

Report to Economy & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Agenda
Item:
A.6

Meeting Date: 14th April 2016
 Portfolio: Economy, Enterprise and Housing
 Key Decision: No
 Within Policy and Budget Framework: Yes
 Public / Private: Public

Title: **Carlisle City Centre Development Framework – Update**
 Report of: Director of Economic Development
 Report Number: ED 18/16

Purpose / Summary:

To update Members of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel on progress with regards to implementation of the City Centre Development Framework.

Recommendations:

That Members note the content of the report.

Tracking

Executive:	N/A
Overview and Scrutiny:	14 th April 2016
Council:	N/A

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 GVA (consultants) were appointed in June 2013 to prepare a Development Framework to guide future development in Carlisle City Centre to 2030. A key objective of the study was to identify suitable locations within the city centre to accommodate future development to meet identified needs, and specifically those relating to additional retail and leisure floorspace. In this regard the City Centre Development Framework (CCDF) constituted a key element of the evidence base relied upon to inform the emerging Carlisle District Local Plan (2015 – 2030).
- 1.2 The requirement to prepare a Development Framework was prompted by the findings of the Carlisle Retail Study¹, prepared by GVA on the Councils behalf in August 2012. This study concluded that there was a significant quantitative and qualitative need for new Class A1 comparison (non-food) retail development within Carlisle over the period to 2030.
- 1.3 Work on the CCDF broadly followed a six stage process, as illustrated in Table One. The work concluded, following multiple public consultations, and was published in February 2015.

Stage 1	Information review and analysis of City Centre area
Stage 2	Identification of opportunities, constraints, key issues and initial ideas and options for change
Stage 3	Consultation and feedback on initial ideas and options
Stage 4	Refinement and identification of Preferred Option(s)
Stage 5	Consultation and feedback on Preferred Options
Stage 6	Final report and recommendations

Table 1 – Six Stage CCDF Process

2. CCDF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS

- 2.1 Following detailed analysis and consultation the CCDF identified a number of key character areas as below. Each of the areas was classified according to their

¹ GVA (2012) Carlisle Retail Study. Available at URL: http://www.carlisle.gov.uk/downloads/FINAL_REPORT_web_2012.pdf

potential for future change and prospective scope for intervention. A proposed strategy, in the form of guiding principles, was also outlined for each area.

- Area North of Lowther Street including Rickergate
- Botchergate
- Caldew Riverside
- Citadel
- Historic Quarter
- Lowther Street/Portland Square
- Primary Shopping Area

2.2 The key recommendations from the CCDF were embedded in the Local Plan which is now at an advanced stage of preparation with adoption anticipated in the Summer. Specifically the CCDF was instrumental in informing the direction and content of Policy SP4 'Carlisle City Centre and Caldew Riverside' which will be amongst the most important policies at play in determining future development proposals within the City Centre across the next fifteen years.

2.3 A progress summary for each of the individual character areas, which includes the key proposals taken forward through the Local Plan, is provided in the subsequent sections of this report, with each area grouped around potential for future change.

3. UPDATE ON AREAS WITH LOW POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE CHANGE

3.1 **Historic Quarter** – The CCDF identified that there was limited (if any) prospects for physical intervention / redevelopment within this area. Two key recommendations in the Framework related however to increasing pedestrian permeability and accessibility and better promoting key attractions (Museum, Castle, Cathedral and Tullie House). In keeping with these objectives good progress has been made with respect to advancing Castle Crossing with an agreed outline design now in place, following a public consultation, and funding confirmed and consultants appointed to advance to the implementation phase. Phase one of the City Centre public realm works, which is focused on enhanced signage to better connect key attractions within the City Centre, is due to commence with on the ground installations from June 2016, in doing so directly helping to better promote the Historic Quarter and the key attractions within.

3.2 **Primary Shopping Area** – The CCDF identified that there was limited (if any) prospects for physical intervention / redevelopment within this area. Key recommendations related to increasing pedestrian permeability and accessibility,

promoting flexibility in secondary areas and managing car parking capacity. As with the Historic Quarter Phase One of the City Centre public realm works will help, post June 2016, improve pedestrian permeability and accessibility. In terms of promoting flexibility, the emerging Local Plan adopts a more flexible approach to land use planning within the retail core of the City Centre much to the support of a cross range of stakeholders.

- 3.3 The introduction of discretionary rate relief on long term (12 months+) vacant units has helped to reduce city centre vacancy levels with the almost full occupation of Earls Lane testament to the success of this initiative. Recently occupied premises supports that the primary shopping area is still attractive to a wide range of multi-nationals with Primark likely to significantly enhance footfall once opened later this year. Independent traders also seem to be trading successfully with a number of recent expansions and reoccupation, including within Treasury Court, testament to this.

4. UPDATE ON AREAS WITH MEDIUM POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE CHANGE

- 4.1 **Botchergate** – The CCDF recognised the anchor potential of the new County Council offices on Botchergate as a catalyst to help stimulate wider investment in this area on the back of increased footfall. These offices are now at an advanced stage of construction and are likely to be completed and operational by Autumn 2016. Amongst other recommendations for this area was promoting flexibility in terms of appropriate uses to help reduce vacancies and diversify the existing mix and reducing the risk posed to the conservation area. In these regards the introduction of discretionary rate relief on long term (12 months+) vacant units has had a positive impact on the area and officers remain in discussion with Historic England regarding the potential introduction of a Townscape Heritage Initiative as a means of enhancing the conservation area and stimulating investment.
- 4.2 **Lowther Street / Portland Square** – Amongst the key recommendations within this area were improving public realm and the viability of uses around the bus station and encouraging a viable new mix of uses in those premises within Portland Square being vacated by the County Council. The introduction of discretionary rate relief on long term (12 months+) vacant units has had a significant positive effect on Earls Lane with all of the units on this key gateway to the bus station now occupied having been empty for in excess of several years.
- 4.3 With respect to Portland Square officers have now prepared and will shortly be consulting on a draft conservation area appraisal and management plan for

Chatsworth/Portland Square. Once adopted this will help to positively manage change and guide more detailed interventions. With regards to the premises recently vacated by the County Council, the County have submitted a bid for funding (essentially a loan) from the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership in order to frontload works associated with converting the premises back to residential use. This approach should significantly de-risk their redevelopment and ultimately ensure they represent a more attractive investment opportunity which stands a good degree of success.

- 4.4 **Caldew Riverside** – The CCDF recognises the challenges faced with respect to redeveloping the Caldew Riverside site but nevertheless highlights that it constitutes a significant brownfield regeneration opportunity with potential to accommodate a mix of uses to complement (but not compete with) the City Centre. The City Council's recent acquisition of Tesco's land holdings on the site affords a greater opportunity to progress proposals given that the site is now in single ownership.
- 4.5 Efforts are currently being focused on raising awareness of the site and its potential particularly amongst the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership and the Government. This is being achieved through a number of ways including the inclusion of the site within a Southern Gateway Prospectus which is being prepared by the LEP, with City Council input, to showcase to the Government and investors the collective potential of sites to the south of the City Centre including the Citadels, Carlisle Station, Caldew Riverside and potentially the Enterprise Centre. The context provided by the Prospectus will raise awareness and importantly support bids for Local Growth Funding being progressed for the Citadels and Carlisle Station.
- 4.6 The prospectus will help support a development brief for Caldew Riverside. In the interim efforts are also being derived to reduce the holding costs of the site and address negative perceptions through for example considering demolition of the former and now derelict car showroom on the site.

5. UPDATE ON AREAS WITH HIGH POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE CHANGE

- 5.1 **Citadels** – The CCDF identified a significant opportunity in the immediate locality of the Citadels for a mixed use redevelopment, which could act as a catalyst to regenerate the southern extent of the City Centre, following the vacation of the site by Cumbria County Council. Given this and recognition of the potential of this area to enhance the sense of arrival (from rail) into Carlisle and Cumbria, the Cumbria

Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) are keen to support, as one of their priorities, the reuse and redevelopment of the Citadels.

- 5.2 On the back of the recommendations within the CCDF and above context, officers have been supporting the County Council in putting together a submission to the Government's Local Growth Fund (LGF). Specifically funding is being sought to deliver essential infrastructure to improve connections to and within the site and to assemble lease holdings to create a single consolidated development site which could be taken to the market. The bid submission is based on an indicative end use of a mixed use scheme comprising of restaurants; boutique hotel; modest supermarket; new comparison retailing and residential units.
- 5.3 A separate bid is being progressed by the County Council for the Nisi Prius with the intention of creating a high quality business incubation centre.
- 5.4 Finally of note within this area is that an LGF bid is being developed for Carlisle Station, with funding likely to be sought to improve the station entrance and forecourt through a programme of public realm improvements; moving vehicular access to the rear of the station including the provision of a new multistorey car park and enhanced connections underneath the station; and enhanced commercial facilities and services for station passengers. Identified as one of Cumbria's key pieces of strategic infrastructure improvements at the station have the potential to act alongside the planned redevelopment of the Citadel as a significant catalyst for wider investment in the City Centre.
- 5.5 In the interim the role of this area as a gateway to the wider City Centre is being enhanced through the roll out of new signage through the aforementioned first phase of the City Council's public realm works. Efforts are also ongoing to secure a new and viable end user for the former Central Plaza Hotel, a key and prominent listed building within the Citadel character area.
- 5.6 **North of Lowther Street including Rickergate** – The area to the North of Lowther Street including Rickergate was identified through the CCDF as the preferred option to accommodate the majority of the required additional retail floorspace (c. 18,700 sqm net) as part of a wider mixed use comprehensive redevelopment proposal including leisure uses, new residential units and car parking provision. This area was taken forward in the emerging Local Plan and formally identified, through Policy SP4 within the Plan, as a potential future expansion of the Primary Shopping Area.
- 5.7 Whilst the CCDF contained indicative proposals for the Rickergate locality focused on the Civic Centre site, it is important to note that the wider area was identified reflecting multiple options to accommodate future growth i.e. those plans previously

published by The Lanes showing an extension of the shopping centre westwards across Lowther Street. This wider and ultimately more flexible designation has ensured that notwithstanding the recent flood events the strategy for the City Centre remains sound i.e. the ability to accommodate growth remains. Testament to the market interest in this area is the recent granting of planning permission (November 2015) for a c. 3,500 sqm new retail unit, and multi storey car park (c. 400 spaces), on the site of Iceland and adjacent Lowther Street car park.

- 5.8 Owing to the recent December 2015 flood events the City Council have not progressed discussions with interested parties regarding their landholdings in the area, reflecting a need to concentrate efforts on flood recovery. Discussions will however reconvene in due course with any potential opportunities and consequential key decisions reported to the relevant committees.

6. NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 Efforts will continue to be prioritised on advancing a number of key projects and initiatives which directly support the implementation of the City Centre Development Framework and beyond this the vision for the City Centre set out in the emerging Carlisle District Local Plan (2015-2030). It must be recognised however that despite clear and positive initial progress the nature of many of the proposals is that sustained efforts across the longer term will be required to ensure success.

7. CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Members are asked to note the content of the report in order that they are aware of and understand the progress made with respect to implementation of the City Centre Development Framework.

8. CONTRIBUTION TO THE CARLISLE PLAN PRIORITIES

- 8.1 Continued implementation of the recommendations within the City Centre Development Framework will support, both directly and indirectly, a number of the corporate priorities including:

- Supporting business growth and skills development to improve opportunities and economic prospects for the people of Carlisle;
- Continue to improve the quality of our local environment and green spaces so that everyone can enjoy living, working in and visiting Carlisle; and

- Promoting Carlisle, regionally, nationally and abroad as a place with much to offer – full of opportunities and potential.

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**Appendices
attached to report:**

- None

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

- Carlisle City Centre Development Framework (Feb 2015)
http://www.carlisle.gov.uk/Portals/24/Documents/Examination_Library/Evidence%20Base%20Documents/EB%20014%20Carlisle%20City%20Centre%20Development%20Framework%202015.pdf?timestamp=1443626584820