



## Report of the Director of City Development

### Executive Board

Date: 13 February 2009

Subject: City Centre Park

<p><b>Electoral wards affected:</b> City &amp; Hunslet</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Ward Members consulted (referred to in report)</p>	<p><b>Specific implications for:</b></p> <p>Equality and Diversity <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Community Cohesion <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Narrowing the gap <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
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Eligible for call In

Not eligible for call in  
(details contained in the report)

### Executive Summary

The City Centre Vision Conference in January 2008 highlighted issues around the perceived lack of greenspace in and around the City Centre, which in turn has led to the development of a vision for a new City Centre Park.

With a view to considering the initial feasibility of this vision, the main existing greenspace within the City Centre has been audited. This has identified quality issues and also a large deficit of publicly accessible greenspace towards and to the south of the River Aire as part of our expanded city centre.

To seek to address this problem it is proposed to progress two objectives. Firstly, it is proposed to undertake further feasibility work to explore the potential to develop a new piece of quality greenspace on the Council's site at Sovereign Street. This could be the development of either a new first floor greenspace, retaining the existing car parking at ground level or the creation of an underground car park with a new public park at ground level. This new greenspace would provide new development opportunities to frame the public space created, along with pedestrian linkages along and to the south of the River Aire.

Secondly, and as a longer term objective, it is proposed to explore land assembly opportunities to the south of the River Aire, to assess the potential to deliver a significant greenspace development in partnership with landowners of major sites, which would function as a new park for the City Centre and also act as a catalyst for regeneration.

## **1 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Executive Board of the progress made to date on the proposal for a City Centre Park. Specifically, medium term and long term objectives have been identified which can be developed further through feasibility work, to enable specific proposals to be brought back to a future Executive Board.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 The Leeds City Centre Vision Conference took place at Leeds Town Hall on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2008. This major event brought together key players from business, local government and other public sector and community organisations to generate a vision for the development of Leeds City Centre. The Leeds City Centre Vision is the start of a shared initiative to shape a stronger City Centre, as part of Leeds role as a regional capital and our ambition to “move up a league”, of which the opportunity to create a City Centre Park has emerged as one of the key components.

- 2.2 One of the main themes that came out of the conference feedback was in relation to the perceived lack of greenspace in the City Centre. A number of big ideas were developed. In relation to improved greenspace and a City-Centre Park, two big ideas have particular relevance as outlined below:

“We will really go for sustainability and public realm improvement to be the unique selling point for Leeds. Enlarge the city centre so that the waterfront is at its centre; create a festival park in its centre, therefore greening and pedestrianising the city, thereby improving the city centre’s connectivity.”

“We will be a sustainable city by providing the infrastructure to enable affordable green city centre living, from cradle to grave. Create a public/private sector forum to drive forward a vision for the wider and safer public realm, so that it appeals to a diverse range of current and future inhabitants to instil a sense of community, non profit making public realm, free to use and available to all.”

Accordingly, at the June 2008 Executive Board meeting officers were asked to investigate the feasibility of implementing the ‘Big Ideas’ from the Conference.

- 2.3 In considering the Conference outcome it is clear that there has been a rapid expansion of City Centre living in recent years. The Leeds Economy Briefing Note highlights property investment in the region of £10bn in 10 years, £372 million of which was in City Centre apartments<sup>1</sup>. It is clear that during this period of development, the supply of new, accessible greenspace has not kept pace with the growth of city living and development of Leeds as a tourist attraction.
- 2.4 The City’s Renaissance Delivery Plan also recognised this issue, and notes that the City Centre now has a harder landscape quality in its streets and spaces. This issue raises a challenge for the City, which when combined with the feedback of the City Centre Conference brings credence to the broad consensus that a new green park would help to address the existing deficit of quality greenspace within Leeds City Centre.

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<sup>1</sup> Leeds Economy Briefing Note, Issue 35, Jan 2008

- 2.5 There has been a significant amount of regeneration in Leeds City Centre over the last 10 years. However, areas in need of improvement remain and the development of a City Centre Park will act as a catalyst to a broader regeneration of a key part of the city centre and provide the potential to open up the waterfront.
- 2.5 In order to access potential locations for a new City Centre Park and to begin to understand the project scope and outcomes, it was important that an audit of existing, publicly accessible green spaces was undertaken and the information gathered used to guide future proposals for the project. The audit assessed city centre greenspace in terms of:
- Location
  - Quantity
  - Quality
  - Linkages and Connectivity
  - Current end users
  - Current function
  - Current green flag status
- 2.6 Officers have assessed the main existing city centre greenspace provision including Green Flag Assessments where appropriate. These summary findings are listed in Appendix A.
- 2.7 The audit identified 10 existing sites that are within or adjoin the City Centre UDP boundary and the locations of these are shown in Appendix B. In summary, the audit identified a general lack of quality in the greenspace provision in the city-centre. Only Park Square meets the Green Flag Standard.
- 2.8 Importantly, when the locations of all of these greenspaces are plotted, it is clear that there is a major deficit in terms of greenspace towards and to the south of the River Aire and that the areas of greenspace should be linked through a network of squares and pedestrianised streets through the city centre and beyond. On a complementary basis, the area to the south is also the part of the City-Centre that has the greatest need for regeneration. Accordingly the development of a City Centre Park in this area of the City Centre will have the potential to be a spur to broader regeneration initiatives.
- 2.9 In considering the outcome of the greenspace audit undertaken, it is also evident to the 'City Rim' that there are some significant challenges to address to make meaningful improvements to the supply of quality greenspace in the area around the River Aire and in the southern part of the city centre. In view of this position, officers have given consideration to what the Council can achieve over the medium-term and start to plan for a new piece of quality greenspace now. Inevitably, this has led to an emphasis being placed on the Council's land holdings. In addition, it is also proposed that long-term plans are developed to consider the potential for a City Centre Park to the south of the River Aire, which could complement any greenspace developed by the Council, but would necessitate a more complex land assembly exercise or form part of major developments on sites in this southern part of the city centre.

### **3 Main Issues**

- 3.1 The successful delivery of a City Centre Park is clearly a key component of the vision to develop the City Centre as a vibrant, attractive and quality environment to

visit, live and work and to help attract new investment, thereby helping to enhance Leeds status as a European city. It is therefore proposed that the long-term objectives for a city centre park are as follows:

- To provide opportunities for new greenspaces which thread and weave through the City Centre and to the areas beyond.
- Improve connectivity particularly between the North and South banks of the River Aire to assist in the opening up of the waterfront
- To spur the expansion and regeneration and enhance employment to the southern part of the City Centre.
- To facilitate the longer-term potential to deliver a significant City Centre Park, looking at opportunities for land assembly with third parties.

3.2 To begin to address these long-term objectives, officers will need to progress two separate work strands. Firstly, opportunities for potential City Centre Park locations need to be identified, that will result in a site which is capable of in scale and quality of matching the best examples in other European and core cities. Opportunities for land assembly with third parties immediately to the south of the river could be explored in the first instance, to provide opportunities to open up the waterfront area, increase the profile of this area of the city centre and maintain linkages to the north of the river. The area proposed for consideration is shown in Appendix C. It is recognised that this area is one that is likely to be the subject of further long-term development, which consequently will create land assembly opportunities.

3.3 An area of the city such as this could provide a significant greenspace of almost 5ha in the future and link the south of the river to the north, creating opportunities to further enhance the profile of the waterfront in the city centre. However due to the complexity and nature of the land assembly issues involved, it is anticipated that it will be a considerable period of time before any firm proposals can be brought forward. The potential outcomes and opportunities will undoubtedly fluctuate and change as the development of this part of the city-centre progresses through the Area Action Planning process.

3.4 Secondly, key to the successful delivery of a city-centre park will be the integration of the Council's aspiration into the Local Development Framework to ensure that the planning framework plays a full role in facilitating the assembly and delivery of new greenspace. The City Centre Area Action Plan is currently at the preferred options stage.

3.5 Within the LDF, the City Centre Area Action Plan (AAP) will be the document that sets out specific policies and proposals for the use of land in the city centre. The city centre park was not included as a proposal at the Preferred Options consultation stage of the AAP (April 2007) but was a concept suggested by some respondents to an earlier consultation. A park proposal would need to be incorporated into the submission draft AAP which would be subject to a further period of public consultation prior to an examination in public. The draft AAP would need to include evidence to demonstrate that the proposal could be delivered. The timetable for the next stage of the production of the AAP is under review but it is anticipated that the AAP will be adopted in 2010 or 2011. The AAP will help provide the basis for land assembly and to secure appropriate terms of development around the proposed park as that sets out the basis for seeking funding for the park and other pedestrian links which are essential to the instigation of the city centre.

3.6 It is acknowledged that the ambition for a city-centre park will take time to deliver. However, In light of the desire for additional greenspace and the issues raised at the City Centre Vision conference, consideration has also been given to the potential to deliver a new quality piece of greenspace within a shorter timescale, which could complement a longer-term vision and which will provide a vital link to other squares and green spaces.. On this basis a series of medium term objectives for a new piece of quality greenspace in the City Centre have been proposed, these are:

- Up to a hectare in size
- Improves connectivity in the City Centre
- Provides a high quality environment which balances the passive and active recreational needs of:-
  - day visitors
  - residents
  - workers
- Can function as a civic space in its own right
- Facilitates the delivery of new commercial developments and regeneration that help to frame the new greenspace and support its financial viability
- Enhance the reputation of Leeds and the City Centre as a liveable environment
- Adds to the critical mass of the City Centre's attractions
- Is designed with sustainability, climate change and flood alleviation in mind

3.7 In considering the objectives identified above and the area of greenspace deficit, it is apparent that there are limited site opportunities available where the Council could make meaningful progress. Moreover, the city centre audit identified Sovereign Street as the only site that could conform to these objectives and aspirations that did not require a land purchase or land assembly exercise. Located between the railway line and the River Aire (Appendix D) the site was the subject of an offer from a developer which has now been declined following the submission of a revised conditional offer. The contract has now been terminated and the Council will continue to receive car parking revenue as land owner in the short term whilst it reviews its long term potential.

3.8 Utilising Sovereign Street as a new greenspace within the City Centre has the potential to deliver the medium term objectives outlined, whilst also addressing the poor distribution of greenspace in the City Centre by bringing new greenspaces southwards towards the waterfront as shown in Appendix E.

3.9 The Sovereign Street site clearly has the potential to deliver a new piece of quality greenspace in the city-centre. However, the development of Sovereign Street for this purpose will need to be carefully assessed in terms of:-

- The sites potential to allow development plots within it that can generate a significant capital contribution to the creation of a new quality greenspace.
- The technical feasibility of developing a new quality greenspace whilst retaining a car park on site and whether there is other development potential on the periphery of the site
- The creation of linkages to the south of the river utilising a pedestrian bridge for example, to make the space more accessible
- The approximate capital and revenue costs of delivery of this new quality greenspace

3.10 It also needs to be noted that this site has the potential to resolve other infrastructure issues in the city-centre. The site may have the potential as a new bus station located in close proximity to the Railway Station. The potential and feasibility of this option is at a very early stage, but one that may need further exploration with Metro as part of any further work.

3.11

3.12 In addition to the further feasibility work required, the Council will also need to engage with stakeholders with an interest in the city-centre so that any final proposals can be shaped and informed by the views of external bodies. This will include consultation with:

- Yorkshire Forward
- CABA Space
- Leeds Property Forum/Leeds Chamber of Commerce
- The Civic Trust
- Marketing Leeds
- Leeds City Centre Management Initiative
- Other key stakeholders and the public

## **4 Implications for Council Policy and Governance**

4.1 The development proposals for the creation of a City Centre Park and new greenspace assist the Council in achieving several of its objectives, notably:-

- **Vision for Leeds 2004 – 2020**
  - Going up a League – Best place in the country to work and work with a high quality of life for everyone
  - Make Leeds Europe’s cleanest and greenest City by improving the quality of and access to local parks and greenspaces
  - Developing a reputation for environmental excellence by agreeing a Parks and Greenspace Strategy and ensuring that everyone in Leeds is able to walk or have easy access to a local open green area

- **Leeds Strategic Plan 2008 – 2011**

Increased International Competitiveness through marketing and investment in high quality infrastructure and physical assets, particularly in the city-centre.

Enhanced cultural opportunities through encouraging investment and development of high quality facilities of national and international significance.

- Beeston Hill and Holbeck Land Use Framework

Physical regeneration of the area that will deliver improved services and a more vibrant local economy, to create an area that will be transformed physically, socially, economically and environmentally, into a sustainable and viable local community.

## **5 Legal and Resource Implications**

5.1 The site at Sovereign Street was the subject of a bid from Simons Developments, who were appointed through Executive Board in April 2004 as the Council’s

preferred bidder. Due to the prevailing economic climate, a revised offer from Simons has now been declined.

- 5.2 For a new piece of quality greenspace to be delivered, any future capital receipt for the wholesale disposal of this site would have to be foregone, with any future developments being linked to the creation of the new greenspace. This would potentially take the form of smaller scale plots that frame the new park area with additional complementary/linked developments. The specific financial implications of any proposal will be explored further, subject to Members approving this report and reported back to Executive Board prior to any commitment being made to progress with a scheme.
- 5.3 In order to establish the potential to deliver a new quality greenspace at Sovereign Street, a significant amount of feasibility work will be required to establish:
- The potential to create greenspace at first floor level, or;
  - The potential for underground car parking
  - Opportunities for bridging across the River Aire
  - Capital construction estimates
  - Development plot layouts and regeneration opportunities
  - The amount of car park retention possible
  - The possibility of opening up links through the arches
  - Potential timescales for delivery
  - Future links to the long term objectives
  - Equality Impact Assessment Needs
- 5.4 It is estimated that approximately £50k will be required to undertake this feasibility work. It is proposed that this money is allocated from the Council's revenue contingency. Subject to the outcome of this feasibility work there will be a requirement to inject a full scheme into the Capital Programme should Members decide to proceed. With respect to a longer term aspiration for a City Centre Park, it is considered that this proposal falls outside of the planning horizon of the existing Capital Programme.
- 5.5 It is possible to obtain contributions towards such public facilities by means of Section 106 agreements related to planning approvals for development. At the present time the principle obligations for City Centre developments relate to the provision of affordable housing and public transport infrastructure. Publicly accessible open space is also usually provided on site by major schemes, controlled through such an agreement. A further draft Supplementary Planning Document is being prepared for contributions to enhancement of the public realm.
- 5.6 Current planning policy (UDP CC10) asks all developments of sites in excess of 0.5ha to provide 20% of land area as public space. The City Centre Area Action Plan (CCAAP) Preferred Options suggested a policy (PO-25) to seek provision of on-site public space for developments on sites of 0.5ha+ but also for tall developments on smaller sites to pay a proportionate contribution toward provision of public space elsewhere. Such contributions could be used to fund the city centre park. However, this policy would need elaboration and appropriate further planning guidance which takes account of other existing Section 106 obligations and emerging potential obligations such as flood risk alleviation. As such there are doubts over whether and when the policy would be adopted and it is unlikely that the policy could be put into effect before 2010 at the earliest.

5.7 There would also be the need to give consideration as to what priority this obligation is given, in the light of the above existing obligation, potential emerging obligations for public realm and also possibly flood risk alleviation, and finally the economic climate.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

6.1 It is clear that there are significant issues in relation to the provision of greenspace in the city centre. Through the delivery of a new quality greenspace at Sovereign Street, bringing the strategic supply of greenspaces south towards the river, the Council will be able to make a meaningful impact on the supply and quality of greenspace in the city-centre, which in turn will have a regenerative impact. In addition, further investigations into the potential for a city-centre park to the South of the River Aire can also be progressed. If delivered, these actions will go a long way towards addressing issues around the lack of quality greenspace in and around the City Centre and will provide a lasting legacy that will significantly enhance the reputation of the City Centre as an attractive and liveable environment and a spur to long-term regeneration.

6.2 At present there is no funding allocated within the Council's Capital Programme and therefore a further report will be presented to Executive Board regarding the options for funding this scheme.

## **7.0 Recommendations**

7.1 Executive Board is requested to :-

- (i) Note the contents of this report.
- (ii) Agree to the implementation of the feasibility works required to explore the development of a new green space at Sovereign Street, which will require the allocation of £50k from the Council's revenue contingency.
- (iii) Agree to the preparation of a Planning and Development brief for the Sovereign St site
- (iv) Agree to officers consulting with key stakeholders in the city-centre to inform any further proposals that are brought back for Executive Board's consideration
- (v) Agree that officers report back to Executive Board following the outcome of the feasibility work and the consultations, including the outcome of any work undertaken in parallel on the provision of a new bus station.
- (vi) Agree that work is undertaken on the land assembly and land use planning issues associated with the development of a new green space to the south of the River Aire and officers to report back on the outcome of this work.
- (vii) Agree that the City Centre Area Action Plan will include provision for a major City centre park to the south of the City Centre
- (viii) Agree to the preparation of a Supplementary Planning Document for contributions toward City Centre public realm
- (ix) Agree that a further report be presented in the future outlining potential options for funding



## Background Papers

City Centre Renaissance Delivery Plan

Leeds Strategic Plan

Leeds Economic Briefing Note

City Centre Prospectus 2020