

Planning for future of City Centre

Whilst we write the words for this column we do not normally write the headline as we believe there are professional journalists better qualified than us for that job. However, the choice of headline for our last article may have inadvertently overemphasised the Cathedral Quarter within the whole City Plan.

In preparing the City Plan we believe that there is much that can be done for the City Centre by developing a locally-lead approach to planning issues. We've said previously that within the draft Ripon City Plan there are almost 60 policies and over 20 complementary projects identified. Within the section on "Strengthening the City Centre" we are proposing 18 policies and 5 complementary projects, so it is a really important part of the Plan. Our approach to the Cathedral is laid out in just one of these policies in which we offer support for the development of a masterplan that could:

- create an environment that accommodates increased visitor numbers,
- provide for improved interpretation,
- enable a wide variety of community events to take place consistent with the Cathedral's diocesan and parochial mission,
- improve the connectivity of the precinct with the Market Place Quarter, car and coach parking and the Bondgate Green Urban Village, and
- reduce traffic levels on Minster Road.

We support this because we believe that the City's businesses and overall economy will benefit if this can be achieved. We also understand that the Cathedral cannot wait for the City Plan and they have been taking this forward in parallel and in collaboration with the Team.

However, the City will only be able to fully exploit this opportunity if improvements are made in other parts of the City too. Kirkgate, linking the Market Place and Ripon Cathedral, is an important city centre street with a great deal of unfulfilled potential. We believe that this is owing, in part, to confusing traffic circulation. So, we think that the draft City Plan should support proposals to improve vehicular access to the rear of Kirkgate and support the conversion and use of vacant and underused premises (including the revitalisation of the vacant former maltings). We believe that this would support the regeneration of Kirkgate and help better link the Market Place Quarter and Cathedral Precinct.

The Market Place is the central meeting place in the city centre, whilst Westgate provides a key link with the Spa Quarter. In the draft City Plan we believe that revitalisation of both of these areas could be achieved by further enhancement of the public realm (including highways). Last revived around a decade ago, there are opportunities to improve the Market Place further and increase vitality and vibrancy by allocating and using the space for more events, markets and allowing cafés, restaurants and other appropriate businesses to use it to create outdoor extensions of their premises.

Elsewhere, within our identified Spa Quarter, any proposals affecting the continued use of the current Ripon Swimming Baths could have significant implications for the existing buildings and would require a coordinated approach. Accordingly in the draft City Plan we have tried to plan for a number of potential scenarios and suggest that if Spa Baths becomes vacant first then, other than the front range, the site shall be made available to facilitate improvements to Ripon Hospital.

In previous articles we have already outlined some of our other proposals in relation to the City Centre, and our suggested approach to identifying sites where new shops could be built. We've also previously set out our approach to addressing car parking issues suggesting that additional parking

could be provided at the St Marygate car park and also identifying the need to look for additional car parking in the south west of the City Centre close to the B6265, which could potentially be in the vicinity of the current hospital car park and Black Swan yard.

So, whilst the proposals being developed by the Cathedral are not at the heart of the City Plan they certainly are an important part of the body of it and an exciting opportunity for Ripon to get behind. However, as it should be with any strategic development plan there are other important aspects too and it is the comprehensive nature of the Ripon City Plan which has been produced by residents of this City which we believe is its strength.