



Report of the Director of City Development

Scrutiny Board City Development

Date: 13th October 2009

Subject: Legible Leeds Project

Electoral Wards Affected:

City & Hunslet



Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. It was recognised during 2007 that there was a need to improve the legibility of Leeds city centre. This means providing information that makes it easy to get into and out of the city centre and once there easy to find your way around. This will help to link together the different parts of the expanding city centre, make attractions better known and easier to find and to ensure that new developments become fully integrated into the city centre.
2. Independent advisors, AIG Lacock Gullam, were appointed in 2007 to produce an Audit of the current wayfinding information in Leeds city centre, which led to the development of the Legible Leeds Wayfinding Strategy (LLWS). The LLWS document recommends what should be done to make Leeds city centre more legible.
3. On behalf of LCC, AIG Lacock Gullam have developed a new city centre walking map, 'Walk it' (**sent with papers**), which has proved extremely popular and are currently developing a concept product design for an on-street wayfinding system that will consist of maps and directional signage.
4. Funding of £1.2 million (combination of LCC and Yorkshire Forward match funding) has been identified to carry out the installation of the on-street wayfinding system.
5. Members' observations on the project and recommendations on the way forward would be welcomed.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

1.1 To advise Members of the:

- publication of a new city centre 'Walk it' map and how it has been received;
- the need for significant investment in the city centre's on-street wayfinding system (i.e. integrated map units and fingerpost information);
- planned expenditure to March 2011 of £1.2 million (consisting of £600,000 Leeds City Council funding and £600,000 of Yorkshire Forward funding) on the Legible Leeds project, specifically the phased implementation of the city centre on-street pedestrian wayfinding scheme;
- need to improve legibility for car drivers and public transport users.

2.0 Importance of Legibility

2.1 Attractions and opportunities within the city centre draw a significant level of footfall from shoppers, visitors, workers and residents alike. Currently over 112,000 pedestrians enter the retail area weekdays and 139,000 on a Saturday. The current wayfinding signage is not making the most of the large volume of people moving around the city centre at any one time.

2.2 For the city centre to become legible it must be easy to get into *and* out of, and once there, easy to find your way around. This is affected by factors relating to the visitor, such as their own wayfinding ability and level of previous knowledge of the city centre, but also the availability of up-to-date city centre maps and directional signage in appropriate locations.

2.3 The importance of good legibility is not unique to Leeds city centre. Considered in a competitive context to other key cities such as Bristol, Sheffield, Glasgow, Liverpool and Southampton, Leeds is currently lagging behind. Gaining a reputation for a successful legibility scheme is invaluable for raising Leeds' profile to go up a league as a city and become internationally competitive.

2.4 The City Centre Retail Group (chaired by the Director City Development and attended by the Trinity and Eastgate retail developers) first identified that wayfinding information in the city centre needed to be improved. This was to ensure that new large retail developments, particularly Eastgate Quarter and Trinity Leeds, become integral parts of the city centre so that the core retail offer expands rather than shifts. Improved legibility would encourage visitors arriving at the new retail developments to explore the rest of the city centre because the route there and back again would be clearly mapped and signed.

2.5 Members of the group, TQD Ltd (Caddick's and Land Securities) for Trinity Leeds and Hammerson's and Town Centre Securities for Eastgate Quarter, offered a sum of £25,000 (£12,500 each) to progress the work.

2.6 Further aims of the Legible Leeds project include:

- increasing visitor numbers and a good rate of repeat visits to the city centre;
- increasing awareness of, and numbers of visitors to, cultural attractions; particularly the new City Museum and the Royal Armouries;
- maximising benefits of the forthcoming Arena being located in the city centre;
- that continued investment in the city centre to secure further growth in employment is encouraged and supported.

3.0 The Audit

- 3.1 Under the guidance of an inter-disciplinary officer steering group, independent advisors AIG Lacock Gullam were commissioned to carry out a three phase Legible Leeds project.
- 3.2 Phase one was to produce an Audit of the current wayfinding information in Leeds city centre. The focus of the research was primarily on the existing and proposed city centre retail area, but also included transport interchanges, car parks, the Civic quarter and the waterfront.
- 3.3 The Audit identified that the city centre's pockets of excellence are not connected together by clear pedestrian routes or information. The shopping areas do not link with the cultural destinations. The waterfront is hidden away and the waterside pathways are disjointed. The viaduct to the south and inner ring road to the north form strong physical barriers that deter pedestrians walking into the city centre.
- 3.4 Leeds' current wayfinding information, which consists of city maps in 33 locations and a system of fingerposts in 70 locations, was installed incrementally in a reactive and ad hoc manner through the mid 1990's. The Audit observed that the location of the fingerposts, the destinations included on them, as well as the destination names and symbols used are not consistent. In addition the fingerposts do not indicate the length of time it will take to walk to the named destination.
- 3.5 The Audit also found that the existing city centre on-street map was designed with motorists rather than pedestrians in mind. For example the inner ring road and city centre loop are visually prominent and it does not show walking routes through shopping centres and the arcades, such as the Victoria Quarter.
- 3.6 The style and physical condition of the fingerposts and map stands are increasingly tired and dated, especially in comparison to the improved public realm, and does not support the aspiration for Leeds to compete at a European level.
- 3.7 Street name and road signs are part of the family of wayfinding directional signage. The Audit identified that city centre's street name signs are not consistent in style or positioning so do not support the idea of a cohesive Leeds city centre area. Road signage tends to direct traffic to car parks without indicating whether the car parks are best for shoppers or visiting cultural attractions.
- 3.8 The Audit also showed how the delivery of a successful legible city is closely linked to the quality of the public realm. Up-to-date, clear and easy to use on-street wayfinding information is a complementary layer of a high quality public realm, offering interpretation and information when needed.

4.0 Legible Leeds Wayfinding Strategy

- 4.1 Phase two of the Legible Leeds project, informed by the findings of the Audit, was the development of a Legible Leeds Wayfinding Strategy (LLWS). The LLWS recommends the ways in which the city centre could improve access, perception, and wayfinding information to become more legible.
- 4.2 The LLWS has three key objectives:
- 1. Welcoming people to Leeds** – improving gateways, providing a consistent image of the city and making sure people's first impression is a full, positive picture.

2. Connecting places – integrating new developments, removing physical barriers, creating a network of pedestrian routes through the whole of the city.

3. Making movement easy – linking transport, giving wayfinding information where it's needed and naming places to make areas easier to find.

- 4.3 By improving on-street pedestrian signage, creating maps designed for people on foot, producing visitor information that links with the on-street information, and improving street and traffic signs, visitors will be encouraged to explore further than they otherwise would. This is beneficial to the visitor as they have a more positive experience of the city centre encouraging repeat visits and beneficial to the destinations as they receive increased visitor numbers and associated custom.

5.0 Implementation – the Map

- 5.1 Phase three of the Legible Leeds project has started to put recommendations from the LLWS in to practice. On behalf of LCC, AIG Lacock Gullam have developed a new city centre walking map 'Walk it', and working on the concept design for an on-street wayfinding system.
- 5.2 The 'Walk it' map has been very well received by Council officers from a wide range of disciplines, the private sector, the general public, equality groups and the Civic Trust. Comments include that people did not know the city centre had so many cultural facilities and that things were much closer than they had realised. A number of companies have asked for the maps to be available at their offices and displayed in their empty shop windows.
- 5.3 Such is the popularity of the map that officers are producing it in a variety of formats, including tailored versions to appear in city event brochures, such as Light Night and Leeds Shopping Week, downloadable versions and simple A3 tear off pads for use in hotels. Options to allow city partners and organisations to sponsor a print run of the map are being explored.

6.0 Implementation – the on-street wayfinding system

- 6.1 AIG Lacock Gullam have developed a placement plan of where the on-street wayfinding system should be installed. This identifies the most popular pedestrian routes and, within these, the most appropriate locations for the signs and maps to be positioned. They are providing options for the concept design of how the mapping units and fingerposts could look.
- 6.2 AIG Lacock Gullam have already successfully delivered this type of work in various other cities, including London, Glasgow and Brighton. With their guidance to date a single strategy for mapping, sign position and preferred routes can now be implemented. The planned approach will allow the system to be logically extended in the future as required.
- 6.3 Sign clutter and street clutter exists on many pedestrian routes in Leeds city centre. Clutter creates 'visual noise' that reduces the effectiveness of on-street information, and affects the overall perception and enjoyment of the area. Therefore prior to putting in further pedestrian signage, a de-cluttering process is underway to remove unnecessary street clutter.

7.0 Consultation

- 7.1 Internal and external partners have been consulted throughout the development and delivery of Legible Leeds wayfinding project. The draft LLWS was sent out to consultation with key city centre stakeholders, including retail developers, Yorkshire Forward, Leeds Civic Trust, University of Leeds, Aire Action Leeds and various Leeds City Council members and officers. The feedback was positive and comments have been incorporated into the final document.
- 7.2 Further consultation has been conducted via dedicated group workshops and presentations and through the creation of the bi-monthly Legible Leeds Working Group that includes members from both internal and external partners. Consultees include, from Leeds City Council, representatives from Planning, Highways, Public art, Urban design, Equality, Visit Leeds (tourism) and, externally Marketing Leeds, the University of Leeds, Aire Action Leeds, the Waterfront Association, NHS, Leeds Civic Trust, property owners, retail developers, shopping centre managers, key retailers, hoteliers and city centre residents.
- 7.3 Two group workshops were held that specifically focused on agreeing the names and facilities to appear on the map. The fact that, for example, six different names were identified for the Leeds train station illustrates that this exercise was not always as simple as it might seem. A clear strategy was devised that determined which buildings and shops should also be included, only if they provided an aid to wayfinding and navigation.
- 7.4 Detailed equality and inclusivity consultation via questionnaires and meetings has taken place with a focus group consisting of visually, hearing and mobility impaired users of the city centre. Within the suite of Walk it maps, the objective to provide a range of maps available on the internet tailored with additional detailed access information, including large print, indication of gradient and using more symbols than words, arose from this consultation. The consultation and involvement in the development of the scheme has been very well received.

8.0 The Future for On-Street Wayfinding in the City Centre

- 8.1 The city centre's existing uncoordinated wayfinding information will start to be removed in 2010 and be replaced by bespoke location specific mapping units, with integrated 'fingerpost' information. Stand alone fingerposts will also be installed where necessary. Installation will be carried out in a number of phases. The actual number of phases will be determined once further work has been carried out on the specific 'Leeds' design and associated costings.
- 8.2 Further to the initial concept design work that has taken place, a number of influential factors regarding the design of the future on-street wayfinding signage have yet to be decided. These will determine what can feasibly be implemented in the first phase within the specified budget. These decisions include the:
- number of on-street map and signage locations required;
 - materials and design of the on-street wayfinding signage system;
 - quality of materials used, options include vitreous enamel (baked glass), stainless steel and/or glass;
 - flexibility of the design to allow future change of information.

8.3 Street name plate upgrading and co-ordination and modifications to highway signage are considered to be part of the overall project, and will primarily be funded through yearly maintenance budgets.

9.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

9.1 Improvement to the legibility of Leeds city centre through, initially, the installation of a contemporary up-to-date on-street wayfinding system supports a number of strategies for the city. These include the Council Plan, the Vision for Leeds 2004 to 2020, the Leeds City Centre Strategic Plan 2006 to 2010, Renaissance Leeds Delivery Plan 2007-2009 and the Leeds City Centre 2020 Vision Prospectus.

9.2 The project supports LCC's Green Strategy and the Leeds Health and Wellbeing Plan as it will encourage and promote walking over using transport.

9.3 The project supports LCC's core values to put customers first, looking after Leeds and treating people fairly. The design will consider, and address where appropriate, the needs of the disabled so improving accessibility for all in the city centre.

10.0 Resource Implications

10.1 £600,000 LCC funding was approved in February 2009 by Executive Board and Full Council. This will be spent by March 2011.

10.2 Yorkshire Forward (YF) has agreed to match fund the above LCC commitment and contribute an additional £600,000 for the financial year 2009/10.

10.3 Investment for future phases will have to be sought and secured from further sources, including future LCC capital programme, the regional development agency, the private sector and large city centre developers.

10.4 There will be future revenue implications for the on-going maintenance of the wayfinding system, including managing map data content over time and the physical condition of the units. It is currently anticipated that this will be met from existing City Centre budgets.

11.0 Recommendations

11.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report and comment on the Legible Leeds project.

12.0 Background Papers

- Executive Board report "Proposed Refurbishment Of The City Centre Public Realm" dated 11th September 2007
- Leeds City Centre Strategic Plan 2006 to 2010
- Vision for Leeds 2004 to 2020
- Renaissance Leeds Delivery Plan 2007-2009
- The Council's Green Strategy
- Leeds Strategic Plan 2008 to 2011
- Leeds City Centre 2020 Vision Prospectus
- Legible Leeds Wayfinding Strategy August 2008