

CABINET
10 JANUARY 2012

ITEM NO.

DARLINGTON TOWN CENTRE FRINGE MASTERPLAN CONSULTATION

**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy and
Regeneration Portfolio and
Councillor David Lyonette – Transport Portfolio**

Responsible Director – Richard Alty, Director of Place

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of Report

1. This report outlines the context and work to date on the Town Centre Fringe Masterplan and the issues and options that have been considered in the process of developing a preferred option for consultation.

Summary

2. The Town Centre Fringe is identified in the adopted LDF Core Strategy as a sustainable strategic location where development and regeneration activity will be concentrated over the next 15 years. Providing about 650 new homes and around 250,000 square feet of commercial space, the redevelopment of this area will provide an accessible and vibrant addition to the housing, employment and commercial offer of the town. It will also provide the opportunity to extend and enhance the urban green infrastructure network, which is so distinctive to Darlington, and develop low carbon energy generation and distribution networks. In the LDF, the Town Centre Fringe is a key regeneration priority, sequentially following the development and regeneration of the Town Centre and Central Park.
3. Situated between Darlington Town Centre and Central Park, the Town Centre Fringe is a key opportunity to improve linkages between these locations and improve access to and from some of the most deprived wards in the Borough to jobs, services and leisure opportunities. It will also contribute to a walkable, liveable and attractive environment in what is currently an underused area of the town.
4. A number of key issues were known at the beginning of the masterplan process such as flood risk, issues around poor quality housing stock, viability and low land values and the impact that the development of the area would have on traffic movement. These issues have been explored and considered through a number of technical reports. Analysis is described which explores these significant issues in detail and how these are dealt with in the draft masterplan.

5. An extensive and wide ranging public participation process with residents, businesses and stakeholders identified further issues and opportunities for consideration including the value of the built and natural heritage, connectivity into and through the area and the image of Darlington when arriving at Bank Top Station.
6. Based on the public participation, technical reports and analysis a series of 'Core Values' were developed to drive the design process and arrive at the draft masterplan.
7. The Town Centre Fringe masterplan is intended to show the key connectivity, development sites and specific actions required to bring forward the sustainable regeneration of the area over the next fifteen to twenty years.
8. The preferred options relating to flood risk, traffic, the natural and built heritage, housing and connectivity have been combined to meet the challenges and opportunities in the area. One of the proposals is a new linear park alongside the river creating a river valley rich in habitats and allowing safe walking and cycling routes.
9. The development of the area over time will be guided by the masterplan, gradually working towards the achievement of the long-term vision for the area. This change is anticipated to be over the next twenty years.
10. The Masterplan is intended to provide certainty to the private sector that will stimulate the development of the area in a managed way. It will also provide a framework for long-term public investment decisions, to unlock further development opportunities and economic growth.
11. Setting out a long-term framework and vision for the future the Masterplan will help to coordinate the development of the area ensuring that developments positively contribute to the required infrastructure and sense of place.
12. The various issues and options for the area are considered in turn leading to the preferred option for the area that is proposed to form the basis for consultation. This approach has been taken to allow the various components of the masterplan to work together to deal with more than one issue.
13. The masterplan will help to unlock development opportunities in the area because it provides a way of dealing with issues that would otherwise render development uneconomic, such as flood risk.

Recommendations

14. It is recommended that Cabinet agrees to allow consultation on the masterplan, supported by the technical reports and options analysis detailed in **Appendix I**.

Reasons

15. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) The master planning of the area is a part of the ongoing plan making process and is a continuation of work already undertaken.

- (b) The views of residents and stakeholders are an important part of the strategy for the area.

Richard Alty
Director of Place

Background Papers

- (i) Darlington Local Development Framework Core Strategy
- (ii) Connections Study 2009

Technical Reports

- (iii) Conservation Management Plan
- (iv) JBA Flood Risk Report
- (v) Environmental Risk Assessment
- (vi) Habitats Risk Assessment
- (vii) Colin Buchannan Highways Report
- (viii) Others when final report completed / catalogued

Timothy Crawshaw Ext.2048

S17 Crime and Disorder	Safety and security has been a key consideration in developing the masterplan options.
Health and Well Being	The masterplan has been designed to ensure the creation of a walkable and liveable environment, with walking and cycling provision designed in.
Carbon Impact	The masterplan will be subject to sustainability appraisal, integral to which is reducing carbon emissions. All policies are tested and amended to ensure the most sustainable outcomes, including to keep carbon emission to a minimum, including promotion of the use of renewable energy in new developments. Specific work has been integrated in to the masterplan to promote the use of low carbon technologies and energy efficiency.
Diversity	Equalities Impact Assessment (EqA) and Disability EqA are integrated into the preparation of the masterplan.
Wards Affected	Central, Northgate, Park East
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	The masterplan has been developed within existing resources with the support of Single Programme funding and the Homes and Communities Agency
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The LDF Core Strategy is the spatial expression of ‘One Darlington: Perfectly Placed’. The regeneration of the Town Centre Fringe is a key deliverable in One Darlington Perfectly Placed
Efficiency	The workload proposed assumes resources at existing level in Strategy and Commissioning, no additional requirements being placed on the team, and the availability of staff time from key officers across the Council whose service requirements need to be reflected in the LDF in a co-ordinated way.

MAIN REPORT

Purpose of the Report

16. This report outlines the context and work to date on the Draft Town Centre Fringe Masterplan and the issues and options that have been considered in the process of developing a preferred option for consultation.
17. There are a number of complex issues that need to be addressed through the masterplan for the area and these have had a significant influence on the options and preferred option proposed. For each theme there is an analysis leading to the preferred option taken forward into the draft masterplan.

Information and Analysis:

Relationship to the Adopted LDF Core Strategy

18. The Town Centre Fringe is identified in the adopted Core Strategy as being a key area of growth throughout the next 15 years and is sequentially preferable to more peripheral allocated sites and those that fall outside these allocations. In the Core Strategy, the Town Centre Fringe is identified as needing to accommodate about 650 new homes and around 250,000 sq ft of commercial space.
19. The masterplan provides more detail to this, outlining a framework for the development of the area. This framework will inform detailed site-specific briefs, other actions such as the potential designation of conservation areas, and provide certainty for the existing community and developer partners, stimulating and streamlining development in a managed way.
20. Within the wider masterplan area an Area Action Plan will also be prepared, as a tool to coordinate, stimulate, inspire and manage the development of area. The Eastern Town Centre Fringe Area Action Plan (AAP), will be a Development Plan Document and will carry a high degree of weight in planning decisions made by development management. It is anticipated that the Area Action Plan will be adopted in 2014, with a view to it being implemented from thereon.
21. As an adopted document, the masterplan will carry weight as a material consideration in making planning decisions in those areas not covered by the Area Action Plan, (and in AAP area in the period before the AAP is adopted).
22. The Town Centre Fringe is identified as a strategic location in the adopted Core Strategy, to accommodate about 650 new houses and about 17 hectares of mixed-use employment. Specific deliverable detailed allocations/policies still need to be identified in the development plan, and this will be done through the Making Places and Accommodating Growth DPD, work on which is underway. If it cannot be demonstrated that there is a realistic prospect of the levels of development indicated in the Core Strategy being achievable by 2026, alternative land in less sustainable locations will need to be identified in the development plan to ensure that all the Borough's development needs are met.

23. The LDF Core Strategy is the spatial expression of 'One Darlington: Perfectly Placed'. The regeneration of the Town Centre Fringe is a key deliverable in One Darlington Perfectly Placed.

Wider Regeneration Framework

24. The Town Centre Fringe is a development location that complements other planned strategic provision in the town centre, Central Park, North West Urban Fringe and Eastern Urban Fringe. Taking Forward the Darlington Gateway (2006) identifies the Town Centre Fringe as pivotal to:-
- (a) Promoting Darlington's gateway role in the Tees Valley City Region.
 - (b) At a local level improving the economic, social and environmental prospects of the area and those to the north and the east.
25. The Town Centre Fringe is included in the regeneration framework for Darlington. To be delivered sequentially following the Town Centre and Central Park the Town Centre Fringe will create the connection between these two areas and capitalise on the prosperity and success created.
26. Within and adjoining the area are some of Darlington's most deprived wards. Unemployment lies at around (8.5 %) with 11.5 % of people of working age claiming disability benefits. 34.5% of people in the area work full time and for around two thirds of the population the household income after deductions is less than £300 per week.
27. Access to jobs, leisure and services is currently poor in the Town Centre Fringe. The area suffers from poor connectivity and a degraded public realm, discouraging movement to, from and through the area. There are significant social, economic and environmental challenges that need to be addressed through the masterplan.

Key Issues in the Area

28. The technical reports and draft masterplan were funded through the Single Programme via OneNE and received the support of the Homes and Communities Agency.
29. Before work commenced on the masterplan research showed that there were a number of key issues that would need to be addressed to allow the development of the area. These issues were presented at an early stage in the various informal engagement documents produced and in briefings to Members and stakeholders.
30. After the Town Centre Fringe was identified as a key area for growth the Environment Agency updated the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for the area. Taking in a much greater area than first envisaged the zones changed with the potential to prevent or curtail development opportunities without significant works. The accessible location and proximity to the Town Centre meant that the challenge was to find a means of viably mitigating flood risk, rather than leaving the area underdeveloped.
31. As the proposed development of the area together with development proposals for the Borough in the Core Strategy would increase traffic in the medium to long term a strategy was required to deal with this increase. It was clear from early work that some remodelling

of the inner ring road to accommodate this growth would be required. As the Town Centre Fringe is an accessible location the Highways Agency have indicated that they would not object to the regeneration of the area.

32. The River Skerne runs north to south through the area and although in recent years it has become a valuable habitat with some amenity value it is nonetheless undervalued. The masterplan area begins in the north at Rockwell Park and ends at South Park. In common with many urban rivers many developments have failed to include the river. The need to improve the river for both its access, amenity and biodiversity value was recognised.
33. The Town Centre Fringe has a number of key historic assets. To the north, North Road Railway Station, now the Head of Steam Museum, is an internationally important heritage asset. Alongside this the Scheduled Skerne Bridge (the £5 note bridge) defines the northern edge of the masterplan area and is the oldest working railway bridge in the world. Pease's House on Northgate and a number of other important Listed Buildings are scattered across the area. In addition a large number locally distinctive historic buildings are in the Town Centre Fringe and their importance is recognised.
34. Within the Town Centre Fringe is some of the town's poorest quality housing. Overall standards of repair, thermal performance and access are poor. There is a predominance of smaller terraced units with problems caused by anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping in the back lanes, a degraded public realm and poor levels of outside amenity space. Overall there is a lack of high quality open space in the area. There is some higher quality housing in the area, with attractive features, in need of updating in some cases.
35. The Town Centre Fringe suffers from poor access to both the town centre and the inner suburbs to the east. The area feels cut off from the rest of the town and has economically suffered since the building of the inner ring road. Streets such as Parkgate, Northgate and Victoria Road have become detached from the Town Centre. Overall poor pedestrian and cycle access disadvantages residents, limits economic activity, depresses values and discourages activity throughout the day. The Town Centre Fringe offers a great opportunity to improve access to Central Park from the Town Centre, both along Parkgate and Haughton Road, and potentially directly across the East Coast Mainline, as well as along the River Skerne corridor for pedestrians and cyclists.

Public Participation to Date

36. A comprehensive programme of public participation was undertaken between February and October 2010 with various residents and community groups. This took the form of walkabouts, 'planning for real' events and individual discussions with landowners, agents and residents as required:-
 - (a) Over 700 individual responses were gathered from residents and businesses in the area.
 - (b) Two walkabouts with residents were undertaken and video evidence of the issues and views of residents were taken.
 - (c) A web page was set up and comments were invited on the baseline position and ideas for the area.
 - (d) A series of 'Planning for Real' events were held in and around the area, focussing on hard to reach groups.
 - (e) Public events were held at the YMCA and Forum Music Centre.

- (f) A specific Town Centre Fringe Darlington Assembly was held.
 - (g) Key stakeholders were contacted and their views recorded.
37. All of the events focussed on the issues and potential opportunities in the area with a view to gaining a deeper understanding of views to inform the masterplan and the actions required.
38. The Key Issues were used to set the scene and were presented. Draft outline solutions to the issues were tested throughout the process, for example the creation of a linear park to address flood risk, the signalisation of junctions on the inner ring road and specific consultation around building conservation and the wider historic environment.
39. The Town Centre Fringe was discussed at a special Darlington Assembly on the 21st June 2010. In a workshop environment, various options were considered and all views and opinions were recorded.
40. A consultation database was set up to record the ideas, options and opinions and to inform the masterplanning process. These are also being used to draft the Issues and Options for the Area Action Plan.
41. Themes that came from this process were:-
- (a) The need for **improved connectivity** between the town centre and Bank Top railway station, possibly in the form of a shuttle bus.
 - (b) A desire for **access alongside the River Skerne** and improvements to its amenity value.
 - (c) **Improvements** required to the **amenity of the under bridge areas** on Parkgate.
 - (d) The need for **activities for younger people** in the area.
 - (e) The opportunity to create a **residential area close to the town centre** by the river.
 - (f) A desire for **cultural activities** and opportunities in the area.
 - (g) The need for **better access to services** such as schools and doctors surgeries, etc.
 - (h) A desire for small scale business accommodation and **live-work units**.
 - (i) **Improvements** needed at **points of arrival** in Darlington.
 - (j) The need to **develop empty and derelict** sites in the area.
 - (k) The value of the River Skerne as a **habitat**.
 - (l) A desire for **more greenspace** in the area.
 - (m) The need for **more trees** for amenity and to improve the skyline.
 - (n) Tourism potential, celebrating **Darlington's heritage**.
 - (o) Fears over **land contamination** and the need to address this.
42. The above priorities were used, together with the technical work to develop the Core Values (see section below) to develop the masterplan.
43. In addition to this, further work has been undertaken by members of the Communities team extending the programme of 'Planning for Real' events with hard to reach groups and specific communities.
44. There has been a continuous dialogue throughout the masterplan design process and it has been undertaken in an open and collaborative way.

Core Values Developed from Existing Policy, Best Practice and Public Participation

45. From the public participation undertaken and reflecting best practice a series of 'Core Values' were developed to drive the masterplanning process and monitor the success of options appraisal and design resolution.
46. The seven 'Core Values' for the Town Centre Fringe Masterplan are:-
- (a) The creation of a **walkable network of connected streets**.
 - (b) **Sustainability** built-in to the area.
 - (c) Creating the conditions for **economic diversity** and resilience.
 - (d) The creation of a **multifunctional bio-diverse** river valley.
 - (e) Cherishing and **protecting heritage**.
 - (f) Bringing forward true **mixed-use** development.
 - (g) The promotion of **arts and culture** for the benefit of all.
47. A detailed analysis of the key issues and options for the area are attached in **Appendix I**. The preferred options taken forward were based upon and influenced by the above Core Values, based upon the public participation work undertaken.

Other Issues and Opportunities

Cultural Quarter

48. A key starting point in the development of the masterplan was the creation of a Cultural Quarter for Darlington. Globe Consultants were commissioned to produce a Cultural Quarter Feasibility Study, undertaken alongside the recent Arts Enquiry process. The main conclusions of this report, were as follows:-
- (a) The bulk of cultural activity in Darlington is focussed on the Town Centre.
 - (b) The Town Centre is the most accessible location.
 - (c) The current Arts Centre is remote from the Town Centre.
 - (d) The best location for cultural activities would be in or close to the Town Centre, probably in Feethams which is at the southern end of the masterplan area.
49. Initial indications were that the Cultural Quarter would be focussed around the Civic Theatre and Forum in the Borough Road area. Given the findings of the feasibility study this is now likely to be focussed around Feethams and the Town Centre with a positive relationship to proposed leisure developments in the area.

Gas Infrastructure

50. In the north of the masterplan area, there is significant gas infrastructure, including the gasholder visible from many viewpoints. In the medium to long-term regeneration of the area this will prevent some of the proposed uses in the masterplan. Discussions with the owners of the gasholder have taken place and the masterplan shows its ultimate removal and a mix of uses around the site reflecting this.

District Heating and Fuel Poverty

51. Throughout the process of developing the masterplan the feasibility of creating a district heating and energy network has been explored. A wider Tees Valley feasibility study identified Darlington as being a possible and credible location for district heating and that through the Council's planning powers the use of district heating could be brought forward in the Town Centre Fringe. The installation of district heating, via combined heat and power plants in the area offers a number of advantages:-
- (a) The total carbon emissions from the Town Centre Fringe would be reduced.
 - (b) District heating from combined heat and power enables sustainable development at a reduced cost to the developer.
 - (c) The reduction of fuel poverty would be possible as there would be a source of heat that could be distributed under a social tariff or reduced cost.
 - (d) Existing housing, if connected, could be made more sustainable.
52. The possible locations for the combined heat and power plants or energy centres are shown in the masterplan, coinciding with existing infrastructure and where there would be an appropriate mix of uses.

Masterplan Resolution

53. Based on the issues and options in the attached **Appendix I**, the masterplan proposes a number of key changes in the area that could be achieved in the long term.
54. The Town Centre Fringe masterplan is intended to show the key connectivity, development sites and specific actions required to bring forward the sustainable regeneration of the area over the next fifteen to twenty years. The many complex issues that have been identified have been combined into a proposal that addresses most of the issues and opportunities in the area.
55. The preferred options relating to flood risk, traffic, the natural and built heritage, housing and connectivity have been combined to meet the challenges and opportunities in the area. The preferred options taken forward were:-
- (a) Mitigate flood risk along the whole of the river corridor by maximising the effect and reducing the burden on individual developments.
 - (b) The remodelling of the inner ring road, creating signalised junctions and bringing the carriageway together, with supporting measures to reduce demand on the network.
 - (c) The creation of a significant new linear park alongside the river creating a river valley rich in habitats and facilitating access and movement.
 - (d) The conservation of historic buildings in the area, with an emphasis on creating opportunities for the celebration of Darlington's Heritage to form the basis for regeneration.
 - (e) The retention and improvement of the existing housing in the area, preserving the historic street pattern and minimising harm to existing communities.
 - (f) Improvements in connectivity for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport into and through the area to allow access to jobs, leisure and business opportunities to flourish.

56. The solutions proposed in the consultation masterplan have been developed in response to the public participation process of last year and have been based upon a large number of technical reports that support the draft conclusions.

Development

57. The Masterplan provides certainty around the Council's intentions for the development of the area. This certainty will stimulate development by setting the scene for the area in terms of neighbouring uses, the quality of the public realm and its connection to other key areas of development in Darlington.
58. By describing the outcomes that are desired for the area and describing the mechanisms for dealing with the current barriers to development, the masterplan allows development to happen over time that will take full advantage of the opportunities. By offering a clear framework new development can be coordinated and funding identified to deliver the necessary infrastructure for the area, unlocking further development opportunities.
59. By dealing with the big issues and challenges in the area the opportunity for development can be realised. Without a masterplan developments coming forward would be piecemeal and unable to generate the required value to pay for the work that needs to be done in the area to make it attractive and functional.

Phasing and Delivery

60. In addition to the above costs there would be the costs of acquisitions where no development will take place, such as to the north of the masterplan area where additional flood capacity is required. A separate piece of work is being undertaken to value the properties across the area.
61. Currently, the projected costs for the infrastructure required to support the full masterplan are estimated at a minimum of £51.8 million before any allowance for inflation or similar issues. Whilst much of this money is expected to come from land receipts, the sums are such that there will probably need to be a commitment from major schemes funds (or successor arrangements) and the Local Transport Plan.
62. A number of funding options are being explored, in the context of changing national frameworks and mechanisms. The options being considered that could help to fund the required infrastructure are as follows:-
- (a) Community Infrastructure Levy (after 2014)
 - (b) Section 106 (pre 2014)
 - (c) Prudential Borrowing
 - (d) Enterprise Zones
 - (e) Public Land Initiative
 - (f) Local Asset Backed Vehicle for Investment
 - (g) Tax Incremental Finance
 - (h) European Regional Development Fund
 - (i) Regional Growth Fund

(j) New Homes Bonus

63. Whilst it is accepted that some of these mechanisms may not be appropriate for all aspects of the works required there are still a number of options available that could be used in the medium to long term to facilitate development.
64. A specific vehicle being explored is a potential partnership with the Council, the HCA and private investment, in the context of a regeneration scheme for the area that would pool resources and unlock further funding. This is being developed to coincide with the consultation phase of the draft masterplan, when the funding context will be clearer.
65. Phasing to address the flood risk in the area has been developed. Within the life of the masterplan the proposed phasing is assumed to be:-
 - (a) In the short term the Feethams Area, the former garage on St Cuthbert's Way, and land to the north of Eastmount Road.
 - (b) In the short to medium term the Cattle Mart site, and land around Garden Street is expected to come forward.
 - (c) And finally in the long term the Borough Road area, Valley Street, Oxford Street, the Gas Holder and John Street.
66. Outside the flood risk zone other development opportunities area assumed to minimal or no impact.
67. To coordinate development in such a way as to address issues of phasing in terms of flooding and highway network an interim solution is proposed that delivers some early wins in terms of connectivity and green infrastructure.
68. Given that much of the development land identified in the masterplan will not be available until the medium or long term, an interim set of proposals has been identified that will help realise the initial potential of the fringe at a commensurate cost of circa £8m.
69. Costs for each element are given below:-
 - (a) The signalisation of Freeman's Place junction incorporating East Street & a new alignment for the western carriageway of the ring road to Parkgate, linked with the signalisation of the Parkgate/St Cuthbert's Way junction on a new alignment with access to Stonebridge being on a left in, left out basis offset from the new junction. The projected cost for both junctions and the relocation of the western carriageway is £4.5m, of which £2.97m has been identified in the Tees Valley Bus Network major scheme funding prior to 2015.
 - (b) The signalisation of the Northgate/St. Cuthbert's Way junction at a projected cost of £2.95m. No funding has yet been identified for this scheme.
 - (c) The opening up of Borough Road with new signalised junctions at each end to provide an alternative route to the ring road at a projected cost of £0.6m. No funding has yet been identified for this scheme.

70. The additional money for the above costs would be generated from the mechanisms outlined above in paragraph 60.
71. This interim proposal would provide the necessary infrastructure to facilitate the short to medium term aspirations in terms of development phasing and assist in promoting development through added certainty.

Consultation Materials

72. The text for the consultation materials is attached as **Appendix I**.

Next Steps

73. It is anticipated that consultation will take place in March and April 2012 and the results of this will be used to revise that masterplan as necessary.