

Ripon City Plan - Making the City Distinctive

Members of the City Plan Team recently met with a national Neighbourhood Planning champion, to discuss the Ripon City Plan. There was a good deal of positive feedback about our work so far and the steps that we have carried out, and the discussion also gave us food for thought.

Whilst developing the Ripon City Plan we have often used the phrase “localism” in the sense of giving greater control and power to the community. A similar phrase that came up to describe the plan was about it helping to enhance “local distinctiveness.” This is not a phrase that we have used, but on reflection it is a key description of what we trying to achieve.

Local distinctiveness is what makes one place different from another. It’s the essential details, large and small, natural and manmade which combine to create a “sense of place”. Much of what the Ripon City Plan proposes is about enhancing the sense of place; protecting and developing those things that make the City locally distinctive - and different from neighboring places including Thirsk, Skipton, Otley, Wetherby and especially Harrogate town.

Landscape and buildings form an important part of local distinctiveness. Our approach to a sustainable Ripon with policies for protecting the landscape character, safeguarding biodiversity and geodiversity and protecting the skyline is integral to this. But this is not all that local distinctiveness should be about.

We think that local distinctiveness also means giving a voice to Ripon on important topics like what should happen with the barracks site, how to enable the hospital to develop, ensuring that a new swimming pool is located in the best place for all and guiding any new school to an accessible part of the city. These matters are only relevant to Ripon but to us appear to be exactly what local distinctiveness should be about.

Many of the proposals in the City Plan are about strengthening the city centre by recognising and supporting the growth of a locally distinctive place. Our approach designates four city centre quarters, proposing a different development focus and approach for each, and recognises that these collectively enhance the place as a whole. We want to support changes and improvements to the Cathedral precinct and encourage environmental improvements in the Spa Quarter. In the Market Place Quarter, we want to enhance the retail and leisure offer as well as making this the arrival and meeting place for many visitors, residents and businesses. In the Northern Quarter we promote the cultural and community uses of land and buildings.

Our approach to green spaces is similar in wanting to protect those areas which are unique and help to define the city. That is why in particular we are proposing that Temple Gardens, Bishopton Fields, College Lawns, Goose Common, Kearsley Road, Tower Road and the Workhouse Garden should all be formally recognised and designated as Local Green Space.

Elsewhere, our proposals for developments to contribute to public art and the production and implementation of a public art strategy and delivery plan will help to further enhance the uniqueness of our City.

So, whilst the Ripon City Plan is about giving you the residents a greater say about the future development of the city, it was nice to hear from an independent advisor that our approach enhances and builds upon the things that already make Ripon unique. Looking ahead this is important because its proximity to a number of other market towns, means that enhancing the local distinctiveness of Ripon will support both social and economic vibrancy and vitality and that can only be good for the future of the city.