

EXETER CITY COUNCIL**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ECONOMY
9 JUNE 2011****EXECUTIVE
21 JUNE 2011****A CITY CENTRE VISION FOR A GREEN CAPITAL****1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To consider the report: 'A City Centre Vision for a Green Capital' and to resolve whether to adopt the document for engagement with key stakeholders.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY OF DOCUMENT

- 2.1 Members will be aware of the progress that is being made on the LDF Core Strategy; following the Inquiry in June on the Core Strategy attention will turn to progressing local development documents including a possible City Centre Area Action Plan. Members have accepted that work should proceed on key City Centre projects, such as: the redevelopment of the Bus and Coach Station site; creating new pedestrian spaces, and the preparation of a bid for the Business Improvement District.
- 2.2 The development principles that will support a framework master plan for the Bus and Coach Station site will be reported shortly to members. Progress on this project has been slower than advised to Members last year in large part due to the decision of the John Lewis Partnership in relation to 1-11 Sidwell Street. The John Lewis decision has major implications to the approach to the development of the site, and effectively work on the master planning has been delayed for the implications of the JLP decision to be assessed.
- 2.3 In January 2010 Scrutiny Committee considered a set of papers on the challenges facing the City in reducing carbon emissions over the next two decades. Specific attention was given to the City Centre and the role of planning and transport issues in addressing carbon emissions. Members recognised the City Centre performs a complex set of roles: economic, social, and residential, and as a transport hub; and if we are to accommodate the various pressures to create a satisfactory environment Members recognised the following key elements need to be delivered:
- Sites for new jobs, housing and retail uses;
 - Significantly intensified use of the Bus Station and Bus Garages sites through a comprehensive redevelopment;
 - Effective opening up and investment in the cultural quarter;
 - Rationalisation of the parking stock;
 - Major enhancement of the gateways for passengers at Central Station and St David's Station;

- Improved facilities for pedestrians in the city centre principal shopping streets and increased priority for public transport vehicles;
- Elimination of City Centre vehicle movement in all the principal shopping streets, except for public transport vehicles; and
- The creation of a series of new pedestrian spaces in the City Centre.

2.4 In addressing some of the key principles, such as creating a civilised city centre with pedestrian dominated spaces and limiting cross centre vehicular movement, such as created in Princesshay; there was recognition that there was no clear vision for the City Centre that could assist decision makers in grappling with specific issues and site specific interventions. A long term vision for the City Centre should drive the traffic management strategy rather than vice versa. Accordingly, Officers of the City Council and County Council have been working with LDA Design on a visioning document for the City Centre.

2.5 The document is attached for Members attention. It has not been the subject of a public consultation exercise. Explicitly the work has been commissioned to:

Provide a development context for a City Centre Transportation strategy and other potential studies and projects in the City Centre; and

Form the basis of a vision for any future City Centre Action Area Plan.

2.6 The City Centre Vision document is split into two distinct components:

- A number of framework principles help to bring out and build on those elements that are, or could be, memorable and great about Exeter; and
- four big moves or development projects that represent one way of delivering change within this framework over the coming years to deliver the ambitions of a prosperous and growing city.

2.7 There are 17 principles:

- Principle 1: Future development in the city centre will 'hang off' the ridge to reinforce its importance as the spine of the city and make best use of the underlying topography. New places and 'events' will provide containment to the linear spine and energy of the city centre (*i.e. marking an obvious beginning/end of the City Centre*).
- Principle 2: The distinctive character of the different quarters along the linear spine will be reinforced, creating area with their own unique character and focus. The different quarters and their attractions will be well connected beyond the linear spine.
- Principle 3: Any new development in the city centre will respect the city skyline and reflect the underlying topography.
- Principle 4: Development in the city centre will improve the legibility of the historic walled city and city gates.
- Principle 5: Repair the finer grain of the walled city
- Principle 6: Create an exciting mix of contemporary design and historic buildings

- Principle 7: Match projected housing growth in Exeter with growth in culture, services, employment and retail. Exeter should be recognised as a cultural centre of the peninsula.
- Principle 8: Create a true mixed use urban centre including more employment, housing and evening economy, delivered in a higher density, space efficient urban form.
- Principle 9: Become a genuinely 'green' place that moves beyond the standard sustainability agenda and takes advantage of local enterprise and business opportunities
- Principle 10: Prioritise pedestrians in the city centre and discourage cross town traffic
- Principle 11: Make public transport the preferred means of getting into the city and remove conflict between pedestrians and buses
- Principle 12: Create a clear network of interconnected high quality pedestrian dominated streets, public spaces and parks
- Principle 13: Improve pedestrian and cycle access and enhance the arrival experience
- Principle 14: Create a new place on the river at Exe Bridges
- Principle 15: Improve foot and cycle connection to the river and surrounding countryside and create more usable green space in the city centre
- Principle 16: Reduce the impact of traffic and road infrastructure on the riverside
- Principle 17: Increase urban biodiversity by creating and connecting habitats within the built fabric and along the riverside

2.8 These principles create a flexible framework for the growth of the City Centre over time. Within this framework, a number of specific projects or 'big moves' are identified that will together help to realise Exeter's Vision as a 'Capital city centre'.

2.9 Big Moves:

- Creating space beyond the historic walls at the East Quarter as the first step in the regeneration of a compact centre;
- Regeneration within the city walls;
- A new place on the river;
- Improving the sense of arrival

2.10 These larger projects – or 'moves' will be accompanied by a series of smaller moves that will come about as opportunities are created; for example 'improving the sense of arrival' could involve specific steps being taken to address the challenge presented by Western Way which acts as a physical barrier between the city centre and residential neighbourhoods. Traffic dominated roundabouts and wide strategic road corridors could be changed into a series of strategic streets fronted by development. It is important to recognise that some of these principles may give rise to an inherent conflict, i.e., reducing cross city centre traffic places greater pressure on the roundabouts and junctions that makes it probably more difficult to produce tightened junctions on the inner bypass. It may

not be possible with current and future traffic flows, especially as a reduction in cross city traffic will result in increased traffic volumes on the ring road. Devon County Council found when modelling the Paris Street roundabout as a signalised junction that in order to accommodate pedestrians and significant turning movements, it would retain a large footprint. This would not necessarily improve accessibility for pedestrians with staggered crossing facilities and 'walk with traffic' in sync with signal timings. Similarly reducing the impact of traffic on the riverside will be challenging and difficult to achieve, given the volumes of traffic on Exe Bridges and limited alternative routes that cross the river.

- 2.11 The City Centre Vision document is not a planning document and will not be a development plan document, its real value is establishing a clear set of principles that allow decision makers to take decisions on specific projects in the knowledge of the bigger picture. In isolation individual decisions can be challenging presenting difficult choices. A case in point was a number of decisions taken on Princesshay that were based on making the new Princesshay a pedestrian friendly environment capable of supporting an evening economy. This gave priority to pedestrians when there was a significant body of opinion that supported vehicular activity in Bedford Street, similarly the Old Post Office Street had vehicular activity and there was concern that buildings should not have been built close to the City Wall. These detailed questions in the design of the development were contentious. The benefit of the Vision document is that it allows the decision makers to see the bigger picture to understand how a specific intervention assists or harms the delivery of the vision.
- 2.12 Not all the ideas set out in the document will be achievable in the medium to long term. The Vision document recognises that the timing for the minor changes may happen in an opportunistic way, and the important thing is to keep the bigger Vision in sight as change happens. Some issues will be challenging due to financial considerations, however the arguments that underpin the principles are sound and are capable of being supported even though the viability of the proposals are challenging. For example, whilst there may be merit in removing multi storey car parks from within the City Walls consistent with returning the built development to a more historic grain; it is unlikely to be viable. Moreover, it is important that the amount of car parking available is assessed as part of the overall transportation strategy so that the economy of the city centre is not harmed. Likewise, although we may wish to improve the sense of arrival to the city centre, plans to remove cross city traffic will be challenging. Even with plans to improve access to the city by increasing the choice of sustainable alternatives, the level of growth in the city and sub region will increase traffic on our roads. Removing capacity on the strategic routes could be expected to increase delays and congestion. These are some of the tensions that will need to be managed and assessed. Given the significance of these issues a formal engagement exercise with key stakeholders would be appropriate.
- 2.13 Members have a number of options with the document; members could approve it for the purpose of engaging with stakeholders; members could decline to endorse the document; and members could adopt the document with or without alteration.

5.0 RECOMMENDATION

- (i) That Members approve the contents of the City Centre Vision document for the purpose of a public engagement exercise with key stakeholders and subject to the engagement endorse the use of the document to inform decision making by the City Council specifically in relation to future City Centre Action Plans; and that Members commend the document to Exeter Vision.

**KARIME HASSAN
DIRECTOR ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT**

ECONOMY & DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

1. City Centre: Carbon Emissions, Air Quality and Traffic; Scrutiny Committee-Economy 21 January 2010; Executive 9 February 2010.
2. Transportation Strategy: Measures to reduce carbon emissions/proposed City Council input to DCC Local Transport Plan 2011-16; Scrutiny Committee-Economy 21 January 2010; Executive 9 February 2010.