

Towards a new vision for Derby City Centre Ambition 2022

Comments and observations by Conservation & Heritage Advisory Committee

This document is not intended to be an exhaustive critique of the Derby City Council's report 'Towards a New Vision for Derby' nor does it attempt to respond to the specific questions posed at the end of each section which the Committee felt are not helpful and leading.

The comments should be read as an open expression of views to enable a more transparent and better focussed consideration of the relationship between the city's heritage and historic built environment and the vision for the future of the city centre.

'The city needs revitalising'

It is acknowledged that the city needs revitalising in many areas and the statement made in the opening of the document "Importantly, we want to engage in conversation to find out how bold our long term vision for the city centre should be." is very significant; however each section lacks imagination and boldness. Furthermore, structuring the report under various headings denies complexity and the existence of the inter-relationship of each section. There is a real danger that each section will be considered as a separate element where any dialogue will become protracted and miss important considerations that will affect the overall concept. In some cases, the visions may be considered unrealistic either in physical or more likely financial terms. Removal or indeed adjustment of any element will have a compound effect on other sectors. It is therefore most important that the elements that contribute to the overall larger and complex issue of revitalising the city are viewed as an interwoven network, not a series of separate issues.

'embracing an innovative and ambitious embracing an innovative and ambitious revitalisation revitalisation'

In a city where so many organisations and people, past and present, have been at the forefront of innovation and thinking, the current state of the city is a poor reflection of that heritage. The opportunity of the city is regrettably not evident in the document being considered. Members of CHAC welcome the fact that the Council are looking at a long term vision for the city which has for many years suffered from indecision and inappropriate interventions in sensitive areas. They would wish to encourage and engage in a continuing dialogue to ensure that the new plan for Derby actively moves forward in a cohesive, more positive and ambitious direction.

'the plan... is currently only nibbling away at the edges'

There remains a view that Derby is poorly marketed, but because of its unique location and setting potentially has a lot more to offer. Comparisons with other cities is rarely helpful but when it comes to attracting visitors and events Derby lags behind its midland neighbours of Nottingham, Leicester and Lincoln. There has to be good reason for this and it is hoped that proper analysis will feed in to the formulation of a far better and more informed plan. At present it is felt that the plan generally lacks real ambition and is currently only nibbling away at the edges of what are very significant social and logistical problems.

'alienation of historic elements'

The "people first" approach is of course an admirable one and fundamental in creating a community that cares about its environment and heritage. The reality is that without the creation of the right

environment that community will not flourish nor will it attract visitors who want to experience that environment. As The Conservation & Heritage Advisory Committee we feel that the historic core of the city and its associated heritage is one of the most valuable assets the city has, and the suggestion that “tension” between that core asset and new development exists is highly counterproductive and will inevitably lead to the alienation of historic elements, rather than embracing them as valuable contributions to a multi layered city scape.

Whilst heritage is featured as one of the key sections of the report recognising that the historic core and old buildings contribute to the overall ambition, CHAC feels that it does not go far enough. One of the most important and unique assets of any city is its heritage, and it needs to be respected and considered as a fundamental element within any regeneration programme. The section in the report covering heritage should focus more on opportunity, integrating any new vision in to the historic fabric rather than treating it in isolation. Harmony between old and new can be seen in many cities where due respect has been paid to the historic fabric and grain of the area. The same approach needs to be adopted for Derby.

‘imaginative re-use of existing buildings’

There is a widely held view amongst members that the imaginative re-use of existing buildings and established built form not only brings about rewards in relation to maintaining scale and grain but from a climate change aspect can be more appropriate in terms of reducing carbon footprint than creating “high rise “buildings. There are numerous buildings within the city which fit in to this category.

‘The river is without doubt a seriously undervalued asset’

The report identifies clearly that the city turns its back on the River Derwent. The river is without doubt a seriously undervalued asset to the city and efforts to utilise it both physically and aesthetically are to be welcomed. At the same time the impact of OCOR could potentially be detrimental with the loss of some well-established and important buildings such as Exeter House. Careful consideration and integration of the next phases of OCOR in to the plan should be given.

‘architectural design in these locations should be of the highest quality’

Reference to “Gateways” and “green and blue” spaces in the report would more appropriately be referred to by names that relate to their historic location and are known to Derby people therefore giving them identity. There is also reference to suggested landmark buildings at these locations. If this is to be realised there needs to be significant respect afforded to the existing approaches which in the case of London Road is both green and subtle with several listed buildings within view. The architectural design in these locations should be of the highest quality and needs to be designed in context with thorough analysis of the problems of the area particularly in terms of accessibility and vehicular flow. For example, the so-called Northern Gateway needs to be examined in the context of the potential re-use of the Queens Leisure Centre and the traffic network.

‘key sites... deserve more attention and scrutiny’

Other key sites within the city and identified in the report deserve more attention and scrutiny as to their future use due to their significance and contribution to Derby’s heritage. The former Great Northern Station and Goods Yard is a prime example, which apart from The Roundhouse is the only significant element left of Derby’s major role in the history of the rail industry.

The document refers to a Cultural Heart Master Plan which needs to be more widely publicised as part of the future planning process, more importantly as to how this links with the current Master Plan and the Ambition 2022 document all of which are intrinsically linked. Any redevelopment work in this area needs to be of the highest architectural standard.

‘seem to have lost impetus’

Other redevelopment sites such as Becketwell which were approved on the basis of improvements to and creation of quality public spaces including the restoring/reinstatement of The Becketwell, seem to have lost impetus. It is suggested that a more integrated approach to living in the city and commerce be encouraged with a more sympathetic view on the conversion of existing redundant commercial and retail buildings to residential use.

‘The removal of cars... is not a realistic option’

The removal of cars from the city centre without a viable alternative is not a realistic option and will further discourage visitors to the city. If Government policy on climate change is pursued vehicles will be powered by electricity or hydrogen removing the argument that excludes them from cities from a pollution control aspect. Towns and cities that provide car parking at convenient and easily walkable distances from the centre would appear to attract a higher footfall.

The introduction of a Rapid Transport System requires very careful analysis, as it is questionable as to whether a city the size of Derby could afford and sustain such a system. The fare cost of using the system would need to be low to encourage usage. Many European cities that operate similar systems offer extremely cost-effective fares for users and as such become the principal method of going in to the city.

The use of the River Derwent as a transport corridor is an interesting consideration but is debatable as to whether it would have any other value other than leisure and novelty appeal.

‘numerous issues that this report brings to the fore’

There are numerous issues that this report brings to the fore many of which have been discussed in isolation in the past and sadly remain unresolved. There would appear to be a resolve to address the future vibrance of the city and this needs to be done in a cohesive and realistic way integrating all of the key elements in to a workable and unified solution. There is concern however that this document does not go far enough in its ambition. The various strands of the report cause confusion and leave a feeling of lack of cohesion between its several parts. There are many in Derby who are passionate about its culture, heritage and historic buildings which form an essential part of our city and which, for the most part, have been poorly marketed and exploited. Our unique heritage is internationally renowned and the city’s greatest asset. The Ambition for Derby 2022 does not currently give proper emphasis to this in its future planning.