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## Report of the Director of City Development

### Executive Board

Date: 11 June 2008

### Subject: City Centre Vision Conference and Follow Up

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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

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The city centre plays a significant role in delivering the objectives of the Vision for Leeds - "becoming an internationally competitive European city at the heart of a prosperous region where everyone can enjoy a high quality of life". 30% of the region's economic workforce is based in the city centre, with the most successful sectors driving the local and regional economy located in the city centre. The success of the region and the city is intrinsically connected to the success of the city centre.
2. Given the strategic importance of the city centre to delivering the vision for Leeds, the question therefore arises of "How do we know when we have achieved success?", What does success feel like, look like and how is success expressed in the city centre, in relation to the vision set out for 2020 for the city and the region?
3. The City Centre Vision Conference thus set out to begin a process through which the aspirations for the city centre can be fully determined and to identify the means through which they can be realised, working in partnership with all stakeholders and the community as a whole. The overarching message from the conference was that all stakeholders needed to have the confidence and courage to be aspirational and ambitious. The conference identified a number of 'Big Ideas' (see paragraph 4.1) which have been grouped into key workstreams which are outlined in Appendix 1. Whilst the Council will ultimately be responsible for the delivery of these workstreams it is proposed that partnership groups are involved in supporting project work, communication, consultation, and generating further debate etc.

## **1.0 Purpose of report**

- 1.1 This report advises Executive Board of the City Centre Vision Conference held at the end of January 2008 and recommends how best to take forward the issues and ideas that emerged.

## **2.0 Introduction**

- 2.1 Leeds is UK's most successful regional city in recent years (Financial Times – 12-03-08). It has an even stronger future with the inflow of significant investment into the city centre. Trinity Leeds development completes in 2010, followed by the £1bn Eastgate Quarters project opening in 2012. Major retailers continue to locate in Leeds City centre, the latest being John Lewis in the Eastgate scheme. Those key investors amongst others have been asking the Council about its vision and long-term plans for the city centre.
- 2.2 The Council itself has made major investment in the city centre in recent years, upgrading the public realm, and in the city's cultural infrastructure. Its land disposals have been a catalyst for major private sector investment. There have been some concerns expressed that the city has been too developer led and such concerns have been reinforced by the current downturn in the residential market.
- 2.3 These have been the drivers behind the city centre vision conference aimed at ensuring Leeds has an holistic and aspirational view for the future of the city centre.

## **3.0 Background**

- 3.1 Leeds City Council, working with partners and key sponsors (Arup, Aedas, Pinsent Masons, Isis and Drivers Jonas) delivered the January City Centre Vision conference which succeeded in bringing together under one roof, active members of the Leeds' business community, local government, voluntary organisations and community representatives. It created 'one' community, for the sole purpose of developing a vision for the future of Leeds city centre. The day generated energy, dynamism and a great host of ideas and proposals, helping to identify opportunities and challenges the city centre faced in the next twenty years and establishing where we are now and where we want to be in the future.
- 3.2 The conference comprised 4 keynote speakers and 12 workshops. The 4 speakers were: *Sir Terry Farrell*, one of the world's foremost architects and urban designers, spoke about the need for Leeds to develop and grow in a sustainable fashion; *Wayne Hemmingway* MBE, of Hemingway Design, Professor of Built Environment and Chairman of the Building For Life CABE project, challenged the audience to take a critical look at Leeds city centre in all its aspects; *Gary Lawrence*, Global Director for Sustainability at ARUP and internationally renowned expert on urban strategies and sustainable development, spoke about taking a holistic approach to the issues of urban management; and *Mike Sharp*, lead architectural partner and urban designer for Scotland and the North of England for Gillespies, provided insights into the re-birth of the public realm and the importance of public realm projects as catalyst for regeneration of cities.
- 3.3 Each of the 12 workshops produced ideas, views and developed one 'BIG IDEA' for each of the six themes of International City, Developing the Rim of the city centre, City Centre Living, Connectivity both within the city centre and with surrounding

communities, Culture, and Sustainability. Sustainability is an overarching theme which does of course run through all the other themes

## **4.0 The Outcomes**

4.1 The **Big Ideas** agreed upon by the groups for each workshop theme were as follows:

### **INTERNATIONAL CITY**

*“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.”*

### **DEVELOPING THE RIM**

*“We will humanise the roads to reconnect communities. Create green bridges to the city centre through Quarry house; Gateway ECO towers; Housing Expo with district heating scheme and water features in the heart of the city centre.”*

### **CITY CENTRE LIVING**

*“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.”*

### **CONNECTIVITY**

*“We will remove non-essential traffic to a re-routed city loop running to south of the river. Reduce the dominance of the car – car free city – providing alternative parking solutions and so allowing pedestrians to have dominance in a clean, green well maintained public environment, supported by bold governance and new funding sources.”*

### **CULTURE**

*“We want to see that Leeds has made a successful bid for city of culture 2020, based on a coherent, pervasive and unifying cultural offer with production as its engine, diversity at its heart and excellence as its benchmark, thereby truly adding – CreateLeeds to Leedsliveit.loveit.- createit. To put culture on the streets, to commit to culture.”*

### **SUSTAINABILITY**

*“We will set a holistic and diverse strategy for the city centre and put in place governance and funding arrangements to deliver it. To provide unity of structure and political purpose to make the city centre ours and our children’s.”*

## **4.2 Specific Project Proposals and Other Major Issues**

In addition to the Big Ideas, delegates also raised major issues such as making the city centre more family friendly and resolving issues of congestion that met the needs of pedestrians, businesses and visitors. They were also enthusiastic about specific projects and ideas they wanted to see developed within the vision for the city centre. Notable examples included:

- City Centre Park
- Arena
- Focus on the river and waterfront

- High quality Public Realm
- Reviewing the Loop
- Iconic buildings and Public Art
- Improving the arrival experience from the train station

## 5.0 How matters are being Progressed and Next Steps

5.1 Some projects such as the Arena are already underway and progress on other ideas has already been made. Regarding **funding** a meeting has been arranged between the Council and key representatives of the financial sector to discuss alternative ways of funding both major projects and ongoing maintenance.

5.2 It has been agreed with the Chief Highways Officer to pilot the removal of **street clutter** in four small areas of the city centre, (Corn Exchange, Town Hall, Civic Precinct and Whitehall Road). This pilot will help identify the potential for change and the barriers to be overcome.

5.3 The specific project proposals identified in 4.2 above received broad support. As stated above, the Arena project is well underway, and the proposal for a city centre park, suggestions to review the “loop” and improving the “arrival” experience to the city centre are ones that can be investigated immediately. Project teams will be established to progress these ideas if they are supported by Executive Board.

### 5.4 Other Thematic Work Groups

Analysis of the outcomes of each workshop suggests that many ideas can be grouped under a number of themes or workstreams and individual projects can be developed within a broader context. It is therefore proposed that working groups are formed based on these themes, namely Public Realm (including public art); Legible/Liveable/Walkable; Culture in the city centre; developing the Rim; and the Waterfront. Each working group will consider its theme in relation to existing work and the wider context of the city centre and indeed the city. The groups will have Leeds City Council leadership and representation from appropriate fora or existing groups relating to the core theme that the workgroup will be focussed on.

5.5 Although Leeds City Council will have a key responsibility for the delivery for each theme, the skills and resources of partners across the City will be essential if we are to achieve our vision. In particular, it is proposed that the Leeds Initiative and other partnership groups are closely involved in supporting project work, communication, consultation, and generating further debate. For example the Leeds Renaissance Partnership would continue to be closely involved in developing the Rim, while Aire Action Leeds and the newly formed private sector waterfront group would continue to be involved in the waterfront projects.

5.6 Some underlying principles that emerged from the conference will be used to “test” proposals and projects that are developed by the Thematic Groups. These include sustainability, high quality, diversity and liveability (see Appendix 1). In all these areas we should aspire to be the best – to be exemplars of best practice.

### 5.7 Communication And Engagement

Communicating the progress being made following the conference is critical. It is proposed to continue to use the [www.leedscitycentrerevision.org](http://www.leedscitycentrerevision.org) website as an opportunity to provide participants from the conference and the wider community with a means of continued involvement in the vision project. This is to include a discussion forum on key themes and projects, and links from other sites such as the

Council web-site, the Leeds Initiative site, and leedsliveitloveit.com. Further development of this website is required. A communications plan is being prepared. It may be appropriate to focus consultation on key proposals such as the city centre park and reviewing the loop.

## **6.0 Prospectus**

- 6.1 It is proposed that a Prospectus is produced which will be a short promotional document setting out our ambitions for the city centre and key themes and showing by means of a time line what is already planned and what projects we are taking forward. It will show clearly how the short term actions and major project ideas are contributing to our long term aspirations.

## **7.0. Implications For Council Policy And Governance**

- 7.1. The outcomes of the Conference are entirely compatible with the Vision for Leeds and progression with the projects outlined above with help with the Vision's realisation. The conference outcomes and the aims of the Prospectus will need to be reflected in ongoing strategies, most notably the City Centre Area Action Plan. This plan will need to reflect the key projects emerging from the conference, the aspirations for the growth of the centre and the desire for a "fuzzy" boundary between the centre and adjacent areas.

## **8.0. Legal and Resource Implications**

- 8.1. Implementing the ideas from the Conference will require significant funding. As indicated in paragraph 5.1 above, officers have established a joint private/public sector group to explore imaginative ways of funding any arising projects. City Centre Management has some funding to meet the costs of, for example, producing the Prospectus, updating the website, running workshops and producing other communication material. For major projects, reports will be brought outlining possible funding packages once further work is completed. Until such packages can be identified no commitments on projects will be given. There are already significant pressures on the capital programme and if future projects are to be funded existing schemes will need to be reprioritised unless additional funding can be identified.

## **9.0. Conclusions**

- 9.1. The Conference was extremely successful in meeting its objectives to engage with a wide audience, to stimulate debate and to encourage stakeholders to work together to deliver an enhanced city centre that will benefit the wider city, its inhabitants, economy and visitors. A clear way forward has been identified to ensure that the conference is the beginning and not simply an end in itself.

## **10.0. Recommendations**

- 10.1 Members are asked to:
- i. note the successful outcome of the City Centre Vision Conference and the ongoing work regarding the arena, funding and the removal of street clutter;
  - ii. agree that officers investigate the feasibility of implementing the 'Big Ideas' from the Conference and the work as proposed in section 5.0 ;

- iii. agree to work with and consult the Leeds Initiative and other partnership groups to help develop more detailed proposals;
- iv. agree that an annual update on overall progress is brought back to Executive Board in January 2009 and that reports on individual projects are brought back to Executive Board at the appropriate time.