
- Capitalise on what exists already, including the good, well lit and safe cycleways.
- Could a green corridor be created to link the 2 sites?

Views about culture and tourism:

Points about which there was general agreement:

- A 'cultural quarter' already exists / has the potential to exist within the city centre; this should be a priority over these sites.
- A 5 star hotel could play a part in attracting a different kind of visitor to York; there is uncertainty whether a site out of the city centre is the right place for it though.

Other culture and tourism related points:

- More work is needed in the city centre on fostering a 'cultural quarter'.
- Pedestrianisation is a key factor in fostering this kind of environment e.g. Seville.
- There are problems with the late night culture in York.
- The appropriateness of mixing bar / café culture with residential uses is debateable.
- A cultural quarter cannot be created; it should develop organically to have any real chance of success.
- Let new residents of the sites walk into the city and use the facilities there rather than create them in this area.
- Facilities will only be provided if they are commercially viable.
- More 4 star hotels are required.
- York is unlikely to be able to get a 5 star hotel.