

## **DESIGN REVIEW PANEL**

**18 October 2007**

**SUBJECT:** Area Action Plan – Draft Spatial Options  
**LOCATION:** Stoke-on-Trent City Centre and Etruria Road Corridor  
**PROPONENT:** Stoke-on-Trent City Council  
**REF NO:** 080

### **Background**

The Urban Vision Design Review Panel has previously considered the Core Spatial Strategy for the North Staffordshire conurbation (incorporating Newcastle-under-Lyme) in June 2007 and the Core Spatial Strategy for Staffordshire Moorlands in October 2007 as well as the Newcastle-under-Lyme Town Centre Area Action Plan. So it can be seen that the review of this document is part of a continued involvement in helping to shape the planning documents that will in turn shape the future regeneration of North Staffordshire.

### **Strategic Planning Context**

Stoke-on-Trent City Centre has been identified as a second tier regional centre in the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy. This places the city centre second only to Birmingham in the region and ranking alongside other centres such as Coventry and Wolverhampton. However, the city has suffered from the effects of outward migration and it is put forward that the quality of the city centre has a key role to play in reversing this trend and improving the quality of life for the people of the city as a whole. To this end Stoke-on-Trent City Council have produced an Area Action Plan (AAP) for the city centre and Etruria Road corridor as a key component of the emerging Local Development Framework.

The Area Action Plan sets out to provide detailed planning policies to guide and help deliver the sustainable regeneration of the city centre up to 2026. The document as reviewed is at the Draft Spatial Options stage and includes an indication of the Preferred Options. This has been approved for consultation by Stoke-on-Trent City Council and is scheduled to go to public consultation in mid November. Following the consultation period amendments will be made as a result of this and a Draft Area Action Plan will be produced, it is only when this has been

successfully tested for soundness and conformity by Government Office that the document will be adopted.

### **The Area Action Plan**

The Stoke-on-Trent City Centre Area Action Plan Draft Spatial Options document identifies six key strategic issues. Different options are put forward for the first three of these with an indication and explanation of the preferred option.

Strategic Issue 1 - Shopping Options

Strategic Issue 2 - Office Options

Strategic Issue 3 - Homes Options

Strategic Issue 4 - Leisure Tourism and Culture

Strategic Issue 5 - Public Places and Green Spaces

Strategic Issue 6 – Transportation

The Area Action Plan does not put forward detailed design policies as this is the role of the Design Supplementary Planning Document which is currently being produced across the north Staffordshire conurbation.

### **The Panel Comments**

#### Clarity and Legibility

The Design Review Panel were very supportive of the clear and jargon-free style of the document and commented specifically about the accessibility of the language. It was suggested that often such planning documents are dense and difficult for a lay audience to understand and that this was of particular concern during the public consultation process, the Panel did not feel that this was a concern with the City Centre AAP as presented.

There was also widespread support over the inclusion of a number of illustrations and photographs but it was suggested that some of these be reconsidered, specific reference was made to the images on pages 60-61. It was felt that there are better examples of highways and public realm design than the one shown and it was suggested that Kensington High Street should be looked at as an example of good practice. As a general suggestion it was put forward that images should be carefully selected and provided with captions that explain what they represent.

The Panel although generally applauding the legibility of the document were concerned over the clarity of some of the spatial diagrams. It was suggested that these documents might be made more clear and understandable to the lay person without losing their essentially diagrammatic quality. It was also suggested that the Stoke-on-Trent City Council watermarked logo be removed from the maps and diagrams as they hindered clarity.

Overall, the Panel felt that the general approach and structure adopted was clear and legible but felt that the preferred spatial policies as described in Section 4 needed a linkage paragraph explaining how it fits in to the rest of the document more clearly.

### Public Consultation

The Panel enquired about the nature of the proposed public consultation. It was explained that the consultation period was being expanded from the usual six weeks to eight as Christmas fell in the middle. It was further explained that the AAP is already published on the website and that formal consultation will consist of a two strand approach. Firstly, local stakeholders including representatives of the development community, will be targeted with a special event scheduled and secondly there will be a more widespread public consultation taking the form of a public exhibition and street events. The Panel welcomed this approach reiterating that the easily digestible language and clear approach should assist in undertaking meaningful consultation.

### The Vision

The Design Review panel were critical of the Vision statement included on page ?? of the document saying that it was too long and convoluted and that it went into too much detail for such a statement. The Panel accept the explanation that this was as a result of guidance from the Government Office to provide more explanation but suggested that the actual statement could be shorter and more punchy with an explanatory section shortly afterwards to provide the required level of detail.

### Shopping

The Panel recognised that the document dealt with the proposed shopping options in terms of location and supported the analysis that led to the selection of the preferred option. However, it was pointed out that there was no indication about they type of retail development that would be encouraged, street shopping or mall-type developments. It was explained that the document was not intended to be prescriptive in this regard and that the changes to the planning system embodied in the Local Development Framework system allowed for guidance to be contained in Supplementary Planning Documents and that these were a far more flexible tool. The Design Review Panel suggested strongly that future retail development in the city centre should focus on shops that strengthen the street with active frontages as opposed to inward looking shopping mall developments such as The Potteries shopping centre.

### Offices

The Design Review Panel initially expressed concern over the use of the term 'Business Park' in relation to the city centre as this type of development would be entirely inappropriate for such a setting being contrary to the principles of creating a vibrant, mixed-use location. The panel were reassured by the explanation that this was a poor phrase to describe what would not be a Festival Park type of development but would be higher density and incorporate a range of complimentary functions.

## Transportation

The Panel fully supported the criticism of the negative effects of the existing Potteries Way ring road but were vexed by the fact that despite this the AAP sets out to complete the ring road further tightening the concrete collar around the city centre. The Panel felt that it should be more clear about what the exact nature of the new ring road should be.

It was explained that the southern part of the new ring road extension from Broad Street to Etruria Road was being completed as a part of the large new Tesco development and would be of a similar type to the existing Potteries Way consisting of four carriageways. The northern extension linking Etruria Road up to Waterloo Road was likely to be a narrower road of only two lanes and as a result of the lack of public funds for such an undertaking would also be likely to be carried using a Section 106 agreement.

The Panel remained concerned about the strangulation of the city centre by the existing road and more concerned about how this could be increased by the completion of the ring road. The Panel pointed out that other cities such as Birmingham were moving away from large impermeable inner ring roads in favour of more open approaches. It was put forward that the new roads needed to be designed very carefully if this were not to be the case and that advice contained in CABEs Manual for Streets should be incorporated.

## Conservation

The Design Review Panel welcomed the proposed extension of the conservation area but thought that the above policy was isolated from other areas of the Area Action Plan when there was a real opportunity to connect it to every element of the document. Specifically it was suggested that the historically significant buildings identified could act as models of how to build in the city centre and create successful places, they should be considered not only as history but also as the raw materials for urban design. The panel pointed out that an intensive characterisation study had been completed in the city centre area and each building had been classified with reference to its historical significance.

## **Conclusion**

The Urban Vision Design Review Panel is supportive of the attempt to produce a comprehensive Area Action Plan for the city centre and particularly welcomed the simplicity of the language and clarity of approach adopted.

## **Recommended Actions**

1. The Design Review Panel recommend that a number of the spatial diagrams included in the AAP are imbued with a more cartographic quality making them easier to understand during the public consultation.

2. The Design Review Panel recommend that photographs and illustrations are considered more carefully and that where uses they have clear and concise captions explaining what they are and how they are relevant.
3. The Design Review Panel recommend that the document is as explicit as possible in recommending that future retail development should reinforce the street and not be contained in inward looking malls.
4. The Design Review Panel recommend that the term 'business park' be reconsidered especially in light of the type of development that would be preferred in the city centre location. The new term should reflect the desire to see a higher density more mixed-use office development.
5. The Design Review Panel recommend that the wording around the completion of the Potteries Way ring road is considered very carefully and reference is made to the desire that coupled with alterations to the existing highway this results in a loosening of the 'concrete collar.'
6. The Design Review Panel recommended that the historic buildings identified within the plan area are not only conserved but used as models for future development. It is further recommended that the intensive characterisation work already undertaken in the city centre be fully utilised.