

Public Consultation on the draft masterplan for Elland Road: findings and feedback

Executive summary

**Public consultation carried out for Leeds
City Council by FWA in collaboration with
Icarus and Austin-Smith:Lord**

April to June 2007

Executive Summary

About the Elland Road masterplan and its consultation

In 2006 the Development Department of Leeds City Council appointed the architectural practice Austin-Smith:Lord (ASL) to prepare a masterplan for the Elland Road area of south Leeds.

FWA, independent specialists in sustainable regeneration and consultation, were appointed in March 2007 by Leeds City Council to work in conjunction with ASL to carry out a public consultation on the draft masterplan. This was to enable a wide range of views about the future of the area to be taken into account to assist refinement of the masterplan and preparation of an informal planning statement for the area. FWA invited Icarus to work in partnership to design and deliver the consultation programme, which took place between April and June 2007.

The masterplan

The site

The area addressed by the masterplan involves land to the north and south of Elland Road, including: land occupied by Leeds United Football Club (LUFC), land owned and used by West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority (METRO) for public transport on match days, land in private ownership and use for warehousing and other business uses and land owned by Leeds City Council currently used as car parking on football match days. A significant proportion of the site currently presents as a poor quality physical environment.

The adopted Leeds Unitary Development plan designates the area of the site at Elland Road for 'leisure and tourism proposals which would enhance the regional and national role of the city' (LT5A).

Why the masterplan was commissioned

In commissioning the masterplan the City Council had recognised a number of factors relating to the site that a masterplan could help to address:

- Planned, rather than incremental, development would help to maximise the leverage of benefits for Leeds as a whole, and for the immediate local communities in particular; this was pertinent as commercial interests were beginning to come forward with proposals and expressions of interest for development;
- Its position as a highly visible site from the M621 and the London-Leeds rail line and the proximity to the city centre impacts on the image of the city as a whole;
- The importance of promoting public transport to and from the site given that the site already attracts large numbers of people on match days.

At the time the draft masterplan was prepared development interests in the site included:

- LUFC, who have expressed interest in developing the land they occupy – e.g for improved stadium facilities, banqueting and retail
- Stanley Leisure, who have an option to develop land on part of the site and have submitted a planning proposal for a casino; this proposal has not yet been determined
- The possible relocation of a divisional HQ for West Yorkshire Police

In addition, Leeds City Council wished to make a Council owned site available to any developer who might come forward to build an entertainment arena in Leeds. The Council wished to test whether this site was potentially suitable by including an arena as an option in the masterplan, and subsequently consulting on it.

The options to be tested in the consultation

The masterplanning work carried by ASL and its technical advisers led to two main options to be presented for consultation – one with and one without an arena. The other main elements of the options included: redevelopment of the football stadium including retail, catering and a hotel; potential for a casino, conference and exhibition facilities, potential for mixed use development such as commercial, leisure and health related facilities; potential relocation of a divisional Police HQ; approximately 76 new housing units; a public transport hub; landscaped car parking for 2700 vehicles, new public realm and other environmental improvements; an internal service road and improvement of road junctions in the local area.

The options and the background to the masterplan were presented to each consultee before their feedback was sought.

The consultation brief and our response

In summary the brief set out by Leeds City Council was to ... 'design, develop and deliver a consultation process with residents and stakeholders to support the production of a Planning Statement for the area ... and for the process to ensure that the public has an opportunity to inform any proposals going forward and facilitate developments which have a positive physical, economic and social impact within the local area'.

Our approach in response was to design the consultation as a piece of 'needs' research for the site, the local area and its stakeholders, locally and across Leeds and beyond. This meant identifying and consulting with the people who use, have interests in, or responsibilities relating to, the site, or who the site impacts upon, or could impact upon in the future.

It was recognised that the scope of the project would not allow for a comprehensive consultation with the wider public but should instead take care to identify the people most likely to have interests in and/or be affected by the site and take proactive steps to engage with them to get their feedback. A stakeholder analysis workshop undertaken at an early stage started this process. It also facilitated the development of the consultation framework which included: setting out the scope of the consultation, themes within which to frame questions about the masterplan options, specific questions within themes, which questions were most relevant for which stakeholders and the methods of consultation that most suited the types and numbers of consultees and feedback required to fulfil the brief. The framework guided the planning and execution of the research programme.

Lines of questioning within the research aimed to get feedback relating to how the site is now, what it could or should be like in the future, and what could or should happen in the future and how.

Consultation programme

Consultation activities took place between April and June 2007 and involved 235 people and 26 different organisations, departments and groups. Methods included a series of in-depth face to face and telephone interviews with individuals and small groups, workshops with youth, community and special interest groups and a public drop-in day that was held in on the site in mid-June 2007. The latter was widely advertised.

Overview of the feedback

The most striking feedback to come out of the study is the importance of addressing the current situation concerning parking and transport on match days and ensuring that there is a robust strategy and management plan for transport as and when the site develops in the future. Significantly, there are numbers of local people who are in the apparently entrenched position of not wanting to see change at the site, especially reduction in car parking capacity, for fear that it will worsen an already difficult situation for them. Aside from these, there are others who are similarly concerned about traffic and parking but who

nevertheless can imagine future benefits for the local area if the site development goes ahead in a certain way that addresses current and envisaged problems.

For a proportion of local people it seems it is probable they will not be ready to engage with or accept the development until they feel their fears on a number of issues have been adequately addressed. These include:

- Car parking nuisance will worsen as visitor numbers and frequency of large events go up
- Traffic congestion and road safety issues will get worse if the development attracts more visitors who generate more local traffic
- Noise leakage and late night nuisance will impact on neighbouring residential areas (including any new housing) if an arena is built on the site
- That a casino will impact negatively on the local area through social problems and crime

The cause of some of these fears as expressed during the consultation are readily apparent and strategies could potentially be developed to address them. Other fears may be due more to perception and lack of information. This points to the potential value of a good communication strategy to be instigated at the earliest opportunity and for this to complement a robust stakeholder engagement strategy that enables local people to feel they are being heard, contributing to successful decision making about the future development and management of the site and enjoying benefits such as local jobs, training and participation in use of the new amenities.

With the exception of those who are in the entrenched position regarding parking issues, consultees were mainly in agreement that the site is an important gateway to the city and, given its current presentation, it is important that any development presents the best possible face. Some suggested that if possible it should have at least one built element or installation that attracts an iconic status across Leeds and beyond.

Many consultees saw the value of increasing the local leisure offer, including retail catering and activity facilities, to add vibrancy and amenity to the local area and also to provide new local jobs and associated training and development.

Other key points concern the siting of the arena within Leeds. Many consultees were in favour of an arena to be built in Leeds, but not all for it to be located at Elland Road. Many local residents were wary of this due to perceived nuisance factors and people with over-arching interests in the future of Leeds thought it should be located in the city centre. Some residents and other consultees felt that the arena would be critical to the viability of the development and would strongly welcome it.

There were a wide range of suggestions concerning ways to make the development more sustainable. These included integrating good environmental management into the design and operation the site from the outset and similarly looking for good ways to genuinely and effectively engage local people and to maximise the positive

economic impact of the development on the local area. It was suggested by some that excellence in sustainability could become part of the site's reputation and attraction to visitors.

Summary feedback from consultation by theme

Theme One: Sense of identity and quality of place

There was a great deal of consensus that the site needs treatment to overcome what was described as its current lifeless, partially derelict, outmoded and incoherent look and feel. This was thought important to the city overall as a gateway site as viewed by visitors to Leeds and for boosting the image and opportunities of a local area with relatively high levels of deprivation. Factors such as improving perceptions of safety and attractiveness to visit and live in to the area and encouraging investment were all motivators behind the comments.

In addition there was a call, particularly from those who see this most strongly as a gateway site of significance to Leeds as whole, for the development to be ambitious yet synergistic and judicious in its mix, to seek inspiration and design excellence through, for example, international competitions, and to seek to raise some aspect of the site to iconic status. Encouraging and supporting LUFC to overcome reputation issues, taking note of its progress as it does so and working within related timescales to develop the site were also recommended.

Theme Two: Traffic management, parking and connectivity

The impacts and options for travel to the site were the strongest feedback theme of the whole consultation. The local community had a very strong view that it needs to be protected from parking and traffic volume nuisance as things are at present and were adamant that the negative impacts of traffic congestion and parking in local streets should not be allowed to get any worse.

The issues that need to be addressed were outlined as:

- The reliance of many match day visitors on unregulated free parking in adjacent streets, which causes a high degree of nuisance to the local community
- The effects of drawing cars to the area on match days because of the provision of plentiful, relatively cheap on-site parking and the above on-street parking: congestion, noise and, possibly, reduced air quality are the main negative effects
- The relative unpopularity, perceived unreliability and expense of public transport as an alternative mode of vehicular travel for visitors
- The relatively unattractive options of walking and cycling to the site from city centre transport nodes due to poor routes and safety concerns

Local residents expressed that the potential scenario of LUFC gate numbers going up concurrently with parking places on site being reduced as untenable, whilst the fear that an arena on the site would bring traffic nuisance on a far more frequent basis was also of particular concern. They were not, in the main, convinced that sufficient people would switch to public transport to mitigate the problem. Local people and transport planners recognised that extending Residents' Parking Zones around the site would help to reduce problems in designated areas but these schemes would only be acceptable if they are well managed and designed with the convenience of residents in mind.

Achieving successful modal shift away from cars to more sustainable transport was high on many people's agenda with a strong view that the site operators had key responsibility to encourage and finance this as part of their business planning. Others, from the public and the private sector, would be willing and able to support site businesses in this matter and broker partnerships as necessary. There was a strong theme regarding making public transport more convenient, cheaper and desirable than driving right into the site, especially for big events. Popular ideas included travel passes/ticketing deals, provision of high quality information about transport options, bus priority lanes, making buses, etc, more attractive and user friendly and reconsidering the potential of train and tram links. This needs to be balanced, in local residents' minds, with making parking on the site so difficult that it forces drivers to seek free on-street parking elsewhere in their communities. Another balance to be achieved was expressed as ensuring the site is accessible enough to receive sufficient visitors to make it attractive and viable at all times of the day and week.

Other ideas included making a safe and legible walking and cycling route from the city centre and maintaining or upgrading local walking links to neighbourhoods south of the site, all, potentially, to be paid for from the development.

Consultees, mainly from outside the community, were often keen to investigate the potential of the site becoming a park and ride facility for the city centre during weekdays to operate at off-peak times for the leisure facilities.

Theme Three: Environmental Quality and Management

This theme excited a wide range of consultees to suggest possibilities that this site could afford in exemplary environmental design and management.

Suggestions included not only meeting accepted standards of environmental performance but also trialing new approaches and partnerships to be innovative and go well beyond current minimum requirements. The concept that the site could not only regenerate this part of Leeds but could also showcase leading edge sustainability in a commercial setting was inspiring to some and, they suggested, could be used as a differentiating factor with customers.

Some of the measures suggested by consultees, such as sharing the benefits of bulk green purchasing, may require little outlay beyond commitment and organisation. Other interventions will require more up-front investment, but the principle of sustainability is to look at the long term cost-benefit equation.

Theme Four: Economic considerations, including employment

Many consultees saw the potential benefits of area regeneration, new local jobs and the purchasing power of new incoming business, although the potential scope and scale of this impact is as yet unclear. As and when businesses begin to think about setting up on the site there appear to be clear benefits in starting a co-ordinated programme of local community engagement, especially to link with the local labour market and business community. There could be potential to increase local labour market fit with incoming employer needs through pre-recruitment and subsequent in-service training programmes. This would need profiling, and local training establishments and funding co-ordinated into any programme to lever maximum benefit for the area.

It was suggested that the incoming businesses need to be encouraged, supported and facilitated to work in co-operation to effect this, and to promote the value of good social responsibility policies. Support for the community to engage with the new opportunities may also need to be provided. Wherever possible preventing the money coming into the site once it is operational from leaking straight out of the area will help to make the site more sustainable.

Some consultees see the job creation and local economic benefits of some of the proposed development on site as minimal and not worth the disbenefits they see in locating certain elements elsewhere, such as the city centre. These comments especially relate to the casino and the arena.

Consultees also advocated a joined up approach to maximising the positive economic impact of the development. For example they suggest ensuring that local transport, housing, amenity and environmental quality is addressed as part of an overall package of reasons for those obtaining the new jobs to stay in or relocate to the local area. If not, some fear that those who obtain better jobs may move out of the immediate area and travel back in to work each day.

Theme Five: Safety and comfort for users

The main issues discussed around safety were connected with fast, busy roads around the site and the difficulties of keeping people and cars out of conflict with each other on match days. Operational difficulties with segregating home and visiting football supporters was another issue and people, including football supporters, were occasionally fearful in crowd disturbances.

The main issues around comfort are the lack of family friendly facilities at the stadium which football supporters say is helping to keep family groups away from matches.

Looking ahead, consultees had numerous suggestions for addressing transport, parking and movement safety and for making sure the site is fully accessible for people with disabilities, and family friendly.

Strongly made suggestions for keeping the site feeling safe were to make sure it is well used all of the time, and has a friendly feel, for example by local people adopting it for their own use and employment and helping to give it a strong sense of location - "and soul".

A number of consultees, especially local people, expressed concern that a casino would attract undesirable people and behaviour to the site, and potentially bring more social and crime problems to the area. Members of the Muslim community expressed concern about a gambling establishment in the area and would like further consultation as plans develop. There appears to be a need to address the fears articulated either as real potential issues, or, if they are founded mainly on myths to help people be better informed about the way a casino would likely be licensed, sited and managed on the Elland Road site.

Theme Six: Provision of new housing and its quality

There was a balance of opinion in favour of building new housing on the site, but a very strong message about getting the quality, mix and the approach right if it does go ahead – preferably right down to the details of layout, landscape provision and treatment, parking provision and control and especially buffering from the rest of the site and Elland Road itself. Those who were not in favour of new housing pointed to the traffic related problems already endured by existing residents and doubted the suitability of the location for families. Others in favour pointed to the vote of confidence in the area that new housing investment would demonstrate, plus the opportunity to widen the choice of housing locally, including for larger families.

Messages about suitable and attractive housing types and sizes were somewhat mixed suggesting more research into this and the trends in the local housing market will be valuable to create a successful housing development in both commercial and area regeneration terms.

Theme Seven: Site synergy to maximise positive benefits

The clear message from consultees was that all user and stakeholder needs must be thought through and looked at in the round at the earliest possible stage in the design and development process. Specific functions and the meeting of needs should be integrated into allocation and layout of space and movement flows, and design and operational thinking. Making the right space in the right places and getting the right balance of open space to buildings and roads will be important, so too the distribution of travel access points across the site.

Opportunities to install environmental management will be realised most effectively if integrated into the scheme from the start.

Most, if not all, of these functions and considerations would help to make the site considerably more sustainable to run and this is thus of utmost importance for 'future proofing' the development.

Theme Eight: Sense of community and community cohesion

There was a good deal of enthusiasm and many ideas for how the site and the local community could co-exist in a mutually beneficial relationship and for this to bring other benefits to the wider community through enhanced sense of pride and opportunities to mix socially in the local area. Examples included local people working on the site, schemes and pricing policies to encourage community participation, accessible and attractive public realm and social outlets. Making participation by young people possible was an especially strong call from consultees, including young people themselves, since there are relatively few youth-friendly facilities available out of school time.

Arguments were made for why investment in a relationship between the site and its local community could bring business benefits – and the suggestion that it could be exemplary in this respect. Conversely, failure to explore these opportunities could potentially affect the general viability of the site, including alienating the community from supporting these or future developments, security problems and the lost opportunity of developing a local market.

The positive ideas and opportunities suggested have to be seen in the context that current fears and detractors about the site's development - mainly transport issues – need to be met to the local community's general satisfaction before there can be any kind of widespread positive engagement.

Theme Nine: Visitor experience

There was a clear enthusiasm for the redevelopment of the site for social, sports and other leisure activities, particularly if an active engagement strategy with the local community can be effected to help make participation accessible to local people, including children and young people. Consultees expect a high quality, 'future proofed', integrated development that is attractive and distinctive.

Consultees stressed the need for careful market research and positioning of the offers on site in relation to other offers and facilities in both the public and private sectors. They were keen for the site to succeed and for there to be no likelihood of failure or the site becoming a financial burden in the future.

There was strong enthusiasm, particularly from people from across Leeds and football fans, for having an arena in Leeds and for the benefits of siting it at Elland Road. This was tempered by local concerns that the arena could bring more traffic misery, the additional nuisance of noise pollution and an imbalance of young adult visitors over

other age groups. It was also tempered by those with an overarching view of the success of Leeds who query whether this would be a good site for the arena and that it would be better sited in the city centre.

There was a great deal of agreement that the football stadium needs to be upgraded as the football club improves its fortunes, that the two aspects are synergistic and taken together are an important part of the image and reputation of Leeds as a successful, vibrant city. There was a suggestion by some that this outcome should be supported by public authorities responsible for the future well-being of Leeds.

The consultation involved a total of 235 people, including 14 individual or group interviews, a youth workshop, 4 group workshops, a half day workshop event with Beeston Forum and other invited community forums (52 participants) and a full day public drop-in event (95 participants). In addition to the community groups involved, people and organisations participating in the consultation included: Beeston and Holbeck Ward Members; First Bus; Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber, Hamara Healthy Living Centre, Leeds CC: Access Committee, Environmental Services, Highways Department, Learning and Leisure (Jobs and Skills), Planning Department; Leeds Chamber Property Forum, Leeds Civic Trust, Leeds Federated Housing Association, Leeds Initiative, Leeds United Members, Leeds United Supporters' Club, METRO, West Yorkshire Police,

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