

The Future of City and Local Centres: Update on Policy Research

Date: 22nd July 2021

Report of: Director of City Development

Report to: Scrutiny (Infrastructure, Investment and Inclusive Growth) Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- Covid-19 has changed the way we think about place and how we use our spaces, as well as how we travel, work and shop. Before the pandemic we knew that the way we worked and shopped was already changing, but the crisis has altered these further and work and leisure patterns now appear to be accelerating previous trends.
- This is posing huge questions for cities like Leeds. Because of this, we are undertaking a number of pieces of work to consider what the future of our city and local centres may be.
- This report outlines this work and what the next steps are as we bring together all of the findings and what actions can be taken to ensure a positive and inclusive future for our centres.
- Work has involved Leeds as a case study for the Core and Key Cities' report on 'The Future of Urban Centres'; a project with ARUP as our partner on how our centres can adapt to the long-term transformational changes and challenges over the next 10 years; an online survey for members of the public and businesses to enable them to tell us what they think about the centres they use; collaborating with the Ahead Partnership, to ascertain the views of young people are in relation to our centres; and liaison with Common Purpose about the findings of their Leeds150 Legacy Programme. Additional work includes consultation and engagement with stakeholders and partners across the city, as well as Elected Members and senior Council officers. We will bring the totality of this work and recommendations to Executive Board in September 2021.
- More and more, the idea of place matters. The future of our centres is paramount to how we recover from the Covid-19 crisis economically and socially in a truly inclusive way. This is directly linked to our ambition to deliver Inclusive Growth across the city, whilst striving to be the best city for health and wellbeing and tackle the Climate Emergency. Centres play a major role in delivering quality of life and integrating Covid-19 economic recovery within our centres with both health and wellbeing and climate action will ensure our economy and our places are supported as much as possible.

Recommendations

- a) The Scrutiny Board is requested to note and provide comments on the information provided in this report which outlines work looking at the future of Leeds' city and local centres; and
- b) The Scrutiny Board is asked to determine what, if any, further Scrutiny activity is required in relation to the work outlined in this report. If further action is requested by the Board, our next steps will include these actions accordingly.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1 This report is to inform Scrutiny Board members of the progress that has been made regarding work looking into the future of Leeds' city and local centres.
- 2 Covid-19 has changed the way we think about place and how we use our spaces, as well as how we travel, work and shop. Before the coronavirus pandemic we knew that the way we worked and shopped was already changing, but the crisis has altered these further and work and leisure patterns now appear to be accelerating previous trends, such as working from home. The pandemic is accelerating trends in our centres and posing huge questions for cities like Leeds. Some sectors have seen five years of change occurring in less than six months, with Covid-19 accelerating structural trends around digital transformation, remote working and the shift from 'bricks to clicks' in Retail. Many businesses are now considering how best to capitalise on these trends to support flexible working and reduce their office space. Major city centre retail locations are also being impacted by a reduction in office workers and shoppers; indeed, throughout the peak of the pandemic, in Leeds city centre we have consistently seen footfall reduced by 66% or more. There have been some positive opportunities for our district centres, however, by enabling some to capture more spend locally; although they too will be challenged by the huge changes in the Retail sector.
- 3 Although we can see the broad impacts on employment, travel behaviours and our local economy, we still need to better understand how Covid-19 is impacting different places across Leeds. Before we began this work, we did not know how much of this change is structural and what is transitional. What we did know, and still do, however, is that cities evolve and change and that Leeds needs to adapt so it can continue to thrive moving forwards.
- 4 Our overall aim through all of the work outlined in this report is to understand how Leeds city centre and Leeds' local centres can adapt to the long-term transformational changes and challenges, now and in the future. We want the work to inform a future direction of travel for our centres that supports the city's ambitions and policies around economic competitiveness, skills, Inclusive Growth, Culture and the Climate Emergency. Brought together, we believe all the different strands of our work will be able to provide some very important insight into what the future may look like for our centres and what needs to be done to support them to be as successful and inclusive as possible.

Overview of our work: what has been done, what is being done and what we know so far

- 5 The Core and Key Cities' report on the future of urban centres - Earlier this year the Core and Key Cities commissioned Metro Dynamics to undertake work looking at the future of urban centres. Leeds was chosen as the case study for a Core City. The report, 'The Future of Urban Centres: An agenda for post-pandemic Inclusive City Renewal', was published in May 2021 and presented findings and recommendations from work carried out from January to May 2021. It is framed as a headline offer to Government from the 36 Core and Key Cities, who could deliver at least an additional £89bn a year into the economy if productivity in the cities matched the national average, and who could take at least 3.3 million people out of poverty by bringing their cities up to national average for economic output and deprivation levels (as a minimum ambition). The ask outlined in the report is for Government to enter into an Inclusive Renewal Deal with cities, which includes some investment but also freedoms and decentralisation.
- 6 The report concludes with a series of frameworks for recovery, setting out the kinds of goals that will be important to Key and Core Cities, including across the labour market; decarbonisation; connectivity; investment; innovation; and building resilient communities,

amongst others. The recommendations are set out to cities and Government, based on the frameworks and centred on making the Inclusive Renewal Deal a reality.

- 7 As Metro Dynamics developed their work and framework, they wanted to test how it would apply in cities. Through a series of workshops with senior officers, Elected Members and partners they applied the framework in Leeds and then Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (the latter three presented together). Through the framework they explored places' current programmes, priority areas and ambitions for the future of their cities post-Covid-19. This showed how cities can apply the framework to their own circumstances.
- 8 The key findings of the report included:
 - Large urban centres have been most affected by the Covid-19 crisis and will be the slowest to recover;
 - The Covid-19 crisis has disproportionately affected more deprived neighbourhoods;
 - City centres can be focal points for innovation and complex economic activity;
 - Increasing employment in exporting businesses will help close the productivity gap;
 - High streets must adapt to suit new purposes; and
 - There are enormous opportunities for cities in the transition to Net Zero.
- 9 The report stresses the importance of Inclusive Renewal, including the creation and support of good work; driving innovation; building resilience; pivoting to Net Zero; catalysing city liveability; and health improvement and wider public service reform.
- 10 Work looking at the long-term transformational changes, challenges and opportunities for our centres— The Council appointed ARUP as our partner to work with us to help us understand the long-term transformational changes, challenges and opportunities for our city and local centres that are now in motion in Leeds. Through this work, we were looking to explore responding to new ways of working; new ways of spending; how we can shape and engage with our centres; and the role of the Council and how it can use its assets and influence effectively to transition our centres to the 'new reality', maximise opportunities and mitigate threats.
- 11 Work on this project has included research; bringing in international and national knowledge; a workshop with a small number of stakeholders from across the city; and a detailed session with Council officers. The stakeholders involved in the workshop included (not exhaustively) representatives from the Leeds Business Improvement District; the West and North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce; cultural institutions such as Leeds Playhouse and Opera North; Voluntary Action Leeds; Nexus Leeds; West Yorkshire Combined Authority; and Morley Town Deal Board. The final content of the report is being finalised imminently; however the conclusions that have been seen so far are broadly in line with the three Council pillars of Inclusive Growth; Health and Wellbeing; and addressing the Climate Emergency.
- 12 We can also provide some headline findings that have resulted from this work, including:
 - Changing work patterns pose a risk to the economic growth and business activity created from knowledge-intensive industries working in close proximity that we have seen in recent years in the city centre; however there are opportunities to maximise benefits of remote work;
 - The role of centres will need to be less about Retail consumption;
 - There is significant opportunity for Culture and Leisure as part of future role of centres;
 - Successful centres are important to enabling Leeds to respond to climate change challenges; and
 - The Council has an important role in urban management, leadership and enabling.

- 13 Also presented through this work are potential areas for action that respond to the changes we are seeing in our city and local centres and within each area are a number of actions that could potentially be taken. We can share a number of these areas, including:
- Curating a diverse mix of uses to attract people back to the city centre;
 - Capitalising on Culture and the creative industry assets;
 - Five-minute city, 90-minute region concept - connecting neighbourhoods with centres and expanding the economic reach of the city centre;
 - From grey to green: bringing nature and new green spaces to centres; and
 - Leading and convening, creating partnerships and mobilising the people that can make a difference.
- 14 We know we have opportunities and challenges and we are well-placed to build on our strong partnerships to address these. There is an opportunity to work with communities to create a new vision for centres and build broad-based coalitions for positive change. Officers will be working over the summer to agree how to respond to the specific recommendations from this work and we will including findings in the recommendations to Executive Board in September 2021.
- 15 The Council public survey, our 'city conversation' - Earlier this year the Council launched an online survey for members of the public and businesses to complete, to enable us to capture their views and thoughts on the changes that are taking place in our city and local centres. Through this, we heard about how often people visited their centres and why and, importantly, how they expected this to change over the next three years. It also asked questions about the changes people have had to make to how and where they work and where they choose to spend their money. Launched on 12th February 2021 and closed on 26th March 2021 (therefore during a period of national lockdown), the survey received over 1,300 responses (including 1,048 people providing feedback relating to a specific local centre) and thousands of individuals comments were recorded in response to questions. For clarification, a drop-down list of local centres was provided for respondents to choose which centre they would like to provide feedback on. This list was taken from the [Core Strategy: Leeds Local Plan](#) (adopted November 2014, with amendments adopted September 2019).
- 16 We have undertaken sample analysis of the results to give a confidence interval of +/- 5% against the total results. This has given a clear indication of what the key headlines from the survey results are, a number of which are shown below:
- People will visit local centres more over the next 12 months;
 - People visit local centres for Retail, Hospitality and meeting friends – this is likely to stay the same in the next three years (returning to pre-Covid-19 levels);
 - People will visit the city centre less than they did before. However, what we have seen is footfall at c.80% of 2019 levels (before the return of office workers and major events), with particular strength at weekends;
 - In the next three years people will visit less for work and more for Culture, Theatre and Hospitality. They will visit broadly the same for Leisure, Retail and meeting friends;
 - People are expecting to work more from home part of the time;
 - More people are spending online and some will continue to do so;
 - More people are spending in their local centres and the vast majority say they will continue to do so;
 - If people used a car before, they say they will continue to do so;
 - Walking has increased and this could continue into the next 12 months, although to a lesser extent than during the pandemic; and

- Bus usage has dropped and may not rise to pre-Covid-19 levels over the next three years.
- 17 This survey provides some clear and useful indications of how people have changed - and see themselves changing still - their ways of working, spending and travelling, as well as the way they use their city and local centres. We are, however, aware that the results provide information from a set period of time and because of this, we intend to continue engagement on our overall work looking at the future of our centres. More detail on this is provided later on in this report, but this will include with Elected Member, partners, stakeholders and local communities.
 - 18 Our work with the Ahead Partnership - We have begun work with the Ahead Partnership (who are founded and headquartered in Leeds, although operate nationally, and who work with business, public and community partners to deliver social value projects that overcome inequality, promote opportunity and deliver positive change) to allow us to gain insight into what young people think about their centres. This has involved posing a challenge to young people to allow them to contribute their ideas and vision of the future in relation to centres. Supported by targeted resources and tasks, young people are being asked to develop their own concepts in a really creative way and then submit their proposals either individually or in groups. A number of these will then be invited to present and explore their ideas in more detail at a youth voice event later this year.
 - 19 Common Purpose, Leeds150 - In 2043 it will be 150 years since Leeds was formally granted city status. In June 2021, the Leeds150 Legacy Programme (which is sponsored by the Council, Leeds Beckett University, Luminare Education Group and the audit, tax and consulting firm RSM) convened a diverse group of leaders, aged 18-25, from across Leeds to address the question “What will the legacy of our generation be?” Furthering this, the challenge set to the young people involved was “How can we all work together to make Leeds a cleaner, greener place for everyone by 2043?” The group was asked to articulate what it is that they want for their futures and how the city looks and feels to them, meaning that the focus of the challenge was on the future of the city in general rather than the year 2043 alone. The programme culminated in a fascinating session with the young people presenting their ideas, including online platforms for sharing best practice and information; green spaces within schools to educate and promote health and wellbeing; interactive engagement with waste management; and a campaign to increase interconnected green spaces in Leeds. A panel of representatives from a range of organisations and sectors (including Leeds Beckett University, Leeds Community Foundation, IBM and the LEP Board, Citu and RSM) provided input on each of the suggestions, making connections and providing positive challenge on ideas. The thoughts raised during this programme will be brought in to the wider totality of our centres work.
 - 20 Consultation and engagement – This work has been discussed with Elected Members, the Leeds Inclusive Growth Ambassadors and Council officers, including via the Inclusive Growth Core Delivery Partnership (IGCDP) and Inclusive Growth Extended Delivery Partnership (IGEDP). Stakeholder engagement was also a key element of our work with ARUP. More detail on the consultation and engagement that has been completed and which will be planned is provided later in this report.

Next steps

- 21 We want to ensure that we fully digest and understand all of the work looking at our city and local centres. This will involve looking at the “so what” angle and considering what all of the findings mean for Leeds and its centres. We will need to consider what actions could be taken as a result of what we have found out, but also what can be done in reality – therefore looking at both the opportunities and constraints presented and highlighted by this work.

- 22 We will complete the gathering of views of young people over the summer time and into the autumn via our collaboration with the Ahead Partnership. Once responses have been collated from young people, a number of them will be selected and invited to a panel session in September 2021 for young people to discuss their views and proposals further. It is anticipated that the challenge and its outcomes will be completed and known in October 2021.
- 23 An officer working group, which was established at the start of this work in autumn 2020, has committed to continue working on the centres agenda, ensuring actions from across the City Development directorate (and across the Council as a whole) are linked together. This group will continue to meet as we look to investigate the findings of our work and what it means for our city and local centres, as well as to identify potential actions and interventions that could be taken by the Council and/or partners and stakeholders from within the city.
- 24 We are also working closely with colleagues within the Council's Communications team to establish a Communications and Engagement Plan to assist us in driving this work forward once further findings are known. Part of this work will confirm our commitment to ongoing engagement with Elected Members, partners, stakeholders and local communities throughout our overall centres work this year and into next, as required. For example, this may include taking our findings to Community Committees in the future. We are also considering the best mechanisms to feed back to everyone who submitted their views to the public survey and we are committed to feeding back the findings of our work at a future IGEDP event, including how we will take forward any realistic actions and interventions identified. We will also consider the option of holding a second public survey/city conversation, potentially in the spring of 2022, a year after the first survey was undertaken.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards Affected:

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

- 25 Our city and local centres have a vital role in supporting the Leeds economy and can provide key economic growth for the whole city. They are the location for many local businesses and are focal points for communities, where people live, shop, work, socialise, and access public and community services. The quality and vibrancy of centres matters and their success hugely impacts on how people feel about their places and quality of life, as well as upon the confidence of those looking to invest in the city. Because of this, the future of our centres is paramount to how we recover from the Covid-19 crisis. As a result of this suite of work, we will work towards identifying actions that can be taken to ensure that the future direction of our centres supports the city's ambitions around Inclusive Growth, Health and Wellbeing and the Climate Emergency.
- 26 The Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education has been briefed on our centres work. All Elected Members were made aware of our public survey via the fortnightly Economic Briefing of 19th February 2021 and Community Committees were involved in the publicising of the public survey to members of the public in particular. Furthermore, this report is being taken to Scrutiny Board to give Elected Members the opportunity to scrutinise and debate the work that is being undertaken. The views of Scrutiny Board members will be fed into the work that is ongoing over the coming months. As potential opportunities, challenges, actions and interventions are identified moving forward, ward members will be consulted appropriately.

- 27 As part of the Communications and Engagement Plan that will be established, we will also consider how we feedback the findings of our work to the city, including at a future IGEDP event, as well as the possibility of taking findings (and potential actions and interventions) to Community Committees. We will consider too the option of holding a second public survey/city conversation, potentially in the spring of 2022, a year after the first survey was undertaken.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 28 The future of our city and local centres work has been discussed and presented at both the IGCDP (made up of Elected Members, Inclusive Growth Ambassadors and Council officers, including the Chief Executive) and the IGEDP (which involves representatives from across all sectors within the city and which sees c.120-170 attendees at each tri-annual event). At the IGEDP on 24th November 2020, a panel discussion was held whereby the Partnership heard from a range of panellists and their views on our centres. The panellists included John Ebo (Head of City Centre Management at the Council, at the time); Mark Hollander (Executive Director of Leeds2023); David Maddison (Chair of the Retail Top 12 Group in Leeds and Centre Director at Trinity Leeds); and Camilla Siggaard Anderson (Design Lead at ARUP). Attendees were also able to provide their views and thoughts and invited to complete the public survey that was launched in February 2021.
- 29 As outlined in this report, the Council also launched a public survey in February-March 2021. Over 1,300 responses were received and sample analysis has been undertaken of the results, giving us key headline information to use when we bring the totality of our work together over the coming months.
- 30 Key stakeholder engagement was an important part of the work the Council undertook with ARUP. This included facilitating a dedicated workshop with partners from across the city to assess and evaluate key trends driving change in our centres and their associated opportunities and challenges for centres. The stakeholders involved in the workshop included (not exhaustively) representatives from the Leeds Business Improvement District; the West and North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce; cultural institutions such as Leeds Playhouse and Opera North; Voluntary Action Leeds; Nexus Leeds; West Yorkshire Combined Authority; and Morley Town Deal Board. A session was also held with senior officers from the Council to gather key perspectives and insights.
- 31 Our collaboration with the Ahead Partnership and engagement with young people, and consideration of the findings of the Leeds150 Legacy Programme undertaken by Common Purpose, also highlights our commitment to ensuring we engage with a wide-range of individuals as possible.

What are the resource implications?

- 32 There has been a large amount of work being undertaken (and is also programmed to be undertaken) in the city centre in particular over the last year – for example Connecting Leeds schemes (such as works on the Headrow and around the Corn Exchange), grey to green projects (such as Cookridge Street public realm improvements and progression of the City Park in the South Bank area of the city) and planned improvements and changes to other areas, including City Square and Leeds Rail Station. Although the centres work outlined in this report does not require any further direct financial resources, it will require dedicated officer time to take forward the findings from it and any actions and interventions that come from the work will also need to be considered for any financial implications, as well as funding opportunities.

What are the legal implications?

33 There are no significant legal issues relating to the recommendations in this report.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

34 The report has no specific risk management implications.

35 There is always a risk to the Leeds economy through both policies and external pressures. The Council recognises that growing the economy has positive benefits to the city and that our work looking at the future of our city and local centres is a crucial component of delivering our Inclusive Growth Strategy ambitions.

Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth

Health and Wellbeing

Climate Emergency

36 The Council's three pillars provide a framework for our centres work. More and more, the idea of place matters. Both our city and local centres have a major role in supporting the Leeds economy and the success of centres has a major impact on how people feel about their places and also upon the confidence of those looking to invest in the city. Because of this, the future of our centres is paramount to how we recover from the Covid-19 crisis economically and socially in a truly inclusive way. This is directly linked to our ambition to deliver Inclusive Growth across the city, whilst striving to be the best city for Health and Wellbeing and tackle the Climate Emergency. Centres play a major role in delivering quality of life and integrating Covid-19 economic recovery within our centres with both Health and Wellbeing and climate action will ensure our economy and our places are supported as much as possible (for example, by adopting a health-led approach to interventions within local centres or the city centre, such as to support physical activity and wellbeing, and by introducing climate adaptation measures, such as more green space and more energy efficient buildings).

Options, timescales and measuring success

a) What other options were considered?

37 N/A

b) How will success be measured?

38 We are yet to bring together the totality of this work and consider any potential actions that could be taken in response to recommendations coming from the work. This will be done and taken to Executive Board in September 2021 for their approval.

c) What is the timetable for implementation?

39 We will continue bringing together all of the work outlined in this report over the coming months. Over the summer and into the autumn time, we will: complete the consultation challenge with young people alongside the Ahead Partnership; have further engagement with Elected Members and senior Council officers; confirm a Communications and Engagement Plan; and consolidate all of our findings to identify realistic opportunities, actions and interventions that could be taken to support our centres recover and grow in an inclusive way. Any actions identified will be taken forward accordingly with appropriate engagement from Elected Members and officers.

Appendices

- 1 The Metro Dynamics report, 'The Future of Urban Centres: An agenda for post-pandemic Inclusive City Renewal'.
- 2 A copy of our public survey/city conversation and list of our local centres, taken from the Leeds Core Strategy.
- 3 The Ahead Partnership resource pack/challenge pack sent out to young people.

Background papers

- 4 N/A