

## Ripon City Plan – City Centre

The draft Ripon City Plan outlines proposals for the long-term strategic development and growth of the city. Regular readers may recall that among the original reasons for developing a Neighbourhood Plan was the belief that more could be done to support the city's economy, and address some of the issues and challenges that we face.

The City Plan's vision for the city is as "... a meeting place of choice for culture, leisure and tourism for residents and visitors." As with other themes, the City Plan takes an holistic approach towards tourism. We have looked at a range of issues and opportunities and outlined a set of planning policies and complementary projects, which work together to make Ripon a better place.

Tourism is clearly important to the city's economy. In the draft Ripon City Plan Summary, published in September 2016, we highlighted plans to enable tourism growth through support for a new hotel; investment in, improvements to and expansion of existing hotels; and major investment in facilities to enhance the city as a visitor attraction.

Ripon has a number of fantastic tourist attractions, but we know from your feedback and discussions with businesses that the lack of hotel bed-spaces is a constraint on the economy. The approach we have set out in the City Plan suggests potential sites for a hotel which are either well-connected to the bypass as a key transport corridor, or in the city centre. Both alternatives fit very well with the business models of many of the hotel operators.

The Cathedral is already a key part of the city's visitor offer and there are proposals for major new facilities, which would enhance its role, and attract significantly more visitors and tourists. The City Plan supports the aspirations of the Cathedral and the development and enhancement of the Cathedral precinct.

Elsewhere, Ripon Museum Trust's acquisition of the Ripon Workhouse Main Block site also creates opportunities to enhance this visitor attraction and bring more tourists to the city. The City Plan supports these plans as part of the development of the Northern Quarter.

Both projects require significant investment, but if they can secure the grants and funding required then the city's tourism economy would be set for a huge boost. As the two projects are in such close proximity there is a need to look at the infrastructure of the city centre to see how these projects could provide a stimulus for other developments in the area to the east of the Market Place.

It is important to recognise that the city centre is in itself a tourism and visitor attraction, as well as serving a number of other purposes. Proposals set out in the City Plan, such as the Kirkgate Yards improvement area and shop frontage orientation seek to promote this role. It is particularly important to ensure that visitors to the tourism attractions also visit the city centre, providing an overall economic boost through increase in catchment, dwell-time and spend.

Hotel bed-spaces are important, but they are not all that is needed. We have also made proposals to enlarge the capacity of the city centre car parks, which serve both the Cathedral and the Museums and are essential for the tourism economy to grow. Similarly, a complementary project to implement a signage and way-finding strategy would enhance the tourist and visitor experience of the city centre, helping them to navigate the attractions.

The City Plan brings these individual projects together into a long-term development strategy, providing a joined up and complementary approach to tourism and visitors as part of a masterplan for the city centre. Most importantly it provides potential investors, from the public or private sector, with a clear strategic, integrated vision for the city which will help in securing investment for individual projects.