

Ad-hoc Regeneration Scrutiny Panel

Thursday 22nd September 2022 at 10:30am

Present:

Councillor Elizabeth Smaje (Chair)
Councillor Andrew Cooper
Councillor John Lawson

In Attendance:

Joanne Bartholomew, Service Director for Development
Simon Taylor, Head of Town Centre Programmes - Development
Sarah Collins, Programme Manager – Development
Edward Highfield, Service Director – Skills and Regeneration

Apologies:

Councillor Graham Turner, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Regeneration
Councillor Yusra Hussain

1. Membership/Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Yusra Hussain.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a correct record.

3. Interests

No Interests were declared.

4. Admission of the Public

All items were considered in the public session.

5. Deputations/Petitions

There were no deputations or petitions received.

6. Public Question Time

No questions were received from the public.

7. Estate / Somerset Buildings and Residential Development in Huddersfield Town Centre

The Panel considered an update on the approach to residential development in Huddersfield Town Centre including the delivery of Estate Buildings and Somerset Buildings, as part of the wider Huddersfield Blueprint. The report was presented by Joanne Bartholomew Service Director for Development who highlighted that:

- The Huddersfield Blueprint was a ten-year vision to create a thriving, modern-day town centre.
- The Huddersfield Town Centre Living Plan was developed to set out the vision, objectives, opportunities and actions to encourage more people to

live in the town centre and contribute to the wider aspirations of the Huddersfield Blueprint.

- The scale of investment and transformation would improve the attractiveness of the town centre as a place to live.
- This would provide new opportunities for residential development which in turn, would attract new residents.
- The initial proposals for residential development in Huddersfield Town Centre would focus on two Council owned assets, Estate Buildings and Somerset Buildings.
- Cabinet agreed on 5th July 2022 to proceed with the first phase of development and to enter a 12-month exclusivity period (to reach a development appraisal) with Thirteen Group.
- Thirteen Group ("Thirteen") was a large developing, not for profit, housing association based in the north east.
- The Council would be supporting Thirteen group to bring forward their ideas for live and work units in Estate Buildings and Somerset House and how to make the Blueprint vision a reality.
- Thirteen were of robust financial standing and had secured a significant grant allocation from Homes England to support them in delivering housing.
- They also had a strong relationship with Heritage England which was important when working with listed buildings.
- Thirteen had a strong set of corporate values which aligned with the Council's priorities.
- Alongside housing delivery, Thirteen were focussed on the social value that could be brought to the wider district.

In the discussion to follow, the Panel raised questions about the demographic of the residents that the Council hoped to attract to Huddersfield through the delivery of Somerset House and Estate Buildings. The Panel also wanted to know about the timing and availability of the new residential offer in relation to the delivery of the wider Cultural Heart.

In response, Joanne Bartholomew advised that the Council were looking to attract young professionals highlighting the development of the Station to Stadium Enterprise Corridor and the aspiration to increase the opportunities for recruitment to local businesses in this area. Joanne also assured the Panel that Thirteen had an established record of working with businesses to understand the type of residential offer that would be best suited to their target workforce. Responding to the question about the timing and availability, Joanne advised that a large amount of construction work related to the Cultural Heart would be completed alongside the residential developments in the area.

When considering the principle of developing residential housing in the town centre, the Panel wanted to understand more about the impact the ring road had on air quality in this location. The Panel also asked about the financial review process in relation to the cost-of living crisis.

In response, Joanne Bartholomew advised that financial appraisals were anticipated during early 2023 and that, in terms of deliverability, there may be some changes in the market and inflation rates by this time. Joanne also explained that the estate buildings project would not be delivered without leveraging external funding to ensure viability. From a residents perspective, the intention was to introduce an affordable level of rent, but this was dependent on the financial appraisal and affordability review, the details of which could be presented to scrutiny at a later date.

The Panel noted as per the report that there would be an update presented to Cabinet but highlighted that there were no milestones of delivery or decision points detailed and asked when the financial aspects of the project would be available. Joanne Bartholomew responded to clarify that the exclusivity agreement with Thirteen was to reach a development appraisal. The current exclusivity agreement was not to deliver the project at this stage, and therefore there were no decision points included in the report. Joanne further reassured the Panel that prior to any cabinet decision a time frame would be implemented which would include scrutiny before any decision.

Responding to the Panel's question around air quality, Simon Taylor, Head of Town Centre Programmes – Development, explained that there were already air quality mitigations and rigorous scrutiny processes to support existing residential properties in Huddersfield town centre. He expressed confidence that this information, alongside previous experience could be used to move forward with the new projects. In the longer term, it would be important to create a vehicle strategy, to understand how vehicles travel in and around the town centre to reduce traffic and emissions.

The Panel asked further questions in relation to energy efficient building standards, highlighting that restoring old buildings and making them low carbon could be costly. The Panel also wanted to know about the potential to connect the new residential buildings to the upcoming District Energy Network.

In response, Joanne Bartholomew acknowledged that there were additional challenges when working with old/listed buildings but reassured the Panel that the Council were working with Thirteen to bring forward the best level of efficient building standards. In relation to the District Energy Network, Joanne explained that a number of key projects within the Huddersfield Blueprint including the Cultural Heart were ready to be connected. However, further work needed to be undertaken in relation to Estate Buildings and Somerset House and it was agreed that a report setting out the various options for the buildings, and the financial viability of those options, would be presented to a future meeting of the Panel. The Panel further highlighted that climate change should have a higher profile in the Town Centre Living Plan, and it was agreed that a response be made in the next reiteration of the live document.

The Panel wanted to know what mix of provision would be available in both of the buildings. In response, Joanne Bartholomew advised that given the proximity of Estate Buildings to the train station, it was anticipated that graduate/entry level professionals may be the target demographic, whereas Somerset House may lend itself to older residents or small family units. Joanne also highlighted that this was only an initial prediction and the Council had invited Thirteen, to bring their wealth of experience and present their ideas for the buildings. It was also noted that the results of the consultations may further identify a need for a particular type of offer.

The Panel asked a question around the availability of services to match the needs of the demographic of the residents that were anticipated to be living in the town centre noting the principles of the 15-minute neighbourhood model. In response, Joanne Bartholomew agreed that this was important to consider as the proposals developed.

The Panel asked if there was a need for market testing to ensure that town centre living was still considered a vibrant market following the Covid-19 pandemic. The Panel also wanted to know if a priority was to attract commuters to work in the town centre. In response, Joanne Bartholomew advised that through the residential developments that the aim was for people to be able to call the town centre home and feel that it had a retail and leisure mix that met their needs. A high quality and well managed offer would ensure a vibrant market and listening to residents was also important. Joanne added that alongside the market for an affordable residential offer, the investment in the Station to Stadium Enterprise Corridor and the University South Gate would help retain young professionals hoping to expand their careers in Huddersfield.

The Panel asked if consideration had been given to providing the right technological facilities in the buildings to enable modern living and attract young professionals. In response Joanne Bartholomew reassured the Panel that Thirteen's units were high tech and would enable residents to live in a modern way.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the Estate / Somerset Buildings and Residential Development in Huddersfield Town Centre update, and it was agreed that:

1. A report setting out the financial appraisal and the affordability review be provided to the Panel.
2. A report setting out the various options for the buildings and their financial viability in relation to energy efficient building standards be provided to the Panel.
3. When developing the type of residential offer alongside the Cultural Heart, it was important to consider the needs of those residents to ensure that the new town centre offer met those requirements through the right mix of services and retail/leisure opportunities.
4. The theme of Climate Change would have a higher profile in the next reiteration of the Town Centre Living Plan.

8. Huddersfield Station Gateway

The Panel considered an update on the Huddersfield Station Gateway (part of the delivery programme associated with Huddersfield Blueprint) which was presented by Edward Highfield, Service Director – Skills and Regeneration. Edward explained that:

- The key projects included were the: (i) Huddersfield Train Station (ii) TransPennine Route Upgrade (referred to as TRU), (iii) St. George's Warehouse (iv) George Hotel and Estate Buildings
- The Transport and Work Act Order (to authorise the construction/operation of new transport infrastructure projects) had now been confirmed and delivery of the TRU had now commenced.

- As part of the TRU project, key elements of the upgrade at Huddersfield Station included:
 - Re-arranging and lengthening the existing platforms and the widening of platform 1.
 - A new platform on the west side of the station (between platform 8 and the warehouse)
 - A new foot bridge, constructed towards the northern end of the platforms, and an extension of the under pass.
 - New canopies constructed at the northern end of the platforms, and the Penistone Line canopy was to be extended northwards.
 - Overhead Line Equipment (OLE) was to be introduced throughout the station, (except for the Penistone Line).
- The completion of the TRU was estimated for Summer 2026.
- Alongside the delivery of the core train station projects, it was important for the Council to find ways to maximise the benefits of Network Rails investment across the wider station gateway area.
- The Council had drawn up proposals in the Huddersfield Rail Station Connections plan in the Transforming Cities Fund (TCF).
- This included 6 projects, funded through the West Yorkshire Combined Authority to help prepare the surrounding area for TRU.
- The £16 million scheme would focus on improving principal streets and ring road junctions.
- Northumberland Street was noted as a critical route into the town centre and would be included in the improvements through the TCF investment.
- Pedestrianisation of Northumberland Street was a key priority as per feedback from consultations and stakeholder engagement.
- Attractiveness of the area was also important; designs and visuals were being developed for a second round of consultations later in the year.
- The next steps included the development of a jointly funded and sponsored Masterplan, produced in partnership with key partners.
- The West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Network Rail and TransPennine Express and HD1 developments were the key active partners.
- They shared the Councils ambition to maximise the rail investment across the areas surrounding the train station.
- This was in the collective understanding that the customer experience began at their journey to and from the station.
- TransPennine Express had identified that the train station was underserved by car parking.
- A key area of regeneration for the station included, St. George's Warehouse and a new Station Square
- St. George's Warehouse was owned by and managed by HD1 Developments Ltd.
- Working HD1 Developments Ltd, the aim was to identify better use for this site (i.e.- car parking, office space, apartments or other leisure uses) and connect the warehouse to the town.

In the discussion to follow the Panel wanted to know what consideration had been given to bus connectivity and the implementation of clean air zones in the town centre.

In response, Edward Highfield explained that increased bus use was the long-term ambition but would require significant modal shift in the way people choose to travel. There was potential use the eastern entrance to the Station as a drop off point to remove a significant amount of traffic from the town centre and free up space to the front of the station for buses. In relation to the question about clean air zones, Edward advised that there were no legal mandates from the Government to implement these in Huddersfield and that there were currently no voluntary arrangements in place.

The Panel noted that having car parking provision to the rear of station would be of benefit but questioned if this would be enough to reduce congestion at peak times. When considering the challenge of balancing the conflict between pedestrians and traffic, the Panel highlighted that the model used here could be replicated across the town centre regeneration projects. Edward Highfield further advised that forecasts had been received from TransPennine Express which would help inform how best to reduce congestion in more detail and it was agreed that this information be provided to a future meeting of the Panel.

In respect of the Warehouse the Panel, wanted to know if the Council and HD1 Developments plans were aligned as well as highlighting the key opportunity for future workspace in this location. The Panel further added that in any new car parking provision should now include electric vehicle charging facilities.

In response, Edward Highfield explained that HD1 Developments Limited were the asset owner of the Warehouse and were responsible for any final decisions in relation to future of the building. The Council were collaborating with HD1 Developments to ask what they needed to achieve a shared vision for the space, and Edward confirmed that workspace was a key option. Edward also agreed to take on board the Panels comment on the issue of EV Charging points highlighting that it was important to set the example for the future.

The Panel noted that other successful towns and cities had prioritized pedestrianisation and requested that the Council was bolder in its approach. In response, Edward Highfield agreed but advised that it was also important to understand the various challenges and complexities in terms of servicing and access. Edward also explained that the Council had some examples of where pedestrianisation had worked well to support a bold approach. This included the widening of pavements to allow cafes and restaurants to add additional outdoor seating to comply with Covid-19 restrictions during the pandemic.

The Panel highlighted that the connectivity between buses and trains was key to reducing maximum journey times and suggested that the Combined Authority should be involved to ensure oversight across both services when master planning. Edward Highfield responded to agree and advised that an upcoming workshop 'The Last Mile' was to be held in respect of improving journey times as a whole.

The Panel wanted to know what the estimated timescales were for the Masterplans. Edward Highfield advised that output was scheduled for early 2023 and it was agreed that the plans be provided to a future meeting of the Panel when the level of detail was appropriate.

In respect of the Station to Stadium Corridor, the Panel wanted to know if consideration was to be given to the ease of access noting that some routes were not easy to walk. Edward Highfield responded to reassure the Panel that this was a key issue that the master plan aimed to address, and that movement would be a key area of focus in the wider plan.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was agreed that the Panel also be provided with the Winter 2022 Consultation Plans by email, noting the importance of checking that the language used was accessible from lay person viewpoint, and that HD1 Developments Ltd be invited to a future meeting of the Panel.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the update on the Huddersfield Station Gateway, and it was agreed that:

1. The passenger number forecasts and options for reducing congestion be provided to a future meeting of the Panel.
2. All new car parking provisions should include electric vehicle charging facilities.
3. The Masterplans be provided to a future meeting of the Panel when the level of detail is appropriate.
4. The Winter 2022 Consultation Plans be provided to the Panel by email.
5. HD1 Developments Ltd be invited to a future meeting of the Panel.