‘This is Sheffield –
Our City Centre Plan 2018 - 28’

Representation to consultation on the Sheffield City Centre Masterplan

July 2018
Introduction

The Sheffield Property Association (S-PA) welcomes the publication of ‘THIS IS SHEFFIELD’ (Sheffield City Centre Masterplan). A considerable period of time has elapsed since the publication of earlier plans in 1994, 2000 and 2008. It is incredibly important that the city continues to have a vision to help guide the continuing growth and development of the city centre.

The S-PA is an independent association of individuals and organisations with interest in land, property and development in Sheffield. Our members represent the significant land-owning and development businesses in the city, along with a wide range of the professional organisations that help create and support our built environment. We welcome the Council’s public ambition to tap into the ‘ideas, passion and perspectives’ on how to create a city centre that works for the people of Sheffield. This document represents our formal response on behalf of our 45 members and, by association, the 22,100 jobs that they are responsible for in and around the city.

Our response is structured around a number of core themes. First we comment on the document’s underlying function and structure and whether it serves the purpose of articulating a clear vision for the development of the city centre. We offer thoughts and recommendations on how the form of the document may be enhanced. We then comment and provide feedback on specific sections, including providing recommendations on areas for improvement.

This representation is made in good faith. Our response is offered on the basis that Sheffield City Council will duly and sincerely consider this feedback and that offered by others. It is imperative the final City Centre Masterplan be shaped by the wider industry and community. Without this participation and ownership of the City Centre Masterplan it will be difficult for the city centre to achieve the level of aspiration that Sheffield deserves.

What is the Masterplan for?

Given its lack of formal planning policy weighting, the fundamental purpose of the City Centre Masterplan is to set out an ambitious vision for the city centre. To do this the document must clearly and succinctly set out the Council’s aspirations for the city centre, alongside the key opportunities through which these aspirations can be achieved.

The current draft fails to achieve this important objective. The language lacks ambition. It is often too detailed and prescriptive resulting in an overly complex and over-inflated document.

The level of detail presented, though intrinsically interesting and positive, actually distracts from the core purpose, giving the impression of a descriptive analysis rather than of a Masterplan with a very clear vision.

We recommend that the final draft should be more succinct and focused on articulating a clear vision for the future of the city centre. If it is considered that the descriptive analysis remains valid then this should be presented in supporting annexes.

In particular we recommend that:

- The document should be significantly shorter to engage external audiences far more effectively.
- More emphasis should be placed on presenting the vision for the city centre visually.
- The Masterplan must focus more heavily on those areas that represent the primary locations of development opportunity in the city centre.
- There is an opportunity to present key development opportunities as the new “Magnificent 7” which together can establish clearly the agenda for city centre growth.

As a result of adopting such an approach, the Masterplan will be much better positioned to:

- Actively encourage development.
- Present a clear visual impression of the city centre and the principal challenges and opportunities.
- Inform prospective developers/investors of the sort of development being specifically encouraged by the Council in specific locations.
- Make the public aware of the sort of changes that may occur in the city centre over the Masterplan period.
- Be used as loose planning guidance. With a clear hierarchy of regeneration objectives being set out, the Planning Authority can ask the simple question as to whether a given proposal supports the clear goals of the Masterplan.

The emerging Masterplan document can be a genuine success for Sheffield. It can create the conditions in which the city centre can thrive, and truly fulfil the bold aspirations that the document must be clear in establishing.

Knowing the challenge inherent in this process, the S-PA is committed to supporting the Council in shaping this Masterplan further. Our members have a wealth of professional capabilities and resources. The Association is ready and willing to assist the Council openly and transparently so that the final Masterplan fulfils its potential in guiding Sheffield City Centre to a more successful future.
Specific comments

Images and visuals

 Many of the visuals and plans included are based upon good and often exciting ideas, however the execution is generally very poor.

In particular, the ‘artist impression’ of the station (p.36) is of poor quality, hugely underselling the potential opportunities the area has to offer. In a similar vein, the sketch of the whole of the city centre (p.6) looks excellent, but is hugely inconsistent in its representation of existing, new and proposed developments. The logic underlying different colouring added to various individual buildings and areas of the city is not clear. There are a number of key omissions and inconsistencies including:

• Omission of many partly or fully completed schemes (e.g in Kelham Island, St Vincents and Rockingham Street).
• Inclusion of some key future development sites (e.g. off Moore Street), while others (e.g. New Era Square) are completely neglected.
• Inclusion of West Bar proposals, while only part of Heart of the City II is shown.
• Inclusion of some but not all of the Sheffield Hallam University Masterplan.

The S-PA recommends that the more visual elements of the Masterplan are fundamental in attracting interest and investors in the city - these are in some ways the most important parts and must be of the highest standard.

Other plans

We question the utility of including a large number of the supplementary plans throughout the document. Within the context of the Masterplan, giving over space (and therefore demanding the limited attention of readers) to plans indicating the locations of schools, medical facilities and nightclubs among other things is not believed to be necessary.

If supplementary plans are still considered important then they should not be descriptive in nature, but rather used to reinforce the vision and opportunities within the city centre.

An alternative approach to visually representing this information has been prepared by the S-PA and is appended to this submission.

Other plans

Castlegate

The S-PA believe that the amount of focus placed upon the proposed Castlegate project is completely disproportionate to both the importance of the scheme itself to the city centre, and compared to other projects.

At the most basic level this can be seen in a simple analysis: the word ‘Castlegate’ appears 90 times throughout the document. Comparatively, the phrase ‘Heart of the City II’ is used 14 times; ‘The Moor’ 31 times; ‘CIQ’ 22 times; ‘HS2’ 20 times; and ‘Kelham Island’ 12 times. Very simply, it is a statement of fact that the Heart of the City II project is orders of magnitude more important to the future success of the city centre than Castlegate - the same can be said for the potential development associated with HS2 and the ongoing revival of the Moor. To place so much emphasis on Castlegate is to misrepresent and detract from what should be some of the key priorities in the city centre.

What’s more, the ambition shown for the Castlegate site itself is underwhelming. Prescriptive redevelopment plots are indicated (p.66) with the associated description of ‘a number of perimeter buildings of limited ‘traditional’ urban plot area and height’. The S-PA believe that for a city centre site such as this to fulfil its potential and deliver maximum benefit to Sheffield, a more aspirational and more flexible approach to its redevelopment must be set out, and in a significantly abbreviated form.

Great Places and Breathing Spaces, Creative City and Outdoor City

In the vein of previous comments (see ‘Other plans’) it is asserted that elements of the consultation document typified by the above sections are unnecessarily long and descriptive in nature. The S-PA is tremendously proud of Sheffield’s public spaces, creativity and innate ‘outdoors’ nature. However within the context of a Masterplan document, the need to go into such depth in describing these strengths is questioned.

The provision of such a large volume of additional information, while interesting and very positive for the city, is believed to be a distraction from the fundamental purpose of the Masterplan.
The document rightly highlights and explains the objective of improving and physically consolidating the city centre’s retail and activity core that underpins the:

- Movement of the markets to the Moor.
- Regeneration of the Moor itself.
- Heart of the City projects.

The S-PA believes that this consolidation to form a denser and more vibrant central core of activity is arguably the most important overarching change that the city centre is undergoing.

In light of this, it is with some concern that Plan IV (p.20), though indicating the Consolidated Shopping Core, still includes Castlegate as part of the City Centre Retail Strategy. While it does identify a transition from ‘large retail’, its inclusion seems contradictory to the above ambition to deliver consolidation, which has been the principal guide to all of the Council’s recent regeneration activity.

There is no question that the future success of Sheffield rests on achieving an increasingly dense and vibrant city centre core. It cannot be overstated that in discussing the ‘21st Century High Street’, the Masterplan must do all it can to identify and encourage this.

City living

The S-PA agrees that the substantial increase in the city centre population in recent years is one of the crucial reasons behind the growth of the city centre. With this in mind the Association believes strongly that all possible support must be given to developments that continue this growth and an increase in city living. Given this context, another concern that must be highlighted is the position set out within this section of the document that apparently seeks to actively restrict certain types and tenures of residential development in different areas of the city centre.

Conclusion

Sheffield has some incredibly important assets. The same applies to the city centre. The purpose of the City Centre Masterplan must be to articulate confidently how we can harness these assets and leverage them to achieve a stronger and more vibrant core. It should be a document designed to inspire rather than dictate the future growth of the city centre. No single stakeholder, not least a Local Authority in the UK, can stipulate exactly how a city centre will evolve. Market forces, demographic trends and the rapidly changing ways we live our lives will all have far more impact on the city centre than prescriptive masterplanning.

The underlying analysis contained in the draft document contains important data and insights but they are largely lost in an overly long and descriptive document. That deficiency can be easily addressed through careful drafting and more detailed dialogue with all stakeholders so that the final draft focuses on the most important issues. The S-PA is committed to engaging positively with the Council to help deliver that objective. Our ambition is to help you to deliver a document that instils pride in local people, gives confidence to government and which attracts investors and businesses. Our city deserves nothing less.
HS2, Hallam and Heart of the City (I+II)

Heart of the City (HoC)

The HoC scheme has transformed a large part of the city centre to deliver world-class public realm and successful developments of exceptional quality. The HoC II project is ongoing to do the same and will form the basis of the city centre’s future growth as part of the ongoing consolidation of retail into a central core. This consolidation will enable the city centre to become greater than the sum of its parts and will help to establish a critical mass of activity, creating a bustling and thriving urban core that truly represents the hub of the whole Sheffield City Region.

As delivery of the HoC II project continues, ongoing support is being offered to the primary development partners as well as potential developers of sites in the surrounding area. To help ensure the success of the project, any scheme proposing high-quality, high-density development of exceptional design will be encouraged and championed so as to secure the best possible outcomes for the city.

Hallam (SHU) and HS2 Masterplans

The location of SHU’s city campus in relation to Sheffield Midland Station and the wider city centre means that together the SHU and HS2 masterplans will play a vital role in the city’s success. As with the HoC II project, every opportunity to enhance the benefit offered by both masterplans will be supported. In this regard it is the case that with this location acting as a key point of entrance into Sheffield and the City Centre, high-quality developments of exceptional design will be particularly encouraged.

Owing to the physical relationship between this area and the city centre core around the HoC, such ambitious development will also be welcomed around the connecting Gold Route and other adjoining areas. Proposals that will help to improve the connectivity, activity and quality of the built environment in this growth corridor represented by the HS2/SHU/HoC II Masterplan areas are actively encouraged.