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## Report of the Director of Development

### Scrutiny Board (City Development)

Date: 6<sup>th</sup> July

### Subject: Current Position on City Centre Sites

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#### Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

#### Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

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At the last meeting of Scrutiny Board (City Development), Members requested a report on key postponed developments and the status of vacant sites in the City Centre.

This report contains a brief summary of the current state of the City Centre property market and a summary of initiatives designed to improve the appearance of sites during the period before development commences.

### Introduction

In the last 2 years, development in the City Centre property market, like many others around the country, has stalled. In 2 cases, this led to vacant sites where development commenced and was subsequently passed and where there are now hoardings around them. In other major schemes, development has not commenced and in some cases they have been left in an untidy state. In other cases, the City Council, in conjunction with developers, has been successful in achieving short term improvements to the appearance of the sites with considerable and widespread positive publicity both for the developer and for the City. This report summarises the position in respect of the major development sites across the City Centre.

### Summary of Individual Development Schemes

1) Leeds Trinity. Development of this retail scheme commenced, but ceased in 2009. There are hoardings around the site and in the interim the developer (Land Securities) has worked closely with the City Council to revise and improve the scheme. Planning consent for a number of alterations to the scheme has been granted and it is understood that a number of pre-development lettings have been successfully completed. It is hoped that redevelopment of this site will recommence in the near future.

- 2) Eastgate. Planning consent, subject to the completion of a legal agreement, has been renewed by the developer (Hammersons) in recent weeks. In addition, the scheme is being revised and should be the subject of a new planning application later in 2010. In the meantime, Hammersons have sought to re-let vacant units, particularly on Eastgate, to help ensure the viability and vitality of that part of the City Centre.
- 3) Criterion Place. Development commenced with the excavation of the basement area and the erection of hoardings, particularly along the street frontage at Wellington Street. Following numerous complaints, the Council has used money from the bond to secure the repair and reinstatement of the pavement and has placed planters in the footpath opposite the existing shops in phase one of the development. The former Leader of the Council (Councillor Andrew Carter) also held meetings with the developers to try and secure further improvements, but to no avail. The Council has given careful consideration as to whether it has any further legal powers it can use to secure the improvement of this site, but has, regrettably, concluded that it is not in a position to do so.
- 4) Sovereign Street. The scheme for the redevelopment of Sovereign Street has not gone ahead. It continues to be used as a temporary car park, providing fee income for the City Council. It is understood that a report on future development proposals for the Sovereign Street site will be presented for consideration at the City Council's Executive Board in the near future.
- 5) Wellington Street. In Wellington Street a consortium of developers has been involved in preparing major development proposals for a new office quarter. I am pleased to say that at least one application for the development of a new office block has recently been submitted. In addition, a substantial area of land (owned by MEPC) has been subject to temporary grassing and the construction of 5-a-side football pitches, allotments and the provision of bee hives. This initiative has gained very favourable publicity both within Leeds and nationally.
- 6) City Square. This site, which is at the beginning of the West End initiative and opposite City Station, has been vacant for some considerable time. Planning permission has been granted for temporary short term car parking and the improvement in the appearance of the site.
- 7) Holbeck Urban Village. Last year, a new initiative aimed at improving land adjoining the Round Foundry at Holbeck (Wonderwood), was supported by a combination of Yorkshire Forward, the City Council and private developers. This was initially for a temporary period of 6 weeks, but proved so popular in attracting office and other workers during lunchtime periods and saw improvement on trading of nearby restaurants that the initiative was continued.

### **Current State of the Property Market**

Although activity in the Leeds property market remains at lower levels than for some considerable time, there is evidence of an upturn in pre-application enquiries, particularly in the hotel and, to a limited extent, the office sector. Interest in new apartment buildings is extremely limited at the moment.

### **Incentives to Improve Sites**

The City Council takes a pro-active role in liaising with developers to try and secure the improvement of vacant sites both within the City Centre and elsewhere. On occasion, it has used its powers under S.215 of the Planning Act to improve the appearance of sites and derelict buildings.

Last year, the Leeds Design Awards included a new category of an award for the treatment of temporarily vacant sites. This was won by MEPC for its West End initiative (described above).

### **Illegal Use of Land**

A number of vacant sites have been unlawfully used for long stay car parking. The Council is taking enforcement action against the parties involved. A hearing relating to an appeal against the Enforcement Notices is to be held in the Autumn. The Enforcement Notice requires the use to cease.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the report be received and its contents noted.

Background Papers

None