

**Report of Director City Development**

**Report to Executive Board**

**Date: 21<sup>st</sup> October 2015**

**Subject: An Approach to Street Design and the Public Realm in Leeds City Centre**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): City and Hunslet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary of main issues**

1. This paper outlines the main principles for the Council's approach to improving public realm in Leeds City Centre. Good quality public spaces and street design is important to improving the experience and ease of movement of pedestrians of all ages and physical abilities, to supporting the economic success of Leeds City Centre and, through a greater emphasis on pedestrian movement, to the Council's emerging transport strategy.
2. This paper is one of three complementary papers on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 2015 Executive Board agenda related to pedestrian movement, transport and the public realm. As the city centre has developed and grown, the pedestrian core has been established, while around this the more traditional public realm and transport network has remained. The city now needs to look forward to how Leeds could develop the look and feel of the public realm across the whole of the city centre. Consideration needs to be given to our approach to street design and the quality of the public realm to ensure that the pedestrian experience is enhanced as well as continuing to play a positive role in attracting and sustaining both investment and major events. It is evident that there is a strong demand to place greater emphasis on the pedestrian and while an ever expanding pedestrian core is not sustainable, our present street design puts constraints on pedestrian movement, place making and commercial opportunities.
3. Our public realm does not just provide routes from one destination to another but increasingly provides destinations in their own right for people's leisure, social

interaction and even work, thereby making a vital contribution to creating an economically successful, liveable and healthy city centre for people of all ages. It is important we create welcoming, calmed and inviting places and spaces for all in Leeds.

4. The Breakthrough Project '*World-class events and a vibrant city centre that all can benefit from*' recognises that city centres are evolving as critical centres for people to interact, exchange knowledge and drive commerce. Consultation undertaken as part of the Breakthrough Project prioritised improving the quality of our public realm, re-thinking our approach to street design and reducing the impact of traffic, to improve the pedestrian experience while creating enhanced settings for our cultural and heritage assets and key gateways. Our proposed approach will help to ensure the delivery of the Breakthrough Projects and our aspiration for Leeds to be a compassionate, caring city that helps all its residents benefit from the effects of the city's economic growth. It will help us achieve Council Policies and the Best Council Plan.
5. We are already making steps to improve the environment around City Square via West Yorkshire +Transport Fund City Centre Package alongside the HS2 South Bank master planning. Steps are also underway to redevelop the West Yorkshire Playhouse building, ensuring it is set within good quality public realm with enhanced pedestrian connectivity which is crucial to realising the full potential of this investment.
6. High volumes of through traffic or standing traffic can severely limit pedestrian movement, dwell time, place making, regeneration, environmental improvements and economic opportunities. We want to inspire people to walk and cycle more often as part of a healthy lifestyle. Our pedestrian infrastructure for crossing roads is becoming out dated and lacks capacity in some places. Prioritising pedestrian movement, however, may result in unacceptable congestion unless schemes are considered within a holistic strategic context and their cumulative impact appraised. Provision for buses can also impact on the footway and carriageway space available for public realm improvement schemes. In order to maintain public transport accessibility to the city centre and help reduce car dominance, both urban realm and public transport will need to be considered hand-in-hand, together with the accommodation of other street uses, to achieve an appropriate balance. This report provides a vision and strategy for a new direction in street design; it complements another report on this agenda on a proposed vision and strategy for transport for Leeds, as creating a more people friendly, productive and accessible city centre will require transformational change in the way we travel into and around the city centre.
7. Other cities are investing heavily in their public realm to improve the visitor experience, increase dwell time, attract further investment, reduce accidents and stress: Leeds needs to do likewise. Resources are scarce and the Council wants to work closely with the private sector, Leeds Business Improvement District (BID), the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to identify potential funding to raise our game, create more jobs and compete effectively.

## Recommendations

8. Executive Board is recommended to:

- i) endorse the principle of the Council developing a strategic plan for public realm improvements in the City Centre based on principles outlined in paragraph 3.7;
- ii) agree to the Council consulting and engaging with stakeholders on potential schemes to be brought forward based on the design ideas and opportunities document attached at Appendix 1; and
- iii) subject to the outcome of consultation, request officers to bring back a report to Executive Board outlining a proposal plan of public realm improvements, costings and funding and note that the Head of Strategic Projects, City Development, will be responsible for bringing this report back.

### 1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report outlines an approach to street design and the public realm, identifying some main principles to ensure schemes are designed and implemented within agreed corporate parameters and objectives. It provides some artist's impressions of how some areas of the city centre might look if this approach was adopted. Although the examples are drawn from the city centre, many of the principles proposed are applicable across the district.
- 1.2 The report provides a proposed prioritised programme for public realm improvements in the city centre which takes account of other major developments and events which will impact on the city centre.

### 2 Background information

- 2.1 Good quality public realm can enhance people's experience of Leeds, while improving, promoting and managing the city centre as a business location, an engine for economic growth and retail and visitor destination of national significance. Improvements in the public realm will help Leeds to be an economically strong and compassionate city in three ways. Firstly, there is potential to create employment opportunities both through the supply chain to deliver the public realm improvements and by enhancing commercial opportunities arising from both the subsequent higher levels of footfall and space for street cafes/events etc. Secondly, public realm can create better, less stressful and healthier environments for residents, workers and visitors. Thirdly by improving connectivity and 'walkability' public realm can give better access to employment and leisure opportunities.
- 2.2 The Core Strategy plans for 10,200 additional dwellings in the City Centre. Car use by city centre residents is very low; the subsequent higher demand for walking and cycling to access facilities within the City Centre reinforces the need to enhance public realm and reduce severance.

- 2.3 Investment in the city centre's public realm has already paid dividends, making the city centre more welcoming for people of all ages, encouraging both large and small scale investment and creating employment. Further investment is required if Leeds' expanded city centre is to continue to fulfil its potential as the economic engine of the city region.
- 2.4 High volumes of through traffic, or lower volumes of standing traffic, can severely limit pedestrian movement place making, regeneration, environmental improvements and economic opportunities across certain areas of the city. Prioritising pedestrian movement may result in unacceptable congestion unless schemes are considered within a holistic strategic context and their cumulative impact on the highway network appraised. Provision for buses can also impact on the footway and carriageway space available for public realm improvement schemes; nonetheless maintaining bus access to the heart of the city centre is essential. The impact of public realm schemes on the bus network will need to be strategically reviewed in order to ensure public transport accessibility to the city centre is maintained.
- 2.5 Work is already under way to create more accessible and people-friendly spaces by reducing the impact of traffic in the city centre. The West Yorkshire +Transport Fund City Centre package will deliver the changes to the highway infrastructure needed to facilitate the closure of City Square to general traffic by 2021. This is a significant aim for the 2023 European Capital of Culture Bid and is a crucial element of the emerging transport strategy; a separate report on the agenda outlines the vision and principles for a new direction in transport for Leeds.
- 2.6 The 'West Yorkshire Playhouse' report to Executive Board in July 2015 set out the importance of investing in our cultural asset. The refurbished building would attract more people and new audiences, be a visible and striking landmark and an exciting place to be and support the long term financial resilience for the organisation. Symbolically, the proposals will re-orientate the building to face the City to the west, rather than the current situation where it faces the Quarry Hill car park. Again, high quality and fit for purpose public realm with pedestrian movement at its heart will galvanise the route between the Playhouse and Victoria Gate and the attached carpark. This will be a key element in retaining patronage once the Quarry Hill Car Park closes.

### **3 Main issues**

- 3.1 As the city centre has developed and grown, the pedestrian core has been established, while around this the more traditional public realm and transport network has remained. The city now needs to look forward to how Leeds could develop and evolve the look and feel of the public realm to ensure that it is more people friendly, playing a positive role in pedestrian movement, in people's experience of the city and in attracting both investment and major events. It is evident that there is a strong demand to place greater emphasis on the pedestrian however, while an ever expanding pedestrian core is not sustainable, our present street design puts constraints on pedestrian movement, place making and commercial opportunities. Consequently this paper outlines an approach to the Council could take in rebalancing street design to upgrade our public realm and place a greater emphasis on pedestrian movement and enhancing people's experience of the city.

- 3.2 Over the last 15 years the Council's approach to improving the public realm in the city centre has been firstly to focus on enhanced wayfinding, improving the quality of surfaces and street furniture, reducing clutter and introducing public art primarily within the pedestrian precinct and, secondly, to enhance 'pocket' spaces including Park Square, Merrion Gardens and Chancellor Court, with funding from the former Regional Development Agency. In addition we have delivered smaller scale interventions, often utilising contributions from the private sector in, for example, Albion Place, Bond Court and the Arena quarter which have added value to adjacent developments, attracting significant investment.
- 3.3 We now need to increase our ambition and create a forward thinking vision for our public realm. One which not only identifies a forward plan of interventions, but also recognises the importance of delivering high quality environments in a range of materials. Of course yorkstone and granite are the right choice for some areas but we need to explore the cost effective development of our quality public realm in a range of materials which is suitable for a high volume of pedestrians and range of uses. This Civic ambition to develop a programme of high impact schemes will help to re-shape the city centre and contribute towards our strategic priority of making Leeds the best city for residents, visitors and businesses. This ambition needs to recognise that the city centre has expanded to include the whole of the waterfront and South Bank; walking links to residential neighbourhoods around the whole of this expanded city centre are becoming increasingly important. As a result we need to further extend the city centre's way finding system into the West End, the hospital and universities quarter and the South Bank. Executive Board on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2015 agreed that a report is brought back to it with proposals to invest in the public realm across the South Bank.
- 3.4 Maximising the value of our Public Realm by ensuring it is well used and animated, through events, street cafes etc, will help to enhance the visitor experience, create natural surveillance and deliver income. We are currently rethinking our events strategy and how we can work with Bid4Leeds, to deliver the greatest benefits from the public realm in the Business Improvement District. As the city centre is a 24 hour destination, the public realm and highway infrastructure needs to be designed to be flexible, changing from day to evening to night time uses for example by possibly making day-time delivery bays available to taxi-ranks in the evening.
- 3.5 We will need to work with our partners in Leeds BID, West Yorkshire Combined Authority and the Local Enterprise Partnership to ensure we are meeting their needs and aspirations and to identify and secure sources of funding.
- 3.6 The attached document '**Leeds Public Realm: Design, Ideas and Opportunities**' shows some before and after photos of areas where we have previously improved the public realm as well as providing an artist's impressions of key gateway sites and areas around some of our major cultural and heritage buildings. These are not intended to be detailed designs but simply the means to help us visualise what some key areas of our city centre might look and feel like if we adopted some different street design principles.
- 3.7 These principles are summarised below and are compatible with the Council's Highways and Transportation policy principles and those of the Property Forum's Quality Places and Spaces Group.

- Understand the place.
- Develop high quality buildings and spaces.
- Increase connectivity, respect desire lines.
- Remove clutter.
- Retain/add trees and enhance landscaping.
- Build with simple robust and quality materials.
- Reveal beautiful architecture and respond to the character of Leeds.
- Design places to sit comfortably, whilst avoiding obstructions to pedestrian flow.
- Integrate public art.
- Co-ordinate signage.
- Provide quality lighting.
- Work together.
- Manage and maintain the place (long-life, loose-fit).

3.8 The prioritisation of areas for improvement has been undertaken using the following criteria:

- footfall;
- opportunity to create a new quality public space and destination for all ages;
- connectivity value and importance as a pedestrian route for commuters, visitors and shoppers;
- setting for key cultural attractions and buildings of architectural significance;
- potential health benefits;
- opportunity to improve dwell time;
- proportion of current physical obstructions; involvement of proactive third parties;
- opportunity to make a significant impact;
- provide a catalyst for further investment;
- economic benefits including potential for income-generating uses and reduction in maintenance costs; and
- contribution to achieving our wider transport strategy and other corporate objectives including bidding for Capital of Culture 2023.

3.9 The resulting prioritisation for improvements is attached at Appendix 2, these are also mapped out in Appendix 3. This would need to be the subject of further engagement and collaboration with key stakeholders including potential funders.

One of the priorities identified is the New Briggate area and a separate report on this agenda outlines some proposals in relation to this area.

- 3.10 Reducing the impact of traffic and improving the pedestrian environment through highway interventions will be a primary driver of an enhanced urban realm offer across all of the higher priority proposals listed in Appendix 2. As all of these proposals contain public highway, a holistic approach is required to the design and implementation of a combined public realm and highways programme in the city centre. This approach will reduce the risk of abortive work, reduce inconvenience to city centre users and avoid displacing issues such as conflicting uses and demands from one area of the city into another, while enabling us to deal strategically with key issues such as public transport accessibility, access to parking and loading, and facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. Furthermore it will facilitate an informed dialogue with potential funders and partners as we will have a cohesive forward plan for our city centre; a cohesive forward plan and vision can also aid our planning colleagues in negotiations with developers over planning conditions, which can assist in delivering the bigger picture. This is additional to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions.
- 3.11 This holistic approach will involve four phases:
- i) **Strategic context.** Establish a holistic strategic vision to deliver an aspirational urban realm by 2023, supporting our European Capital of Culture ambitions to provide the foundation for designing the public realm and transport network that will serve the future city centre; agree urban realm requirements and priorities by location; develop traffic circulation options for modelling in the next phase; conduct further consultation and engagement and explore funding options;
  - ii) **Model traffic circulation options**, including bus movements and appraise them against the strategic vision;
  - iii) **Detailed highways and public realm design**, including identifying opportunities for public art, undertaking site surveys, consultation, engagement and collaboration, assessing cost etc; and
  - iv) **Implementation on a phased prioritised basis.**
- 3.12 As a feasibility study will be required for each scheme, and the complexity of the challenge makes it hard to presently define each package of work, it would be sensible to approach the budget allocation in three stages. Firstly to undertake a highways feasibility study to understand any constraints and opportunities for the site and its interdependencies, secondly a capital allocation for detailed design and costings and thirdly a capital pot for delivery. A mixed funding package from internal and external sources can be pursued at all stages. Finally, a revenue commitment from LCC and potentially other stakeholders will be required to maintain the public realm and highways infrastructure. Naturally schemes will seek not to increase revenue requirements. However, in certain cases an enhanced level of funding may be needed. This could be delivered through increased income from the public realm such as events and other activities.

- 3.13 Another report on this agenda explains how we will work with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority to reduce the impact of traffic in the city centre through developing a compelling ambition and spatial vision for investment in an integrated mass rapid transit network for the city supported by strategic park and ride facilities and car parking policy contained in the emerging Parking Supplementary Planning Document.
- 3.14 Incremental Approach.** By clearly setting out our aspirations for the city centre as a whole and undertaking detailed designs for each key area, we will be able to develop a set of criteria to deal with smaller scale proposals as they emerge, encourage meanwhile uses and experimentation, particularly for problematic spaces. It will help to facilitate implementing incremental improvements as opportunities arise, without prejudicing future work or undertaking work that might ultimately prove to be abortive.
- 3.15 Alongside the improvements to the highway and public realm, the Council is committed to developing both a **public art strategy and an events strategy** for the city centre contributing to creating an inviting and engaging city centre for all. It is important to have actives within our public realm which engage with a broad range of user groups. This is crucial as a key factor influencing the design of our public realm will be how it could be used - for events, to accommodate both temporary and more permanent works of art as well as for street cafes and more informal interactions. Our existing approach of incorporating public art into features such as seating and bollards will doubtless continue and could be extended and enhanced to accommodate stand-alone world class public art. This strategy will also encompass use of event spaces and the approach to market pitches and events such as farmers markets.
- 3.16 **Management and Maintenance.** When choosing materials and creating designs we need to be mindful of the maintenance legacy in terms of ease of cleansing, durability and patch replacement. There are a number of quality alternatives to yorkstone including granite and manufactured materials with a lower cleansing requirement. The holistic approach to transport feasibility will also be able to inform the highways planned maintenance schedule, further safeguarding Council investment and allowing for effective resource planning.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.1.1 There has already been widespread engagement and collaboration on the overall aspirations through Breakthrough Project workshops, Access Groups, the Transport Symposium, The Grand Quarter Stakeholders Group, the Property Forum Quality Places and Spaces Group, The Calls Stakeholders' Group etc. Further detailed engagement and collaboration will be undertaken on a scheme by scheme basis to include these and other stakeholders including children and young people.

### **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- 4.2.1 Different users have different needs and these are sometimes conflicting. The Council is committed to continuing dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders to

ensure that our streets are designed in such a way as to improve road safety particularly for pedestrians of all ages and wheelchair users. A full equality impact assessment will be undertaken for each scheme.

- 4.2.2 A screening document has been prepared and an independent impact assessment is not required for the approvals requested. The document can be found in Appendix 4.

### **4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan**

- 4.3.1 The proposals contained in this report will further the delivery of the Breakthrough Projects and our aspiration for Leeds to be a compassionate, caring city that helps all its residents benefit from the effects of the city's economic growth. It will also help us achieve Council Policies and the Best Council Plan including enabling everyone in Leeds to 'move around a well-planned city easily, be safe and feel safe, enjoy happy healthy, active lives, earn enough to support themselves and their families, enjoy greater access to green spaces, leisure and the arts'.

### **4.4 Resources and value for money**

- 4.4.1 Investing now to identify the optimum highway design options needed to deliver our urban realm ambitions for 2023 will identify the critical path to delivering key urban realm interventions, opportunities for scalable and early wins, help realise the benefits of the West Yorkshire +Transport Fund City Centre package as well as harness devolution and local funding opportunities.
- 4.4.2 The phased approach outlined in paragraph 3.11 potentially offers the best value for money for the Council.
- 4.4.3 We will explore how we could use a 'cocktail' of funding through s106/CIL contributions, the private sector, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, other sources and mainstreaming within the capital budget.

### **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 4.5.1 This report is eligible for call-in. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

### **4.6 Risk Management**

- 4.6.1 There are no immediate risk management issues. A holistic approach to feasibility to progress a long term public realm improvement programme is the preferred option to deal strategically with transport issues, ensure co-ordination between adjacent schemes and avoid potentially abortive work. The BID4Leeds is one of the key drivers for urban realm improvements in the city centre's Business Improvement District and will be keen to see outcomes delivered within a 4 year time frame. The Council will need to balance the needs of different stakeholders who will want to see localised schemes progressed through the identification of potential quick wins.
- 4.6.2 Both the timescales and costs will be subject to refinement following the completion of the first Strategic Context phase.

## **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1 A key component in improving pedestrians' experience of their environment, and in attracting and sustaining both investment and major events is the quality of the public realm. Our public realm does not just provide routes from one destination to another but is increasingly a destination in itself, providing people with places for leisure, social interaction and even work, thereby making a vital contribution to creating an economically successful, liveable and healthy city centre for people of all ages. Changing our highway infrastructure and maintaining strategic highway assets to facilitate a transformation in the scale and quality of our urban realm will be challenging and take significant capital funding.
- 5.2 Given the complexity and interdependencies of implementing major transport and public realm improvement schemes while planning for major developments & events, a holistic approach to feasibility development and programme delivery is the optimum means to:
- identify the critical path to delivering key urban realm interventions;
  - realise the benefits of the West Yorkshire +Transport Fund City Centre package;
  - provide a platform for taking forward our urban realm ambitions for the Capital of Culture;
  - engage with WYCA on the emerging Single Transport Plan 'Place Making' core principle; and
  - harness opportunities for funding through devolution and from local contributions.

## **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1 Executive Board is recommended to:
- i) Endorse the principle of the Council developing a strategic plan for public realm improvements in the City Centre based on principles outlined in paragraph 3.7;
  - ii) Agree to the Council consulting and engaging with stakeholders on potential schemes to be brought forward based on the design ideas and opportunities document attached at Appendix 1;
  - iii) Subject to the outcome of consultation, request officers to bring back a report to Executive Board outlining a proposal plan of public realm improvements, costings and funding and note that the Head of Strategic Projects, City Development, will be responsible for bringing this report back.

## **7 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

- 7.1 None

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.

## **8 Appendices**

8.1 Appendix 1 'Leeds Public Realm: Design, Ideas and Opportunities'

8.2 Appendix 2 Prioritisation for improvement

8.3 Appendix 3 Map of locations

8.4 Appendix 4 EIA