

Meeting:	Executive
Meeting date:	12/10/2023
Report of:	Neil Ferris
Portfolio of:	Cllr Kilbane Executive Member for Economy and Transport

Decision Report: Delivering the Vision for the City Centre

Subject of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to re-launch the Vision for the City Centre, signifying a strong commitment from the council to the overarching aims in the existing Vision.
2. The Vision is to create “a vibrant city centre, where a wide range of people want to spend time in the day and night, which creates the right conditions for responsive businesses to grow and adapt, for city living to develop, and for cultural and social activity to flourish.”
3. The Vision was informed by extensive public and stakeholder engagement and is therefore owned by the city as a whole, its partners, businesses and communities. Although a 10-year vision, it was always intended to evolve to adapt to the changing environment.
4. The engagement and drafting of the Vision were undertaken at a time when the impact of the Covid pandemic on the city centre was a very live issue.
5. In the 2 years since the Vision was adopted, the city centre has continued to recover strongly from the impact of the pandemic, which has seen an evolving context, including regulatory change for accessibility and business activity.

6. In this period, the city has also adopted three significant 10-year strategies, which were the product of further city-wide engagement and are joint strategies across city partners. More recently the council has adopted a new Council Plan.
7. To reflect the current environment and align to the city strategies, this report proposes an evolution of the 8 themes of the Vision to draw out certain elements. To emphasise and highlight this progression, it is proposed that the Vision is re-launched as the “Our City Centre Vision”, with a stronger focus on accessibility, residents, affordability, equalities, climate resilience and carbon reduction.
8. Although work was paused on the drafting of a Delivery Strategy in summer 2022, there is still a significant appetite from partners and stakeholders in the city to collaborate in making the city centre the best it can be, recognising that a lot of really good work is already underway, but that further coordination and collaboration will ensure the greatest benefit for the city.

Benefits and Challenges

9. Re-launching the Vision for the city centre will encourage this further collaboration between partners and key stakeholders in the city, building on existing activity and creating new opportunities to achieve the shared Vision for the city.
10. This is also a particularly opportune moment for the city to come together behind this shared vision for the city, to ensure that where key transformational schemes are to be delivered, they deliver the best possible outcomes.
11. Mayoral Elections in May 2024 mean that York needs to be in the strongest possible position to influence and secure funding for priority schemes in the city centre, where the support of partners and stakeholders will be critical. Collaborating with partners and stakeholders to develop an investable project pipeline and Delivery Strategy is therefore really important at this time.
12. A shared Vision supported by partners, businesses and communities is a strong statement of what the city is and who it is for. Re-launching the Vision, provides a significant opportunity to

publicly reflect the this, further promoting the city centre as a welcoming and inclusive environment.

13. The Covid pandemic had a huge impact on all city centres, both in terms of immediate change, and also with the longer-term impacts still being felt. This was driven by a change in the way in which people used the city centre.
14. The Vision was adopted at a time of significant uncertainty, and when some specific Covid recovery measures were still in place, therefore reflecting a point in time. Consequently, it is important to ensure that the Vision remains a live document and evolves and adapts to both national and local issues and legislative change.
15. Significant collaboration and engagement was undertaken to inform the Vision. Time has already elapsed, and as acknowledged above there is an evolving context, resulting in a risk that the value of the previous work is lost.
16. Re-launching the Vision now addresses this risk, enables momentum to be maintained and builds on the work undertaken to date. Reinterpreting the engagement in responses in light of the evolving city centre context.
17. Re-establishing the co-ordination and collaboration channels with partners and stakeholders in the city, through the Economic Partnership, will ensure that a much greater overall impact is achieved and relevancy is maintained.

Policy Basis for Decision

18. Evolving and emphasising certain aspects of the “Our City Centre Vision” reflects the strategic priorities for the city, supported by city partners, as set out in the three 10-year Strategies.
19. The 10-year Strategies which were approved by Full Council in December 2022 comprise:
 - a) Climate Change Strategy 2022-2032
 - b) Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2032
 - c) Economic Strategy 2022-2032

20. The overarching aim of all these strategies being to improve the quality of life for all York's residents.
21. The Health and Wellbeing Strategy aims to improve health and reduce the gap in healthy life expectancy between the richest and poorest communities in our city. It sets 10 measurable goals (for example reducing loneliness, halving smoking rates) for improved population health, but also emphasises the conditions which produce health, including economic, cultural, environmental, housing and educational factors. The city centre contains a huge number of assets such as these which can be harnessed to improve the health of our city, whilst also having a number of potential dangers to human health such as poor air quality in places. This Our City Centre Vision will enable us to build with partners a city centre which is health-generating for all of our residents.
22. York's Economic Strategy highlights the importance of the visitor and retail economy as an employment sector, the pivotal role of small businesses in driving growth, and the need to find new uses for underused space in the city centre. These themes are strongly represented in the Our City Centre Vision.
23. As a direct response to the adoption of the Climate Change Strategy and to reflect the critical importance of improving climate resilience and carbon reduction, a new theme has been created to focus on the specific actions that can be taken in the city centre that support the delivery of the overarching strategy. The creation of this theme will also promote the importance of considering how the other themes also support the carbon reduction, climate resilience and adapting to extreme weather events within the city centre.
24. The recently adopted Council Plan reflects the new administration's four key manifesto pledges: **Affordability; Environment; Equalities and Human Rights; and Health Inequalities**. These were already aligned to the Vision for the city centre, however, the wording of the themes has been refreshed to emphasise these within the existing themes. These are not fundamental changes, but highlight their importance, to inform the development of the Delivery Strategy.
25. The Vision is also aligned to the priorities in the **emerging** Tourism Strategy for the City "A vision for tourism in York: 2032", which is

being developed by the Tourism Advisory Board and Make It York. A separate report on the Tourism Strategy will be brought to Executive later in the year.

Financial Strategy Implications

26. The re-launch of the Our City Centre Vision in itself has no direct financial implications. There are, however, a number of improvements to the city centre proposed by the vision.
27. Whilst it is not necessarily the council's responsibility to deliver all these improvements there is likely to be an expectation that the council takes the lead on a number of the improvements.
28. As the Our City Centre Vision also reflects the key themes of the city's 10-year strategies, delivery of those strategies will involve investments in the city centre. Parts of the Vision will therefore be delivered without specific new investment.
29. It is therefore critical that the Delivery Strategy is fully costed considering the levels of budget available. There are a number of budgets that can be targeted to support improvements, specifically Combined Authority funds as highlighted above, and it will be important to set out how both internal and external (partner funding) can also be drawn down to secure delivery.

Recommendation and Reasons

Executive are asked to:

30. Support the overarching aims of the Vision for the city centre approved in November 2021, which set out an inclusive vision for residents and business.

Reason: To re-launch the Vision for the city centre and re-focus partner collaboration and drive delivery.

31. Approve the updated themes which set out the key aims of the Vision and emphasise the focus on residents and city centre businesses through the change in name to "Our" City Centre.

Reason: To reflect the current priorities for the city, emphasising the importance of the city's residents and of creating an inclusive city through the Vision and subsequent delivery strategy.

32. Instruct officers to work with the Economic Partnership to bring together key partners and stakeholders to promote effective collaboration on delivering the Vision for the city centre through the creation of a joint delivery strategy.

Reason: To ensure that the Our City Centre Vision is collectively owned by stakeholders and communities. A jointly owned delivery strategy is key to realising the Vision. Effective collaboration between partners and stakeholders will drive delivery and maximise benefits. The detailed "actions" within the themes were only aspirations to be explored further through the drafting of a delivery strategy.

Background

My City Centre Engagement and Vision

33. The My City Centre Project was commissioned by Executive in August 2019, with the aim:
"To engage the public and stakeholders to develop a long term social, environmental and economic strategic vision for a sustainable future for York city centre."
34. Following project scoping, procurement of consultancy support and establishment of a project Stakeholder Group of key city partners to guide the process, a first round of engagement commenced on 2 March 2020. However, in response to Covid the project and engagement was paused in April 2020.
35. In April 2021, after a 12 month pause, the Executive Member for Economy and Strategic Planning approved the recommencement of the project, and engagement was re-launched in late May 2021.
36. As the culmination of this significant 'conversation' and engagement with city partners the Vision for the city centre was approved by Executive in November 2021. This set out an

aspirational 10-year Vision for the city centre, developed from the extensive public engagement and stakeholder involvement.

37. The Vision defined ‘a long term social, environmental and economic strategic vision for a sustainable future for York city centre’, responding to the changing use of the high-street by local residents and visitors, and immediate impacts of the Covid pandemic, which presented both challenges and opportunities for the city centre.
38. Local residents and families were seen as central to the future of the city centre, ensuring vibrant community use of the city centre throughout the day, on each day of the week and across the year, to support businesses and drive social and cultural activity. This would only be achieved by creating a place which is safe, attractive, inclusive and sustainable, and establishing the policy and regulatory environment to support this and enable businesses to thrive.
39. The My City Centre Vision proposed a range of actions designed to improve the city centre; however, these actions were only aspirations as opposed to firm commitments. When the Vision was approved in November 2021, it was intended that a Delivery Strategy, owned by key stakeholders, would set out the next steps to realising the Vision.
40. Having a clear Delivery Strategy is critical to ensuring delivery and seeing the Vision translated into tangible outcomes to support the success of the city centre. The approval of the Vision highlighted the need for a Delivery Strategy to drive delivery and measure progress and success. It also acknowledged that it was essential that the Vision remained a live document, which would evolve, and be reviewed in response to changing circumstances.

Our City Centre – Re-Launching the Vision

41. In the two years since the My City Centre Vision was adopted, the city centre has continued to recover strongly from the impact of the pandemic, and there has been an evolving context, including; changing patterns in the use of city centres across the country, reflecting increased use of online retail, increased demand for leisure and hospitality, ever greater emphasis on the overall

experience of a place and the role of public space, and regulatory change impacting accessibility and business activity.

42. Over this period, the city has also adopted three significant 10-year strategies, which were the product of further city-wide engagement and are joint strategies across city partners. Most recently the council has adopted a new Council Plan.
43. To reflect these changes, the current environment and to align to these city strategies, this report proposes an evolution of the 8 themes of the Vision to draw out certain elements. To emphasise and highlight this progression, it is proposed that the Vision is re-launched as the “Our City Centre Vision” (Annex 1), with a stronger focus on accessibility, residents, climate resilience and carbon reduction.

Figure 1: Our City Centre Vision Themes



44. The most significant change is the creation of a new theme focused on the implementation of the Climate Change Strategy in the City Centre: Theme 3 A sustainable city fit for the future.
45. There is significant opportunity for city centre partners to contribute to the delivery of the Climate Change Strategy and support the city’s ambition to be Net Zero by 2030.

46. As our Economic Strategy highlights, the city centre plays a vital role for our retail and visitor economies, with changing consumer habits post-Covid demanding a rebalancing of the use of space, including better use of fallow spaces such as empty premises and unused floors. We need to support our retail and visitor economies to increase their productivity, and this can be achieved by making the city centre more flexible and attractive, and focussing on the unique experience that York can offer.
47. In parallel with the consultation and development of the Vision, a review of the pedestrianised area of the city centre was undertaken which included the geographical extent and hours of operation. Some elements of the vision assumed the footstreet hours were to be extended to 7pm. This was particularly the case for the theme “*An attractive city centre offer at all times - supporting outdoor eating and café culture and creating a family friendly environment in the early evening*”. This change was never made, and the footstreets now reopen to vehicles at 5pm. This does not make the theme obsolete, because creating an attractive offer at all times in the city centre and utilising the space available are still important to the vibrancy of the city centre. However, it does mean is that city centre partners need to think differently about how this can be achieved.
48. One of the main restrictions during the Covid pandemic was usable space for businesses, particularly the additional space hospitality businesses could make available. There were restrictions on the number of people allowed inside venues and social distancing requirements. This led to a surge in the desirability of, and demand for, outdoor eating and café culture. To support the survival of many city centre businesses this use of the space was prioritised, with emergency legislation to facilitate additional highway licences.
49. Since then, there has been a wider consideration of the impacts the Covid measures had, and steps have been taken to ensure that these measures, which were aimed at supporting businesses and creating a vibrant city centre, are not to the detriment of creating an inclusive and accessible city.

Partner Engagement and Delivery Strategy

50. The Vision is not a council document, it is owned by the city as a whole – its partners, businesses and communities. Some of the measures, particularly creating the right environment for success through regulation, sit with the council, but there are significant strands which will need to be delivered in partnership or directly by other key stakeholders.
51. To focus this activity and ensure the Vision becomes a reality it is proposed to develop a shared Delivery Strategy with partners and stakeholders, which will be brought back to Executive for endorsement at a future meeting.
52. Working with the Economic Partnership, officers will engage with previous City Centre Stakeholder Group membership, to establish a productive task and finish group to co-ordinate activity in the city through the creation of a Delivery Strategy.
53. The Delivery Strategy will be co-designed and establish clear and realistic routes to realising the Vision aims. It will:
 - Provide additional detail on achieving the Vision aims.
 - Define a delivery route for individual actions including: quantifying resource requirements at high level; setting out potential funding sources; identifying approvals and consents, and establishing the future engagement approach.
 - Set out the priority actions, early wins and longer term projects within the strategy as a whole, and establish broad timescales for delivery, sequencing of activity where relevant, and relationships with wider strategies and projects.
 - Outline the roles and responsibilities of the council and existing partners across the suite of actions, identify potential additional partners where appropriate.
 - Outline governance structures for projects related to individual actions, and for the programme as a whole.
 - Identify cross-cutting actions from elsewhere in the Economic Partnership which will support the delivery of the Our City

Centre vision - for example in business support, city promotion and climate change action.

- Establish an approach to the marketing and dissemination of the Vision as whole to the public, stakeholders and potential city investors/occupiers.

54. The Delivery Strategy will also include a monitoring and evaluation approach, defining measurable outcomes for the actions, methods and frequency of monitoring, and establishing in more detail the overall vision review mechanism (nominally envisaged to be undertaken around 3 years from inception).
55. As already noted, the Vision represents a bold ambition with significant resource requirement and a need for co-ordinated efforts with partners to deliver. Given the scope of the Vision, external funding will be essential to deliver the full ambition. Although there are elements of the Vision which will be delivered as secondary impacts of other investments and will thus not require separate funding.
56. Officers will continue to explore funding opportunities for specific elements of the Vision, including any future rounds of Levelling Up Funding and through the regional devolution settlement discussions.
57. Following adoption of the Delivery Strategy, and where individual projects flowing from the Vision are council led, they will be managed through the corporate project management approach, and have resources allocated to them, through further Executive approvals.
58. The Council has a significant role to play in shaping a number of transformational city centre projects, but there are also a number of significant schemes being brought forward for delivery by partners. Across the Council and partners, major city centre schemes which are key to delivering the Vision include: the Castle Gateway, Parliament Street and St Sampsons Square, and Coney Street and the Riverside Walkway.
59. **Castle Gateway** - the schemes within the Castle Gateway masterplan align to the Our City Centre Vision across a number of

the themes, including; the opportunity to better celebrate the nationally significant heritage assets, embrace the riverside with a new pedestrian walkway and greening of the river (Foss) edge, and also offer the potential for family friendly space including play space and open space in the city centre.

60. **Parliament Street and St Sampson Square** - present a significant opportunity at the heart of the city centre. The existing public realm is worn and tired, and in desperate need of investment. Securing investment to revamp Parliament Street is key to realising the Vision for the city centre, improving accessibility, creating a more family friendly space, and increasing the suitability for the widest possible range of uses.
61. **Coney Street and Riverside Walkway** - this private sector led project is important to realising the Vision aim of opening up and celebrating the cities rivers in a way that is not impacted by flooding. The opportunity to create a new riverside walkway link has been a city ambition over many years and its delivery linked to the wider Coney Street regeneration would be a key benefit of this scheme.
62. Further work is required, working in collaboration with partners in the city to further develop a prospectus of priority schemes which can be used as a focus for future funding bids. This work will be a key element of the partner collaboration under the Economic Partnership and sit alongside the Delivery Strategy.

Consultation Analysis

63. The My City Centre project was shaped through extensive public and stakeholder consultation throughout its lifetime. This has followed the innovative 'My' approach to engagement developed at Castle Gateway and continued at other development projects such as York Central. The approach seeks to broaden and deepen project involvement through staged activity:

1 Build a brief: Use a variety of engagement tools to gain an understanding of a diverse range of people's needs and ideas. Make these ideas and differing perspectives visible.

2 Explore Challenges: Cultivate an open public debate about complex issues. Share and explain challenges, decisions and compromises throughout.

3 Make change together: Build ongoing networks to retain involvement, as well as long term community influence in decision-making, design and delivery.

- 64. Over 5,000 contributions to the Vision development were made over the three rounds of engagement, including almost 1,000 questionnaire responses final stage to test the draft vision. We have engaged with the public across a wide range of platforms, from pop-up events and interactive consultation stands in early stages, through use of the council’s Our City publication (received by all households) and interest group attendance, to social media videos and animations, wide press coverage and the interactive Facebook live Q&A event.
- 65. Further detail on the engagement, including the approach and findings can be found in the November 2021 Executive report and its supporting annexes.
- 66. The project Stakeholder Group (see Figure 1 below for composition) were instrumental in the development of the Vision.

Figure 2: My City Centre Stakeholder Group Composition



Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

67. **Option 1** – To accept the recommendations in the report, adopt the Vision aims / themes and instruct the additional work with the Economic Partnership to produce a Delivery Strategy.
68. **Option 2** – To request further work from officers on the Vision document, including additional engagement activity and receive a future report on a revised Vision and delivery approach.
69. **Option 3** – To adopt the vision but not instruct officers to prepare the associated delivery strategy.

Analysis

70. **Option 1** is the officer recommendation – the Vision was prepared through extensive engagement, is strongly supported by the public, and is considered to represent the best approach to ensuring the ongoing vibrancy and vitality of the city centre. The proposed delivery strategy is an essential step in ensuring that we are able to realise the actions within the vision.
71. **Option 2** – the Vision has been informed by extensive engagement and shaped by a strong stakeholder group, with the technical expertise of council officers. Further consultation and engagement was undertaken to inform the three key 10 year strategies, which we have drawn on to inform the amends to the Vision. It is considered unlikely that there would be significant benefit from further work, and there is a risk that this would result in over-consultation. There is a pressing need to implement the recommendations of the Vision given the ongoing changes to our highstreets and communities, and the vision will ensure we are well placed in forthcoming funding opportunities and programmes. Additionally, there is a review mechanism built into the vision approach, to deal with future change and circumstances.
72. **Option 3** – the Vision sets out a complex and extensive suite of ideas to improve the city centre, and requiring the input and involvement of a wide range of partners. It is considered unlikely that key elements of the vision content would be realised without the coordinating influence of a Delivery Strategy, and therefore this option would ultimately result in a reduction in overall project

benefits, and undermine the resource already committed to the project to date.

Organisational Impact and Implications

- **Financial**
As stated in the Financial Strategy Implications the recommendations do not have direct financial implications. There will be costs in the delivery of the vision and future interventions. These need to be considered by Executive including fully costed schemes and proposed funding options. There are no revenue budgets supporting the city centre vision and only limited capital funding available. There may be opportunities for external funding but that will need to be the subject of business cases considered by Executive.
- **Human Resources (HR)**
Realising the Vision and associated ambitions in this paper will require resources. Whilst resources will not all be from City of York Council employees, where there are, and this requires a change to an employee's work and possible impacts on grade or new recruitment; all employee impacts will follow HR processes and further specific advice can be sought when further details are known.
- **Legal**
There are no legal implications at this stage. Legal Services will advise on detailed implications if a Delivery Strategy is developed.
- **Procurement**
No procurement implications
- **Health and Wellbeing**
The Our City Centre Vision includes significant commitment to the 'healthier and fairer' ambitions of the York Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and therefore the Health and Wellbeing implications of this strategy are positive.
- **Environment and Climate action**
The vision for the city centre sets the policy context in which the regulatory framework for decisions on how the city centre operates. Therefore, as the vision is developed into a delivery

strategy, work with the teams responsible for the city centre is key to delivery of the vision.

The inclusion of the new theme within Our City Centre Vision for 'A sustainable city fit for the future', reflects the ambition within the York Climate Change Strategy. The city centre will play a vital role in contributing to the decarbonisation of York and adapting to a changing climate. Within this theme, consideration should be given to the energy efficiency of new and existing buildings, low carbon heating systems and renewable energy generation, while also considering the impacts of flooding, overheating and natural ecosystems.

- ***Affordability***

The themes around family friendly, affordable city centre and thriving businesses and productive buildings, will contribute to the council's Affordability core commitment by providing affordable access to the city centre for residents giving them access to affordable cultural experiences for example and good quality jobs for people in the city to help improve household incomes.

- ***Equalities and Human Rights***

The Equalities Impact Assessment was scoped out when the vision was adopted by the Council (Exec in Nov 21). This report is about tweaking/updating the vision, it is not introducing any new commitments at this stage.

The Equalities Impact Assessment(s) will therefore be fully revisited when we report back the Delivery Strategy.

- ***Data Protection and Privacy***

Please see Annex B

- ***Communications***

Communications have been engaged by the regeneration team, having supported the initial work around the Vision. Stakeholders are being updated about this report and a communications strategy will be needed around the delivery plan to raise awareness of the vision across the city as well as highlight the projects that are being delivered and the impact they are having.

- **Economy**
York city centre is home to around a quarter of York's businesses and is a key attractor of inward investment and business growth. This report builds on key elements of the York Economic Strategy 2022-2032 and the involvement of the York Economic Partnership in shaping future delivery of the Our City Centre Vision will ensure continued close alignment with city and business priorities.

Risks and Mitigations

73. The principal risks associate with the project at this stage are reputational and 'non-delivery' or 'opportunity cost' related, given the project stage, which is the re-launch of the Vision.
74. There is a risk that having engaged extensively and raised expectations amongst the public, the vision is not ultimately realised. This would also result in the decline of the city centre as a hub for commercial social and cultural activity. The risk of not delivering the vision is mitigated by the strong partnerships and relationships formed throughout the project's development, and the detailed and robust delivery strategy which is proposed to be brought back to the Executive.
75. Other specific risks need to be considered through the development of the Delivery Strategy – and that document will be expected to highlight key risks and mitigations, specifically including those relating to the implications above.

Wards Impacted

76. Guildhall and Micklegate Wards

Contact details

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Background papers

29.08.2019 Executive Committee. Agenda Item 29: My City Centre Project - Establishing a Strategic Vision for York City Centre

27.4.21 Decision Session of the Executive Member for Economy & Strategic Planning. Agenda Item 44: Engagement Strategy - Economic Strategy, Skills Plan and My City Centre

18.11.2021 Executive Committee. Agenda Item 52: My City Centre Strategic Vision – Adoption of Vision and Next Steps

Annexes

Annex A: Our City Centre Vision

Annex B: Data Protection Impact Assessment DPIA

As there is no personal data, special categories of personal data or criminal offence data being processed, there is no requirement to complete a DPIA.

This is evidenced by completion of DPIA screening questions
CGT20733