

Executive

20 July 2021

Report of the Director of Housing Economy and Regeneration
Portfolio of the Executive Member for Finance and Performance

Outcome of the feasibility study in to a riverside walkway and new pedestrian bridge over the Ouse

Summary

1. This report sets out initial feasibility findings for potential infrastructure and regeneration proposals for the Coney Street and associated riverside area of the city centre. The high level feasibility study was undertaken by BDP through York North Yorkshire & East Riding LEP (YNYER) funding and considered a range of interventions including a new pedestrian bridge over the River Ouse; a continuous riverside walkway from Lendal Bridge to Ouse Bridge; and links to the Riverside Quarter redevelopment of much of Coney Street that is proposed by private developers, the Helmsley Group. Any redevelopment of Coney Street is likely to need the inclusion of the council owned 25-27 Coney Street.
2. Having considered the opportunities and constraints - informed by a wide ranging context analysis, technical feasibility and financial viability - it is proposed that the focus for the next stage of exploratory work is on the riverside walk from the existing boardwalk outside City Screen to Ouse Bridge. Whilst a pedestrian bridge is technically feasible it will need to be considered within the wider future movement strategy of Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP 4). A walkway connecting the existing boardwalk from City Screen to Lendal Bridge is considered to be too problematic due to complex land ownership and the conservation impact on the setting of the Guildhall.
3. It is therefore recommended that officers continue to explore options for the riverside walkway route identified above, and work with the Helmsley Group to shape the public benefits of the proposed Riverside Quarter redevelopment, including undertaking necessary survey and feasibility works for the council's associated land holdings. To support the delivery

of the project it has been included in the council's bid submission to the government's Levelling Up Fund to match fund the private developer investment and provide a fully funded deliverable scheme.

Recommendations

4. The Executive is asked to:

- 1) Note the outcomes of the YNYER LEP funded feasibility work on a riverside walkway to the rear of Coney Street and options for a new pedestrian bridge over the Ouse

Reason: To note the options and opportunities for opening up the Ouse riverside and creating new walking routes from the station in to the city centre

- 2) Note the inclusion of the riverside walkway in the council's Levelling Up Fund bid

Reason: To be aware that the riverside walkway has formed part of the council's first round funding bid to government's Levelling Up Fund with the outcome due to be announced in autumn 2021

- 3) Approve officers continuing to work with the private sector owners of riverside properties to shape the emerging riverside walkway proposals and negotiate any necessary commercial relationships with neighbouring landowners and developers for Executive approval

Reason: To ensure the developer proposals for a new walkway as part of the emerging Riverside Quarter development fit with the city's strategies and ambitions, and optimise social benefits.

- 4) Approve the undertaking of any necessary early stage surveys and feasibility work on the council owned 25-27 Coney Street as part of the wider private sector redevelopment proposals to be funded from existing city centre regeneration budgets and staff resources

Reason: To ensure that the council can use its landholding interest to influence the Riverside Quarter development proposals and maximise the commercial return from any potential future development

Background

5. In March 2019 the council submitted a funding bid to the government's Future High Street Fund. This bid focused on the revival of Coney Street, and sought feasibility funding to explore the options for a continuous riverside walkway alongside the River Ouse from City Screen to Ouse Bridge. The primary principle of the bid was the creation of a secondary riverside frontage to the rear of Coney Street to spark and encourage investment from landlords in an area of the city centre that was starting to decline. It would help to bring large scale property owners - who had persistent vacancies in medium sized retail stores that were unattractive to the modern retail environment - to the table, allowing the remodelling of properties at ground floor and enabling access to upper floors to encourage the conversion of vacant storage spaces into residential and office use. Unfortunately the funding bid was unsuccessful, with the government funding allocated to areas which were experiencing more severe high street failures. However, that did not detract from the principles of the bid being sound, or the complexity of the issues that had coalesced around Coney Street and the increasingly challenging future outlook.
6. At that point the council were approached by local developers The Helmsley Group, who intend to use their recently acquired Coney Street land holdings to create a new Riverside Quarter and bring back in to use vacant upper floors and open up access to the River Ouse as set out in the Future High Streets Bid. Given the council's strategic role in the success of the city centre it is important that the council has an input into any emerging proposals in partnership with prospective developers to ensure the quality, viability and feasibility of the proposals, and to optimise the social benefits for the city. The council are also a key landowner on Coney Street having acquired the freehold 25-27 Coney Street (currently leased to Holland and Barrett) in December 2019 as a strategic commercial interest. This retail property sits in the middle of Helmsley Group's landholdings meaning any comprehensive project including that property would need the council's agreement.
7. The council submitted a funding bid to the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding LEP's Pipeline Capital Infrastructure Projects Fund in early 2020 to undertake a feasibility study of a continuous riverside walkway from Lendal Bridge to Ouse Bridge. It was also decided to include a consideration of options for a new pedestrian bridge to link from North Gardens to create a new walking arrival route in to the heart of the city centre from the railway station, whilst avoiding the heavily trafficked

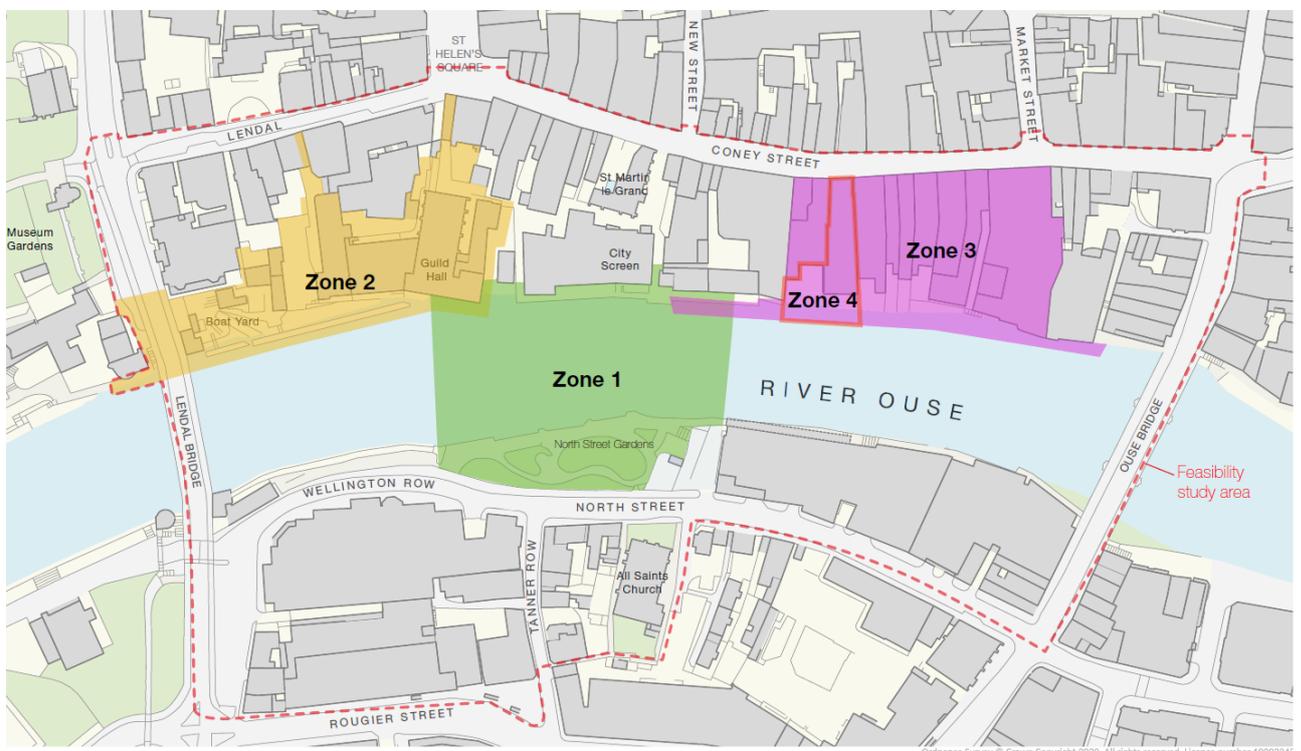
Lendal Bridge. The feasibility study funding application was successful and the council were allocated £45k, with £15k of match funding from CYC and private developers.

- On receipt of the funding a procurement exercise was undertaken in September 2020 through the Crown Commercial Services Project Management & Full Design Team framework to appoint consultants to undertake the feasibility study. Two bids were received, with a bid led by BDP (and supported by Turner Townsend Cost Consultants and Mark Lovell Design Engineers) being successful based on price and quality. Work commenced in November 2020 with a deadline for completion in March 2021 to meet the funding conditions.

Feasibility study scope

- The feasibility looked at four zoned areas between Lendal and Ouse Bridge:

Figure 1 – feasibility study zones



Within Zone 1, the feasibility study brief was to explore options for a pedestrian bridge linking North Gardens with the city centre; in Zone 2, to explore connectivity improvements at high level including a walkway

linking from the Lendal Bridge area to the existing walkway terminating at Vodka Revolution; in Zone 3, to review the riverside walkway proposed by the Helmsley Group to connect from City Screen to Ouse Bridge as part of the wider proposed development forming the zone; and in Zone 4, to consider at high level the development potential of the council owned 25-27 Coney Street should a decision be taken to include it in any comprehensive redevelopment of the area.

10. The feasibility study considered these options with reference to any previous studies that had been undertaken and:

- Assessed technical & engineering feasibility
- Produced context and option analysis
- Outline designs
- High level cost analysis for future business case preparation
- Development appraisal
- Early stakeholder engagement

Feasibility study outcome

11. The feasibility study positively establishes the deliverability and broad cost and design parameters for infrastructure works across all four zones, exploring alternative options for further development where appropriate, and incorporating stakeholder feedback and constraints and next steps for design development. The study is informed by historic context and constraints analysis, significance assessment, and movement and connectivity analysis, as well as drawing on previous studies and policy context. The study is available at confidential annex 1, and a non-confidential summary of approach and findings is provided at annex 1.

12. Within Zone 1, and informed by context analysis and stakeholder feedback from the Environment Agency, Canals & Rivers Trust and Historic England amongst others, the study identifies three options for a bridge crossing. All three options are based on a single-masted cable-stayed structural approach, and a river crossing alignment broadly continuing the route between City Screen and Pitcher & Piano. The three bridge options have differing landing options at North Street gardens.

13. Option 1 proposes a curved ramped landing into North Street Gardens (with steps also), which would activate the garden space, and not impinge on adjacent flood infrastructure and highway, though the approach would mean that the bridge was unusable in times of flood. Option 2 proposes an approach which continues the linear bridge alignment to span over the existing flood wall at the rear of the gardens, and then ramp down within the highway at North Street. This approach would allow the bridge to be used during most flood events (landing on the 'dry-side' of the flood defences), but would require a significant reconfiguration of and loss of the highway at North Street, and create a high level structure crossing over the whole of North Street Gardens, increasing visual disruption. A third 'hybrid' approach combines the ramped (and stepped) landing in North St Gardens, to activate the space, whilst also extending the bridge deck over the flood wall and providing a (less intrusive, but also less accessible) stepped access within the highway which would be less intrusive, but would be less accessible in times of flood.
14. All three options are manageable in terms of flood storage, and propose a sensitive re-landscaping of North Street Gardens. All three also maintain the current riverside pedestrian route, which would pass beneath the new crossing. As part of more general design development, particular consideration would be required for options 2 and 3 to ensure there is no impact on the existing North Street flood wall. Additionally, further discussions would be required to agree the proposals with both Joseph Rowntree Trust (who have a covenant on North Street Gardens), and the Church Commissioners in respect of passageway between City Screen and Pitcher & Piano. The cost parameters across the three options range from £5.02m to £5.23m (excluding design, service diversions, archaeology and other costs), with option 1 the most affordable.
15. Within Zone 2, the study identifies limited scope for a walkway between Dame Judy Dench Walk and Vodka Revolution. Due to the highly sensitive historic location adjacent to The Guildhall the only real solution would be a series of floating and landscaped pontoons, with stepped link to the existing Vodka Revolution terrace. A high level cost (with exclusions as above) in the order of £1.68m was identified for the approach.
16. This proposal has a number of challenges however as there is no publically accessible land and it would require access through City

Cruises Boatyard which is not possible under its current operation. The flood related constraints at the site would also impact on the design, as well as rendering public open space and connectivity routes inaccessible at some times. These factors, alongside the fact that the route would not be likely to be heavily used, and poses heritage impacts as noted above, lead the study to the conclusion that the proposals do not have a strong business or strategic case to proceed to the next stage of development.

17. Within Zone 3, the study reviewed emerging details for the riverside walkway component of the proposed developer led Riverside Quarter regeneration scheme, confirming the broad cost and engineering basis of the proposals are sound, and reviewing (with stakeholder involvement) the high level emerging concept designs. The due diligence undertaken around engineering and cost has provided reassurance that the proposals are deliverable, with broad cost parameters identified at between £5.65 and £7.52m. The review of high level emerging concept designs have identified opportunities for improvement which have been shared with the developers to feed into ongoing design work.
18. Within Zone 4, the study undertook a high level analysis of the redevelopment potential of the council owned 25-27 Coney Street, which sits in the heart of the Riverside Quarter masterplan and would be an integral part of any development. The study identified and considered how the property could be redeveloped, both in isolation or as part of any wider scheme, to establish a high level massing approach and accommodation schedule to inform the development value and to inform ongoing discussions with the wider development.

Next steps

19. Given the outcomes of the feasibility study it is proposed that at this stage any further work to develop the Zone 1 pedestrian bridge is only undertaken following wider strategic reviews such as My City Centre and Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) which can establish whether it is a strategic transport investment priority. Similarly the conservation, flood risk and land ownership complexities of a Zone 2 pontoon walkway, in addition to potentially limited benefits, mean that it is proposed not to undertake any further work at this stage. However, the principles of both of these options may be explored in the My City Centre and LTP4 public engagement to inform future decisions.

20. Given the positive outcome on the feasibility of the Zone 3 riverside walkway connecting the existing area outside City Screen to Ouse Bridge, and that it forms part of upcoming Riverside Quarter redevelopment being pursued by the Helmsley Group, it is proposed that this element of the project is taken forward. This is to continue to shape the emerging plans and to explore the options for inclusion of 25-27 Coney Street in the Riverside Quarter masterplan (which the zone 4 findings will also influence). The proposed next steps to achieve this are set out as follows.
21. Firstly, the Zone 3 riverside walkway has been included in the council's first round bid to the government's £4.8bn national Levelling Up Fund which closed on 18 June. Although the country is split into priority areas, and York is in tier 3 – the lowest priority – this is only one of the criteria and the Executive delegated the final decision on what to submit in our application to the Executive Member for Finance and Performance and the Corporate Director for Place. To maximise the chance of success the council sought guidance from economic business case consultants Amion to look across the portfolio of council projects for the best strategic fit. The riverside walkway scored well under the economic modelling that the bid is assessed and consequently a £3m funding ask was made to part fund the anticipated £6.6m walkway, with agreement that the remaining £3.6m is provided by the Riverside Quarter developers.
22. This was part of a package of three other projects included in York's £19m first round bid that had extensive stakeholder support and was supported by both of the city's MPs. The other projects included delivery of the new Castle & Eye of York public realm (including riverside park improvements), and improvement works to Parliament Street & St Sampson's Square. The successful bids will be announced by government in the autumn. However, should this bid be unsuccessful the business case preparation will not be wasted as future government funding is anticipated to be forthcoming.
23. Secondly, it is proposed that the regeneration team (in liaison with legal projects and property teams) continue to engage and work with the Helmsley Group to continue to shape the emerging Riverside Quarter proposals. This will ensure that the plans meet and complement the city's wider strategic aims and priorities, optimising the social value of any redevelopment scheme and ensuring they are an appropriate size and scale of development for the area. Should any formal commercial partnerships be required to enable the development, officers will

undertake those negotiations and return to the Executive for approval before entering into any agreement.

24. Finally, the council will undertake any necessary feasibility studies or surveys to establish the relationship of 25-27 Coney Street premises with any wider development plans. This will ensure that if the council decided that the property should be included in the Riverside Quarter redevelopment its' value is maximised. The council have a land owning interest so a comprehensive redevelopment including this property can only go ahead if the council, as land owner, are in support of the proposals. Any redevelopment or disposal of the property would be subject to future Executive decisions and would also need to account for the lost rental income on which the commercial purchase was predicated in December 2019. **It is important to note that at this stage there are no proposals to redevelop or dispose – the council is just exploring options.**

Consultation

25. Internal dialogue on the emerging Riverside Quarter proposals has taken place between regeneration and property teams. The Levelling Up Fund submission was worked up in consultation with legal and finance teams and external stakeholders and both local MPs who provided letters of support. The BDP feasibility study included stakeholder engagement with internal Council teams such as heritage, planning, engineers and highways, as well as with external stakeholders including the Environment Agency, Historic England, and Canals & Rivers Trust. Public consultation has not yet been undertaken on the proposals, due to their emerging nature and the ongoing commercial confidentiality of the Riverside Quarter proposals. Moving forward it is proposed that the infrastructure proposals are tested through the My City Centre vision engagement, and Local Transport Plan 4, and a detailed engagement strategy be worked up by Helmsley Group aligned to the planning submission of Riverside Quarter proposals.

Council Plan

26. The proposals support the Council Plan 2019-2023 (Making History, Building Communities), which sets out the ambition to provide the best quality of life for residents, supporting in particular 5 of the Council Plan's core outcomes:

- **Well-paid Jobs and an Inclusive Economy** – Investment through the Riverside Quarter would support and diversify the high street to benefit York’s economy, and support the lowest paid sectors, and contribute to improvements to place that facilitate inward investment and growth in higher value sectors.
- **A Greener and Cleaner City** – creation of new pedestrian routes to encourage greater use of active travel to reduce vehicle emissions, and new and improved open spaces in the river corridors
- **Getting around Sustainably** – creation of new pedestrian infrastructure to encourage active travel in York city centre
- **Creating Homes and World-class Infrastructure** – Improving and creating new, free to access public realm in the heart of the city centre, which also improves the setting of York’s historic environment and buildings, and freeing up inaccessible and vacant upper floors for new homes.
- **Safe Communities and Culture for All** – the provision of new and improved spaces for cultural activation and community activity.

Implications

27. The following implications have been identified:

- **Financial** – The costs incurred to date have been funded from a contribution from the Y&NY LEP as well as contributions from the council My City Centre Budget. The proposals outlined in the report do not require further budgets at this time as the majority of costs relate to staff time on the project or work on commercial portfolio which can be contained within current budgets. The costs of the wider scheme quoted in the report are indicative and require further development. Should the Levelling Up Fund bid be successful the fully costed scheme will need to be incorporated into the council capital programme.
- **Human Resources (HR)** – considered to be no implications
- **One Planet Council / Equalities** – see *Equalities Impact Assessment (annex 2)*

- **Legal**
 - The report seeks approval for officers to continue to work with the private sector riverside property owners to shape the emerging riverside walkway proposals and negotiate any necessary commercial relationships with neighbouring landowners and developers for Executive approval. Care needs to be given in developing the relationship between the Council and the private sector riverside property owners to ensure this remains in accordance with public sector procurement legislation.
 - Should the application to the Levelling Up Fund be successful the Council will develop a procurement strategy to ensure the funding is used compliantly in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and subsidy control requirements (previously known as State aid).
 - Any commercial arrangements around the associated development scheme would need to be framed to ensure best value requirements are met.
 - Legal Services officers will work closely with project officers to ensure compliance with public sector procurement legislation.
- **Crime and Disorder** – considered to be no implications
- **Information Technology (IT)** - considered to be no implications
- **Property** – covered in the report.

Risk Management

28. The report recommendations establish next steps for progressing the works, including some limited initial budget to develop the works further. Future decisions to progress to capital delivery will require further executive approvals, and detailed risk analysis and management approach will be set out in association with these approvals. The risks at this stage are that the projects will not proceed as planned, and work (and resource deployment) will have been abortive. However, these are outweighed by the risk of the council not engaging to shape the emerging private sector proposals to ensure they align with the city's strategic ambitions.

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Report

Approved



Date

7 July 2021

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Wards Affected: [List wards or tick box to indicate all]

All

Guildhall

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

Not applicable

Annexes

Annex 1 – Summary of feasibility study findings

Annex 2 – Equalities Impact Assessment

Confidential Annex 1a – Full feasibility study findings (containing sensitive commercial information relating to developer proposals)

List of Abbreviations Used in this Report

BCR – Benefit cost ratio

LEP – Local Economic Partnership

LTP 4 – Local Transport Plan 4