

The Ripon City Plan – In My View Part 2

Following last week's article looking at the process for developing a Neighbourhood Plan for Ripon, Ripon's City Development Manager gives an insight into some of the options that are being considered and the complexities involved in developing the Plan.

The vision and objectives for the Ripon City Plan were published in December. In summary the vision is that by the 2020's the City of Ripon (the Neighbourhood Area) will be an even better and more attractive place to live, work, shop, visit and socialise and will play a more important role in serving the needs of its hinterland.

In developing the City Plan, one of the fundamental considerations is housing, and in particular the scale of new development. In the latest report from Harrogate Borough Council (October 2013), which looks at large housing development sites, planning permission is in place for another 19 houses to be built in Ripon. In addition 3 brownfield sites are identified as potentially providing a further 139 houses over the period 2013 to 2018. Given well publicised recent events surrounding one of these sites (Auction Mart – identified capacity 79) it is not clear how much of this can be delivered in the next 5 years.

The consequence of an under provision of new housing can be rapidly rising prices, making affordability an issue, especially for young people wishing to stay in the City, which in turn can have a knock-on effect to skills and impact upon our local businesses.

The consideration for the City Plan Committee is, therefore, whether additional alternative housing development sites should be suggested to provide for a modest level of house building, or whether the Plan should be more aspirational and promote sites to regenerate the City based in part upon population growth.

Obviously in proposing any new housing development sites, the impact on the City's infrastructure needs to be considered and necessary improvements identified. Even without any increase in house building the City Plan is looking to identify transport infrastructure improvements which could be made, particularly to enhance walking and cycling routes around the City. More radical improvements may be needed to increase the capacity of the Ripon road network, if substantial population growth is to be a reality.

Additionally, there remains the long-standing aspiration for Ripon to be reconnected to the rail network and the City Plan Committee needs to consider whether this is deliverable in the timeframe of the plan and whether or not to allocate and protect land for that purpose.

Other infrastructure issues need to be understood and addressed, including the future requirement for health, education, leisure and recreation facilities. This includes understanding the longer-term future needs and aspirations for both the hospital and the swimming pool. Appropriate sites may need to be allocated to increase or improve provision.

A second fundamental consideration for the City Plan is the future of the City Centre. Recently the national spotlight has been shone on the role of the High Street and the significant changes that are taking place in the retail sector. In that respect Ripon is no different, however, whilst some shops

have closed, new businesses have opened and the vacancy rate is comparable to the national average, but the nature of town and city centres is changing.

Whilst population growth, and the ensuing increase in consumer spend, would undoubtedly help the vibrancy and vitality of the City Centre, the City Plan could also encourage a more flexible approach towards enabling shop premises to be used for alternative types of businesses. This could help to improve the City Centre's role as a service hub for the hinterland; as an evening economy destination with more restaurants and cultural venues; and support efforts to attract more visitors and tourists.

Increased footfall, duration of stay and spend from the hinterland are all essential to improving the economic vibrancy and vitality of the City Centre. However, the Neighbourhood Plan cannot deliver these alone and this where the City Development Initiative is important, working with partners to identify and deliver other complementary projects, such as better promotion and marketing, more events on the Market Place and an improving the customer experience for those visiting the City.

A further major consideration is how to support the rest of Ripon's economy and in particular whether the lack of employment sites within the City is a constraint on attracting new businesses or allowing existing ones to build new premises to expand, and whether land can be allocated for this use. Notwithstanding that employment land is available at Melmerby to serve the needs of the Ripon area, but this does little to support the sustainable growth of the City.

Finally, Ripon is steeped in a long and proud history and from our consultation it is apparent that residents of the City wish to see that preserved and enhanced. The key consideration here is whether the existing Harrogate Borough Council policies go far enough or whether there is a desire to strengthen these and designate, for example, areas for such

These are just some examples of the things that the City Plan Committee are considering, but ultimately you, the people of Ripon, will decide in a referendum whether you wish to see the Neighbourhood Plan implemented or not. So, later this year, we will publish our draft Neighbourhood Plan and consult with you about what you think. This will be your opportunity to shape the future of the Plan and the future of your City.

Full details of the vision, objectives and your opportunity to get involved can be found at: www.riponcityplan.com