

York City Centre: Public Realm and Spatial Masterplan to support the City Centre Area Action Plan

Bid to Yorkshire Forward for Support

February 2009

Summary

Yorkshire Forward have offered the City of York Council support to help develop and deliver a clear vision and masterplan for York. We have carefully considered the proposal from EDAW but consider it too wide in scope. Much work has already been done on the matters they set out as part of the recent review of our Sustainable Community Strategy and in progressing the LDF Core Strategy and City Centre Area Action Plan. We don't want to duplicate this as it would not be an effective use of resources and could create public/stakeholder confusion.

Instead we would like your support to develop key elements of the City Centre Area Action Plan and in particular input into the development of a Spatial Masterplan for the city centre which will be a key component of the AAP. We are seeking your support to carry out a thorough audit and analysis of the public realm in the city centre and its key linkages using the 'Placecheck' approach. This will be a unique and comprehensive review of the city centre spaces and street network. We would also like urban design support to help develop the spatial strategy and articulate it through strong visuals and to help us to articulate plans for the urban network (the public realm) and the key 'action areas' identified in the AAP.

We would also seek your support to develop the Accessibility Masterplan for the city centre, which will clearly be a key driver and influence for the wider spatial Masterplan. This will consider issues of access, parking, public transport, the extension of York's footstreets, and linkages with key areas such as York Northwest.

We believe the approach of using consultants to support key strands of work on the AAP, is better than asking consultants to carry out a complete vision and strategy for the city centre. The latter approach would duplicate work that has already been done or is underway, and would create confusion as to the role of the 'City Centre AAP' vs the 'city centre vision and masterplan'.

Strategic Justification

Why are we asking for support on accessibility, the public realm, and developing a spatial masterplan for York City Centre ?

The quality of the city centre and its public realm is critical to the continued economic health of York. This is acknowledged in a number of key strategic documents including:

- The **Future York Group Report** (2007) - this set out a number of key recommendations including developing a clear masterplan to guide development and investment decisions; continued growth in tourism spend; and

delivering transformational enhancements to York's visitor attractions and **to the quality of the public realm** (Recommendations E4 and P6). One of the significant actions identified was "improved streets and public spaces with a high quality well designed public realm, that is spectacular both by day and night with an exciting programme of events and activities for residents and visitors." (page 7). It also says that "City of York Council should give priority to improving the quality of the public realm across the historic city including paving, lighting, signage and public spaces." (page 24). It states that this will require a creative approach to funding and the involvement of the public and private sectors. *Through the City Centre AAP the Council is taking up this challenge.*

- The **Sustainable Community Strategy** (2008) has high level objectives for amongst other things a Thriving City and a City of Culture. Under a Thriving City it identifies a lack of investment in the city's heritage and tourist industry with increasing competition and a fall in visitor numbers. It seeks investment in the heritage and cultural infrastructure to support this. Under the City of Culture it has a Strategic Aim, amongst other things "to be a city of high quality spaces" with actions to achieve this identified as:
 - an urban design plan
 - creating attractive and stimulating spaces
 - de-cluttered and creatively lit spaces
 - spaces will be linked with clear and perhaps themed routes
 - river fronts opened up and their opportunities exploited.

The City Centre AAP will be the overarching plan for York City Centre to achieve these key objectives.

- The Visit York partnership document "**York a Vision for Tourism**" (2009) is seeking to achieve 5% average annual growth in expenditure to support the 10,000 plus jobs in tourism. One of the seven 'key ambitions' to deliver the new vision for tourism is: "enhance York's public realm so that it becomes the most special in England." *The City Centre AAP will have a central role in delivering this objective.*
- The **York Economic Programme** (2009) - this recognizes that the city centre is the economic powerhouse of the local economy. There are over 30,000 jobs in or on the edge of the city centre, the biggest concentration of employment in the City of York. Creating the right conditions in the city centre to enhance economic vitality is therefore crucial. The programme identifies a number of initiatives to enhance the quality of the public realm and ensure the city centre is a vibrant location for events and activities. *The City Centre AAP will provide the overarching plan to address these issues and ensure all parts of the city centre, including its public realm and the peripheral streets can play a valuable economic role.*
- The **City Centre Area Action Plan** (2008) - the AAP Issues and Options Consultation (Summer 2008) generated very strong support for public realm improvements in general and for a combination of those options in the report that dealt with public realm issues. A key message from this first stage of the AAP was that improvements need to be coordinated and holistic, yet appropriate to specific spaces. This reflected the objective of York's Community Strategy to increase the City's cultural offer and support a greater level of public exchange through festivals and events in York's public spaces.

The Preferred Options (next stage) of the AAP will introduce a City Centre Spatial Masterplan. The Spatial Masterplan element of the City Centre AAP will

provide a co-coordinated approach to enhancing the public realm, identifying new development opportunities in the city centre and maximizing the wider benefits from new developments and areas of potential such as Castle Piccadilly, the Cultural Quarter, Gateway Streets etc.

The key role of the City Centre Area Action Plan

The City Centre AAP is the first comprehensive review of York City Centre in over 40 years, last one being the Esher Report in 1968. The Future York Group Report June 2007 includes a key recommendation that the Council prepare a Masterplan, reflecting the Future York Vision, to guide development and investment decisions, and promote investment. We see the historic city centre, representing the international image of York and also its economic powerhouse, as the priority for such a masterplan.

The York City Centre Area Action Plan is the ideal process from which to deliver a City Centre Masterplan for York. The AAP will provide a 20 year vision, strategy and policies to build on its current strengths and address key weaknesses.

The AAP will provide a robust grounding in the York LDF providing conformity with national and regional planning objectives, conformity with the aims of the Sustainable Community Strategy, as well as having statutory status once adopted.

Key elements of the City Centre AAP will be :

- Policies – a suite of policies and allocations to guide future development.
- A Spatial Masterplan – this will articulate the spatial vision and objectives for the city centre, focusing on public realm improvements, transport and accessibility proposals, and projects and initiatives for the main ‘action areas’ within the City Centre including regeneration of the peripheral areas.

We want to develop a long term Strategy for the City Centre. Quick fixes rarely work; what is needed is a sustained and durable commitment to transform York’s urban realm. A willingness to make a long-term commitment is essential if the AAP is to deliver a successful Spatial Masterplan

The Ask: *We are looking for Yorkshire Forward support to develop the Spatial Masterplan element of the AAP. Further details of key strands of support we are seeking are set into the remainder of this note.*

City Centre AAP: Spatial Masterplan

Introduction

The City Centre Area Action Plan needs to promote diversity of activities and experience. In promoting diversity, it will be important to exploit the opportunities presented by areas in transition - places, on the fringes of the City Centre, such as Hungate; Castle Piccadilly, Layerthorpe; the Barbican, York Central and the Gateway Streets, where economic and social changes present opportunities for new types of business and lifestyles to flourish. These areas should not be left to develop in isolation. These spaces should be linked together (and integrated with the core of the city centre) through high quality pedestrian connections, forming a network of improved and enhanced spaces across the City Centre.

We can learn from the cosmopolitan culture that makes small European cities like Bruges and Freiberg successful. Making a place more cosmopolitan is partly about encouraging events, linkages and cultural activities that promote a sense of place. Examples closer to home include Sheffield where the Council have successfully implemented economic and urban regeneration initiatives, with key partner Agencies including Yorkshire Forward, by developing strategies to enhance public areas and improve key linkages.

A proven way to make a city attractive to visitors is to make it attractive to its citizens. The way local people use the city - especially its public and semipublic spaces - creates the city experience. Taking action now, in a time of economic downturn, will support local economies such as retail and tourism and give York an advantage over its competitors in times of recovery.

Increasingly European cities including many in the UK are realising the social, economic and environmental benefits of urban strategies which create or renew urban spaces to ensure great public space. This can be achieved alongside ensuring convenient vehicle access to service the city centre. Well used and well designed city spaces help to retain a vibrant economy which in turn attracts local people and visitors to enjoy public life.

Production of the Spatial Masterplan

Consultation on the Spatial Masterplan will be carried out through the AAP process at both Preferred Options and Publication stage. The Masterplan will be developed to deliver, and will also be shaped by, the policies of the City Centre Area Action Plan.

Through the production of the AAP the Council's City Development Team will steer development of the Masterplan and act as 'the client'. We are seeking support on key strands of work from Yorkshire Forward to move this forward.

Any consultants appointed through this process will need to conduct a review of the Council's objectives (coming out of the AAP Issues and Options) and work with a range of CYC officers to develop a Spatial Masterplan in time for public consultation on AAP Preferred Options in summer 2009.

Further work required to produce a City Centre Spatial Masterplan

We are looking for Yorkshire Forward support for some key strands of work to inform the development of our City Centre AAP:

1. Placecheck (or quality audit)
2. Placecheck analysis
3. City Centre Accessibility Masterplan
4. Completion of the Central Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal
5. Spatial Masterplan for AAP Preferred Options
6. Spatial Masterplan for AAP Publication
7. Public Realm specification and guidance document

A summary of what is required under each strand of work is set out below.

1. Placecheck (or quality audit), and 2. Analysis

As a starting point we need to understand the quality of our spaces. To measure quality effectively we must ask the right questions to the right audience. It is important that our appreciation of quality is not just that of our own but also that of others. Different perspectives will help us identify both what is good and what is bad in terms of how a place looks, feels, smells, and functions from the point of view of - a resident; a performer; a shopper; a tourist; someone with a physical disability; someone responsible for its maintenance and so on and so on. It is also important to know what resources and skills might be available now and in the future that could benefit a place.

'Placecheck' is a method of assessing the qualities of a place, showing what improvements are needed, and focusing people on working together to achieve them. The Placecheck method was devised by Rob Cowan and developed on behalf of the Urban Design Alliance with funding from the DTLR (now CLG) and English Partnerships. At the centre of the method, is a list of questions, 'the Placechecklist', which can be tailored to particular needs. There are no set rules about who takes part in Placecheck but it is important to base this on the objectives of the exercise and in terms of the collaboration and action that may follow it.

The organisers of the local Placecheck draw up their own tailor-made checklist after selecting the questions that seem most relevant and adding any more that seem important locally. This checklist is then distributed to participants in a walkabout or a meeting.

The key work of Placecheck Audit and Analysis needs to start as soon as possible to be completed by April 2009 if the AAP is to keep on track.

The ask: a facilitator is required to organise the 'Placecheck' and compile results.

3. City Centre Accessibility Masterplan

The Spatial Masterplan must be developed with regard to work on the City Centre Accessibility Masterplan. City of York Council Transport Planning Unit (TPU) are leading on the production of the Accessibility Masterplan and this must be a key consideration for the Spatial Masterplan in terms of both high level and site specific design themes and objectives.

Following an officer workshop, in July 2008, to consider the issues five specific areas to be investigated for accessibility and impacts of access changes were proposed:

- Gateway Streets - Micklegate / Blossom Street, Fossgate / Walmgate, Goodramgate, Piccadilly, Stonebow / Peasholme Green and Bootham / Gillygate
- Other potential Shopping Streets - Museum Street, Lendal, Duncombe Place, High Petergate and Castlegate
- Cultural Quarter - St Leonard's Place, Ouse Bridge and Leeman Road
- Castle Piccadilly Piccadilly, Castlegate, Coppergate/Pavement and Clifford Street/Tower Street
- York Central/York Northwest (and the importance of links with the separate but overlapping York Northwest Area Action Plan)

Work to complete the Accessibility Masterplan will be broken down in to four phases:

- **Phase 1** : A high level strategic review of public transport, walking and cycling routes into and within the city centre, including an assessment of what currently exists and how it is managed, together with an overview of key drivers for change. This is to be followed by an analysis of how and where these modes could access the city centre in the future and the implications for traffic management. (Work has begun but will require additional consultants support to be completed on schedule)
- **Phase 2** : Data gathering and analysis of the operation of the Footstreets zone, including a review of existing surveys, in conjunction with discussions with stakeholders and internal officer groups to assess the issues and consequently inform Phase 3 proposals. (This work is underway)
- **Phase 3** : Preparation of potential options for improvements or alterations to the city centre including the Footstreets Area and its operation. Followed by wider consultation on these options with internal officers, stakeholders, interest groups and the general public and subsequent analysis, leading to the preparation of detailed proposals / scheme amendments and assessment of their impact. (This work is yet to be started)
- **Phase 4** : Seek appropriate permissions from relevant committees prior to implementation of modified Footstreets zone. (This work is yet to be started)

Work will need to be completed by July 2009, so as to keep on-track with the AAP timetable.

The Ask: Consultants support to help complete the Accessibility Masterplan by July 2009.

4. Completion of the Central Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal

The findings of the ongoing character appraisal of the Historic Core Conservation Area will form a key part of the Spatial Masterplan evidence base. The character appraisal is currently being carried out by consultants on behalf of City of York Council and English Heritage.

5. Spatial Masterplan for City Centre AAP Preferred Options

City Centre AAP Preferred Options will set out the framework of the proposed Spatial Masterplan.

Findings from the AAP Issues and Options consultation; the York city centre 'Placecheck'; York City Centre Accessibility Masterplan; and the Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal will all be used to draw up the framework and key design principles for the Spatial Masterplan. At Preferred Options the draft Spatial Masterplan (for consultation) will:

- Contain high level design themes and objectives;
- Identify a network of sites, spaces and key linkages across the city centre to be developed in response to the findings of the AAP Issues and Options consultation and the latest evidence base;
- Set out objectives for each site, space or key linkage within the network (based on the findings of the key evidence base);
- Include details on viability as well as delivery partners and tools;
- Illustrate the strategy with diagrams and plans.

The work to develop the draft Spatial Masterplan for the AAP Preferred Options document will need to take place between May and August 2009. This will follow the key work on understanding the city centre public realm through the Placecheck process and other key evidence base outlined above.

The Ask: *Consultants support will be required in urban design to help to develop, illustrate and articulate the framework and key design principles of the Spatial Masterplan ready for Preferred Options consultation in September 2009.*

6. Spatial Masterplan for City Centre AAP Submission Draft

The AAP Submission Draft will contain the final York City Centre Spatial Masterplan. Primarily this will:

- Contain high level design themes and objectives;
- Develop a network of important spaces and key linkages across the city centre (periphery to core)
- Identify change and explain the rationale behind new and renewed designs;
- Develop a project plan or rolling programme of works to be carried out;
- Demonstrate the strategy through a series of detailed visual concepts illustrating each strategic project and the linkages between them;

The Spatial Masterplan will have two major components:

- 1) Urban Network (similar to the songlines principle¹) consisting of 'city spaces' and the key pedestrian links connecting them. Spaces and linkages such as Parliament Street, Newgate, King's Square, Exhibition Square, riversides and

¹ CYC Lottery funding bid (2006) which proposed to create a network of recognisable routes around the key spaces and features. Although unsuccessful the bid received very positive feedback from the funding board.

many more. The urban network will be broader in nature and span across the whole city centre area. It will be the overarching element of the Spatial Masterplan and the framework from which the major sites or 'action areas' (e.g. Castle Piccadilly, Cultural Quarter, Gateway Streets, the Barbican and Layerthorpe) will hang. The network will include a series of interconnected urban squares and spaces that present a good opportunity for public realm interventions and investments. These spaces differ from the main 'action areas' in that project delivery does not generally rely on the resolution of larger development. The project will achieve an incremental yet significant improvement to the perception and prosperity of the City Centre by:

- enhancing the character and quality of the city centre urban environment;
- developing an interesting and exciting pedestrian experience throughout the city centre;
- promoting and reinforcing the distinct character areas within the city;
- providing spaces for social exchange;
- introducing a hierarchy of spaces to aid orientation in the city centre;
- attracting inward investment.

- 2) Action Areas (or strategic projects) to be developed in accordance with the themes and objectives of the Spatial Masterplan. These key sites consist of the main (re)development opportunities in the City Centre. The objectives and concepts for each 'action area' will be presented in written and illustrative form. Once developed these areas will contribute enormously to the formation of a network of improved and enhanced spaces as well as meeting AAP objectives in terms of retail, offices, leisure etc.

Action Areas under consideration:

- Castle Piccadilly;
- Cultural Quarter;
- Gateway Streets;
- Ouse riverside
- the Barbican;
- Layerthorpe.

The final Spatial Masterplan will contain site specific details on delivery such as delivery partners and tools; financial management and funding; contract management and legal issues etc.

This work will need to take place between October 2009 and February 2010 following consultation on the AAP Preferred Options document in September 2009.

The Ask: *Consultants support will be required in urban design to help to develop, illustrate and articulate the final spatial strategy through a range of presentation techniques. At this stage the Spatial Masterplan will require detailed design solutions that are both viable in terms of accessibility and deliverability. We would expect consultant support at the subsequent AAP public Examination.*

7. Public Realm specification and guidance document

The guidance document will be developed alongside/ following adoption of the AAP. It will be in conformity with the design themes and objectives of the Spatial Masterplan and the AAP policies and evidence base (e.g. Conservation Area Appraisal). This associated document will set out guidance on the specification of works, e.g. materials, street furniture, signage, special needs, tree and planting, public art, sustainable quality, maintenance etc. It will become the Council's

guidance on works to implement the public realm strategy contained in the City Centre Spatial Masterplan.

This more detailed work would commence from October 2009 onwards once a Submission AAP (Spatial Masterplan) is agreed.

***The Ask:** Consultants support will be required with expertise in public realm design and specification.*

Conclusion

We have an unprecedented opportunity to deliver a 20 year strategy for the future health and prosperity of York City Centre. The historic core is the jewel in York's crown and is also its economic powerhouse with over 30,000 jobs located in or on the edge of York city centre.

The importance of developing a clear masterplan and the need for a strong focus on public realm improvements have come from key strategic documents such as the Future York Group report, the sustainable Community Strategy and the Visit York partnership's own vision document.

The City Centre AAP will provide the framework for developing that vision and clear spatial masterplan.

We are seeking some targeted support from Yorkshire Forward to complete the Spatial Masterplan as part of the City Centre Area Action Plan.

We are more than happy to discuss our ideas in more detail if that would help.

**Directorate of City Strategy
City of York Council
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Contact for further information:

**Dave Caulfield
Head of City Development
Tel:01904 551313**