

# Hereford Area Plan Reference Group Meeting

## Notes of Meeting

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> April 2018

Time: 16:15

Venue: Hereford City Council Offices, Town Hall, Hereford

### Attendees:

Cllr P Price (Chair), Herefordshire Council – (PP)  
Cllr M Lloyd-Hayes, Herefordshire Council – (MLH)  
Cllr P Andrews, Herefordshire Council – (PA)  
Kieran Coultas – Youth Council – (KC)  
Steve Kerry, Hereford City Council – (SK)  
Joy Harvey, HVOSS – (JH)  
Bill Bloxsome, Herefordshire Local Nature Partnership – (BB)  
John Phipps, Holmer & Shelwick NDP Group – (JP)  
David Cooper, Holmer & Shelwick NDP Group – (DC)  
Kevin Singleton, Herefordshire Council – (KS)  
Siobhan Riddle, Herefordshire Council – (SR)  
Victoria Eaton, Herefordshire Council – (VE)  
Georgia Smith, HBID – (GS)  
Susannah Gilson, Herefordshire Council – (SG)  
Cllr M McEvelly, Herefordshire Council – (McE)  
David Shepherd, University – (DS)  
Barry Lucas, University – (BL)

### Apologies:

Alison Talbot-Smith, CCG  
Mike Emery, CCG  
Martin Koveckis, Youth Council  
John Jones, HBID  
Tracy Morriss, Youth Council and Hereford City Council  
John Bothamley, Hereford Civic Society  
Alison Rogers, HBID  
Helen Wildman, University

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## 1.0 Welcome, introduction and apologies

## 2.0 Minutes of previous meeting

2.1 With reference to the awaited Urban Panel Report, DS will chase up the expected date for its publication. (Since the meeting, the published report has been circulated to the members of the reference group.)

2.2 Notes of last meeting agreed.

### **3.0 University land acquisition update**

3.1 DS and BL provided an update on the progress that the university is making on the search for sites required for university development. Of particular interest are sites in Herefordshire Council ownership. With regards to land outside HC ownership, the university are being discreet about these due to the rapid inflation in land prices precipitated by landowners if interest is disclosed. However, favoured sites being considered are within a ten minute walk/cycle of the city centre. Already privately owned land prices are rising greatly above market value because of the possibility of the university seeking to purchase them.

3.2 BL discussed the aim of reaching the 'critical mass' of 1,050 students by 2022. After this date there may be additional demand for land for the university's future growth. Up until that time, the Site Options Report will suit the university's purposes.

3.3 DS: the aim at the moment is to provide sufficient teaching space for around 1,100 students. The university is also looking into leasing suitable properties which meet the 10m<sup>2</sup>/student requirement, either within the city or on the Enterprise Zone at Rotherwas. With regard to the possibility of developing on the Essex Arms site (rear of), the extent of the Widemarsh Brook watercourse diversion scheme will dictate the amount of developable footprint and therefore building heights. The university are in discussions with Balfour Beatty on this issue. Also under consideration are options for improving connectivity through from Blueschool Street, via Conningsby Street to Catherine Street. Negotiations are also being held regarding the potential of the police and fire stations if they relocate in the future.

3.4 PP asked if the university would be able to make use of the Robert Owen Academy if it becomes vacant. BL advised that this site is of interest, however, whether it could be used with its current internal layout is uncertain. PP pointed out that considerable public money was spent on converting this building into a school space. BL advised that it would likely require comprehensive internal reconfiguration if it is to be utilised by the university for tertiary education.

3.5 PP raised the question that as land pricing are rising dramatically, will this mean that, in terms of design policies/guidance contained in the Urban Panel Report and local development plan policies, there will come a point at which high quality development cannot take place? BL said potentially yes, because there will be less money available. Inflated prices and constraints of various types will mean that the costs for the university will be high and this may affect viability. At the moment this is an unknown since there are many and varied issues to consider (such as the structural soundness of existing buildings, utility requirements etc).

3.6 MLH expressed her understanding of the set-up challenges facing the university and the need for commercial confidentiality. Could the former Chadds property could have been considered by the university? DS: at one stage this was a possibility, but at that time funding was not available. The university is not looking at alternative property fund investment vehicles to enable building work to take place. A mortgage fund is being arranged so that the university is able to move faster on sites as they become available (the funding would then be in place for up to two or three sites). At the moment the advice is being sought on the legal position with this type of scheme. DC: has the Green Dragon and land adjacent been considered? DS: yes this land has been considered.

3.7 SK asked whether the HAP should provide a policy on the height limits to development in the city. BL agreed that the number of storeys that will be acceptable is an issue because many sites have constraints as to the size of a potential building's footprint. KS: A Design Guide SPD is jointly being commissioned and funded by both Herefordshire Council and the university. A brief has been drawn up and the commissioning of this work is in progress. The end document will provide planning and design guidance on issues including: building heights, green infrastructure, scale and massing etc. The SPD will cover land in all parts of the city and will add finer grained detail to the design principles of the NPPF/Core Strategy/HAP policies. It is anticipated that this will take around 9 months to produce. ACTION: KS to arrange the circulation of the SPD brief. BL said that because of the production timetable for the HAP, the Design SPD is urgently required. This will provide essential information as to the planning requirements on city sites when purchase or leasing is being considered by the university. PP enquired about the possibility of producing the SPD more quickly. KS advised that there is a regulatory need for two formal periods of public consultation. However, as the production process progresses, the direction of travel of the guide will become clearer and may be used to guide the university in their understanding of the anticipated planning requirements.

3.8 The possible restriction on height of buildings was again discussed. The group acknowledged that Hereford does contain areas which could embrace modern architectural forms without detriment. BL asked if there is a need for different approaches needed towards development in Conservation Areas. Can planners take a flexible approach to the interpretation of the NPPF and Core Strategy policies? KS advised that neither the NPPF nor the Core Strategy contain building height restrictions per se. SK: There have been previous debates about acceptable types of development at the margins of Conservation Areas. There is an argument for Conservation Areas to be reviewed, with a possibility of making them smaller in geographical area, but with stronger protective policies.

3.9 BB: In terms of tall buildings, the proposed Design Guide SPD will assist in bring clarity to developers. It is not the Conservation Area status which will necessarily affect the potential for taller buildings, it is more to do with the sensitivity of views into and out of the city which are the issue. It is an urban design issue. DS requested that policies in sensitive areas need to be imaginative and flexible in order to help unlock the economic potential of the city.

3.10 JH agreed with the sentiment expressed by SK and suggested that an agreed route into the city and an area of the city (perhaps within the city walls) would be protected to give visitors a historical/heritage and scenic perspective, whilst other areas could be made more contemporary. If necessary, creating signposts for "scenic route to the city centre". The current access from the north on the A49 along Holmer Road is neither heritage nor scenic, however the approach from the south over the bridge is both. Pedestrians arriving by train encounter a challenging walk to the city along Commercial Road (many roads to cross and then a pedestrian crossing at Franklin Barns buildings that could be easier to use), which could be made quite contemporary with signposts to the "historical centre of the city". However, in order to provide what tourists and visitors want from Hereford, we must first understand why they visit: is it heritage, its green spaces, is it the cathedral, is it the Black and White houses trail, is it fishing, is it horse racing, is it the cattle market or is it a wedding or a funeral? Has a survey of visitors to the poppies exhibition been conducted? Are tourism

providers carrying out ongoing data collection of their visitors? Is it clear to visitors where the historical area of Hereford is?<sup>1</sup>

3.11 GS asked if the draft Design SPD will be able to provide the university with an idea about the key issues coming forward. KS said that such a stage should be reached in the next 12 to 15 weeks.

3.12 PP asked about the process of procuring the work for the Design SPD. KS discussed the tender and assessment methods, which will be carried out in accordance the Council's procurement policies and procedures. There are a number of documents which have been identified for prospective tenderers and they will need to demonstrate that they fully understand the special local conditions and needs of Hereford. It is not simply a matter of going with the cheapest option and due weighting will be given during the decision making process. DS confirmed that so long as the criteria for assessing tenders is made clear to tenderers, then the weighting can be levelled appropriately.

3.13 PP asked how the Design SPD and the HAP will sit together. KS replied that the SPD will contain a set of urban design policies, which will be adopted as a Herefordshire Council planning document. It will then comprise a key piece of evidence for the development of the HAP's policies.

3.14 PP asked how the HAP will be adopted. KS confirmed that there will not be a referendum, however, it will be publically examined and undergo the regulatory tests of soundness for a development plan document. If it meets these, then it will be presented before full council for formal adoption by Herefordshire Council.

3.15 Discussion between JP, KS, BL and MLH took place about the short term need for policies to be in place about the potential height of new developments. BL suggested that they are looking to build at around 5 storeys potentially. KS: the Design SPD will provide a raft of key policies to provide a framework for all types of development across the city. Before its adoption, planning applications will be assessed against the NPPF and Core Strategy's policies and through negotiations with planning and conservation officers.

3.16 Healthcare provision and the university: DS said that the CCG have highlighted a future requirement for additional mental and sexual healthcare provision, as opposed to a growth in GP services. In the future, as the university size expands past the critical mass of students, then there will need to be adequate healthcare services of all kinds in place for the University of Warwick to endorse the degree courses taken in Hereford.

3.17 KC: in addition to highlighting the issue of young disabled people needing to have improved and modernised public transport. He also indicated that, in relation to design of buildings, young people would like to see more modern looking buildings, rather than copies of existing traditional ones.

3.18 DS assured the group that he will let the Reference Group know when planning applications are going to be submitted.

#### **4.0 Site Options update**

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<sup>1</sup> The content of this section was provided by JH post meeting, for purposes of clarification.

4.1 SR informed the group that most of the responses have now been received from internal consultees on the site options work. Now officer will conclude on the suitability of sites and produce the draft report, associated schedules and questionnaire before it then goes out on public consultation. This will be carried out over the next month, in time for the next meeting of the Reference Group.

4.2 PP queried whether there is a need for an earlier or more frequent meetings. KS advised that there is not a need for meetings of the group whilst the site options report is out for consultation.

4.3 PP asked about the requirements for public consultations on the HAP itself. KS advised that it is a regulatory process:

- Site Options consultation
- Draft HAP consultation
- Pre-submission HAP consultation
- HAP submission consultation

4.4 PP said that a timetable is needed for these stages of the process. The group needs to ensure that it has come to agreed conclusions on the key issues for the HAP. JH asked for a draft list of contents to be drawn up and the identification of any gaps there may be. KS said that a HAP template will be drawn up for the next meeting.

4.5 DS and PP and SK discussed for the HAP to address the bigger concepts pertaining to the growth of Hereford (autonomous vehicles, high speed broadband and other technologies). KS advised that the HAP is a land use plan only, a point also noted by JH and BB.

4.6 BB highlighted that the HAP should be put in place to alleviate the housing supply issue in Hereford as a priority, especially given the lack of a countywide lack of 5 year housing land supply and the planning consequences of this.

## **5.0 Site Options consultation programme**

5.1 SG provided a presentation on the methods of consultation for the Site Options report document. See presentation attached.

5.2 PP: in respect of the need for adequate utility provision over the plan period, can we ensure that they understand the evidenced need and can assure that it will be provided?

5.3 SG advised that Hereford's colleges (including the RNCB) will be consulted.

5.4 KS asked if organisations such as the City Council can host consultations. SK agreed. McE said that there is a possibility of making use of secondary school geography departments (see Kington School Geography Group). They will be able to reach a whole new layer of people through this method.

5.5 Members of the group discussed various potential locations for the consultation exhibitions, including supermarket foyers and JH said that HVOSS would be happy to help too.

5.6 The questionnaire which goes alongside the Site Options report consultation should be fairly simple. The aim is to get an understanding of whether people think the sites are appropriate for development and allocation through the HAP. More complex site considerations and policies will come through the HAP document itself.

5.7 PP was happy with the proposed approach to the site options consultation.

## **6.0 New Reference Group membership**

6.1 The group were happy for a representative of Look UK to become a Reference Group member and that it was important to have somebody to provide input from the perspective of disabled groups. As requested, SG will contact the RNCB to confirm that Look UK also represents their views. PP said that he supported opening up membership for the group if necessary to obtain all relevant views of those in the city.

## **7.0 AOB**

7.1 SK reminded the group that there is a need for the planning issues relating to houses in multiple occupation to be considered by the group and how policy in the HAP should be formulated.

7.2 MLH requested that the minutes of the Reference Group meeting be put on the Herefordshire Council's web pages. VE adds post-meeting: once the minutes have been checked and redacted where necessary they will be put on the website.

7.3 DS informed the group that there is an inaugural university event on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 2018 (provisional date). Funding by government and LEP is being made available and the leadership team is coming into shape. A funding officer post is being created and this will assist in making links with local businesses.

7.4 PP asked KS to circulate the draft site options consultation report and questionnaire circulation as soon as possible prior to the next meeting (which is to be confirmed).

7.5 JH asked whether a plan of sites to be circulated? KS advised that as this is still work in progress, it would not be appropriate for it to get into wider circulation ahead of the next meeting. However, it may be acceptable for it to be disseminated to interested groups.

7.6 Meeting ends