

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF: Executive Director, Growth and Sustainability

TITLE: Urbed Town Centre Urban Design and Sustainability Strategy adoption

REPORT TO:	CABINET
Date of Meeting	13 July 2022
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Regeneration and Culture
Key Decision	Yes
Public or Private	Public

Purpose of report

This report seeks authority to adopt the Town Centre Urban Design and Sustainability Strategy produced by Urbed.

Council Plan priority

Sustainable Barnsley

Recommendations

That Cabinet:-

Refers this report to full Council for approval to adopt the Town Centre Urban Design and Sustainability Strategy produced by Urbed.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In December 2019 we commissioned some urban design and sustainability work in Barnsley Town Centre. URBED were the successful bidder and have been working on this project since January 2020. This was originally to be a nine-month piece of work which has several strands including: looking at how we move the Town Centre towards being zero carbon; urban design issues, consideration of whether the town centre should contract; and a movement framework.

- 1.2 Whilst the URBED work was ongoing, the need for a refreshed Town Centre Plan to update the work that Arup did in 2016 has become apparent. This will provide us with an evidence based response to a changing town centre in a post COVID context, including considering contraction /repurposing with opportunities to integrate sustainability. It fed into the Sheffield City Region Economic Blueprint to seek to position Barnsley as an Urban Centre within the context of SCR Economic Priorities. It was considered preferable to have one comprehensive piece of work rather than two related/ overlapping pieces of work. The strategy will help inform priorities within the Council's adopted Place Based Investment Plan, which is a live document.
- 1.3 Consultation took place between 27th August and 30th September 2021. A total of 108 responses were received, although not all questions were answered by every respondent. Appendix 2 summarises the consultation responses. A presentation was given to the Youth Council on 6th September, 2021. Three online stakeholder workshops were held during the consultation period on 9th, 16th and 18th of September. A further workshop was held on 20th October to ensure that those that had expressed an interest in attending had the opportunity to attend. The notes from Youth Council presentation and from the Stakeholder Workshops are in

2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1 It is proposed that this report is referred to full Council for adoption of the Town Centre Design and Sustainability Strategy. It is proposed that as the document has been the subject of public consultation that it will carry some weight as a material consideration in determining planning applications. It is not however proposed to adopt as a formal Supplementary Planning Document.

Summary of content

Baseline

- 2.2 A detailed analysis of the town centre was undertaken in the first phase of the project. This was revisited and updated in light of Covid -19. The document gives a high level summary of the findings that have influenced the ideas later in the document.

Sustainability

A study was undertaken to quantify the carbon emissions from buildings within the town centre, based on best available data. It highlights the highest emitters and looks at four case studies to illustrate approaches they might be considered for different types of buildings.

Economy/ Post - Covid actions

The economic analysis on a post-covid future is interesting in terms of Barnsley's prospects. The following extract concludes that Barnsley is well placed to recover:

"Cities shows that city centres have in many cases been hit hardest by the sudden changes. With their greater reliance on department stores (now contracting or going bust entirely), office markets (at a time when most

companies are planning to downsize space in the next 2 years) and access from a wide catchment area by public transport (when safety fears are high and passenger numbers are curbed) city centres have suffered significant losses. Barnsley is now in a really interesting position. Like many medium sized towns in the UK Barnsley has been better equipped to weather the storm, partially by dint of not having city centre style assets to lose in the first place. It had no significant office market and no large department store anchoring its high street and it is in many ways a practical town centre, serving the needs of residents as much as visitors or commuters. Because of this Barnsley is in an excellent position to respond to the emerging trends following the pandemic. It may need, as ADE Regeneration highlighted, to rethink its relationship with retail, reducing its floorspace by up to a third, but it is well placed to plug the gaps left behind. People want to move out of city centres, away from cramped apartments, without completely giving up the amenities they enjoy. Barnsley can provide family houses in town centre neighbourhoods, with outdoor space and access to independent shops, café's, restaurants and culture. People want to work more flexibly, working from home sometimes and using office facilities when they need to. Barnsley can provide home office spaces, co-working facilities, spaces to start a business and rail links to larger centres when and if they are needed. People want a sense of community, to live more connected and healthy lives. Barnsley can provide great walkable and cyclable streets, access to green spaces and a network of local businesses and facilities. This new way of life is not just advantageous for Barnsley's recovery, its is also inherently sustainable and can support Barnsley's zero carbon ambitions."

The report suggests the following key actions for post-Covid recovery:

- Monitor the economic health of the town centre to ensure problems are identified early and responded to.
- Plan to remove surplus retail, either through the provision of diverse uses, or removing the quantum of built form all together.
- Diversify uses so the town is less dependent on retail, introducing creative workspaces, cultural assets, additional housing, civic services, events space and workspaces.
- Communicate about the safety of the town centre, and ensure the transport to and from allows people to feel safe.
- Support independent retail to lessen the reliance on big-chain retailers that are consolidating into larger urban centres and growing their on-line presence e.g. suitable flexible accommodation, financial support and business mentoring.
- Ensure the town's employment space is capable of meeting the changing requirements of a post-pandemic workforce.

2.3 People Focused Principles

The principles on which the strategy has been based are set out below:



2.4 Themes

The overarching theme of 'Sustainability Interventions' sits above six other themes: Retail; Culture; Work; Housing; Greenspace and Connections. These are then followed through into a proposed spatial strategy and a list of interventions. Some reflect work that is already planned such as The Seam, whilst others are ideas that could be worked up and delivered in future. Some

The spatial strategy for each theme is set out below. Further detail is provided on suggested individual interventions and actions to achieve this spatial strategy.

2.5 Retail

- Contraction of inner retail core focused around Glassworks, market and Alhambra Shopping Centre.
- Development of wider "indy town" outer core, in which to explore diversification to independent retail and alternative uses.

2.6 Culture;

- Development of a cultural "zone" around the existing cultural institutions: The Civic, Parkway Cinema, Lamproom Theatre, Cooper Gallery and Barnsley Museum.
- Public realm improvements/activation of connecting streets and spaces: Eldon Street, Church Street, Mandela Gardens etc based around the early evening economy.
- Improvement of eastern connectivity out to the Metrodome

2.7 Skills/ Employment

Introduction of flexible offices, co-working spaces and studios.

- At The Seam Digital Campus to the north, such uses could help to diversify the offer of the existing masterplan and build connections with surrounding educational institutions.
- To the north west these could be introduced through intensification and have a relationship with Barnsley Sixth Form College.

2.8 Housing

Drawing high quality housing from the surrounding suburbs into the town centre.

- Around Churchfields to the north west.
- Around Townend Roundabout including junction reconfiguration.
- Along Pitt Street and New Street with improved crossings over the West Way.
- Around the “Youth Zone” development site to the east.

2.9 Greenspace

- Improvement of existing green spaces and introducing additional larger green spaces around the periphery of the town centre.
- Introduction of smaller scale green interventions into a zone in the core of the town centre: pocket parks, green roofs etc.
- Development of a “wellbeing route” of green links around the core of the town centre.

2.10 Connections

- Improvement of walking and cycling connections around the periphery of the town centre. Including a strong link between the Active Travel Hub at The Seam and the existing Interchange.
- Development of “wellbeing route” around the town centre core with improved walkability.
- “Taming” of the West Way with landscape softening, reconfigured junctions and improved crossings

2.11 Opportunity Areas

Three “opportunity areas” (Peel St/ Townend; Eldon Street block and New Street Neighbourhood) have been selected by Urbed to develop mini-masterplans along with some more information on what the “multi-purpose route” might look like. These areas were chosen because they:

- Are areas of the town centre where land is not being used as efficiently as it could be/is not meeting its full potential.
- Are areas where a number of the interventions on the previous pages are located
- Cut across a number of different themes within the strategy - providing an opportunity to show how they work together to create better places.

The multipurpose route has been included as a key idea which could knit everything together.

2.12 **Delivering the strategy**

The document contains suggested advice on delivering the strategy and suggests changes, interventions and potential funding sources. It recognises that delivery is underway in many areas and suggests next steps including a series of more detailed feasibility studies. It considers the public realm, green space and connection improvements should be drawn together as one programme of interventions, with the potential to target external grant funding to deliver these. The idea of a 'Space Agency' for Barnsley town centre should be considered in more detail as the transitioning of space in the secondary retail and periphery of the town centre will be critical to the overall delivery of the vision. As stated above it will help inform priorities within the Council's adopted Place Based Investment Plan, which is a live document.

2.13 **Sustainability Action Plan**

The document contains a sustainability action plan to help achieve the Council's net zero targets. A key focus of this is retrofitting premises. The action plan suggests strategies that could be considered that would develop capabilities and supply chain. It also suggests strategies for finance and business support. The Sustainability Action Plan and baseline information will help to inform and support the delivery of the Council's Zero 40 and Zero 45 aspirations.

- 2.14 The main strategy document is appendix 1 to this report. In addition to the main document a baseline report, Barnsley Town Centre Zero Carbon Transition Strategy by LEDA and a Delivery Strategy by Ade Regeneration are appendices 3,4 and 5 respectively. Given the time that has elapsed since the start of this commission, some of the information in the early baseline report may not be current. The strategy document at appendix 1 is the main document that will be used in future planning decisions and projects.

3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

3.1 Financial and Risk

Consultations have taken place with representatives of the Service Director – Finance (S151 Officer).

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The strategy suggests potential future interventions in the Town Centre that could be worked up as projects. Any future proposals to deliver the suggested interventions and projects will be the subject of future reports. No Appendix A is therefore required.

3.2 Legal

There are no legal implications arising directly from the adoption of this Town Centre Strategy.

3.3 Equality

Full Equality Impact Assessment completed.

An Equalities Impact Assessment was drafted when the work was originally commissioned. It is important that we create an inclusive Town Centre. The Equality Forums were contacted during the consultation process. A stakeholder workshop was held with the Youth Council. Members of an age friendly group attended the stakeholder workshops. The consultation information was circulated to the Equality Forums. Due to Covid 19 no face to face consultation was carried out.

3.4 Sustainability



Implementation of the strategy is expected to lead to positive impacts. The overarching theme of the strategy is sustainability.

3.5 Employee

There are no employee implications arising from this report.

3.6 Communications

Communications support will be required to publicise the adoption of the strategy through press releases and social media.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Public consultation took place between 27th July and 30th September 2021. A total of 108 responses were received, although not all questions were answered by every respondent.
- 4.2 A wide range of Town Centre stakeholders were informed of the consultation, including Town Centre businesses, Market Traders and Equality Forums. A press release was done to encourage anyone who was interested in commenting or attending a workshop to get in touch. All stakeholders and residents were able to review the documents and give their views via an online form. Hard copies of the document and comments forms were available with a display of the draft strategy at both the Market and Library @the lightbox. Attendance at workshops was open to all who requested to attend
- 4.3 The people focused principles were largely supported. One respondent asked for the Town Centre to be dementia friendly. We asked what people liked about the Town Centre and received some complimentary comments about the new Glass Works/ Market and Town Square. Some people felt there are a good variety of shops, including independent businesses, and welcomed new eating establishments. There were positive comments about our cultural facilities and built heritage with the Town Hall and Gardens, Victorian Arcade, Churchfields Park and Wellington House being mentioned amongst some of the particular buildings and spaces people enjoy. We asked what people don't like about the Town Centre. Some want to see more retail variety particularly in clothes shops and more independent shops. Some people didn't feel safe and mentioned anti-social behaviour. Cleanliness/chewing gum/ litter was mentioned and some areas outside the boundary of the strategy on the approach into town were mentioned as being run down and needing improvement, particularly entering from Doncaster Road through the underpass.
- 4.5 People want to see more green spaces and trees, places to meet and sit, and public facilities. Evening establishments where older people feel welcome, with reasonably priced rooms for hire by social groups were requested. A venue for live music and quality street entertainment would also be welcomed by some that commented.
- 4.6 A presentation was given to the Youth Council on 6th September 2021. We asked what they thought of the Town Centre and what they think the challenges are. Some members felt that the new development is modern and what is needed, that it is becoming exciting and will draw people in. Another member queried what is the need to come in from the surrounding principal towns and

what makes Barnsley unique and appealing to draw them in. They queried whether it would appeal to older people. The point was made that Barnsley has proud communities that enjoy socialising and the market was a focus for this. The challenges raised were impact of higher rents; addressing the needs of SEND people that wish to work and start their own business and that nationally high streets are in decline.

- 4.7 Three online stakeholder workshops were held during the consultation period on 9th, 16th and 18th of September. A further online workshop was held on 20th October.
- 4.8 A document summarising the issues raised in comments and workshops has been prepared and is available as appendix 2 to this report. Many comments summarised are outside the scope of this strategy.
- 4.9 The suggested interventions have been refined following comments, in particular the reference to new housing at Town End roundabout. Three opportunity areas have been suggested: Eldon Street block; New Street Neighbourhood and Peel St/ Townend; and a potential multipurpose route. A sustainability action plan and delivery strategy have also been developed and included in the final version of the strategy.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 One alternative approach would be to not adopt this strategy. Adoption of the strategy will inform any future plans for the Town Centre and may support future funding bids.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The strategy provides suggested measures to achieve net zero targets in the Town Centre. It provides suggested interventions to assist in making the Town Centre attractive, coherent and inclusive. Post-Covid actions are suggested to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and ensure Barnsley is well placed for recovery. There are several important strands that this strategy pulls together, which if implemented will enhance the Town Centre.

7. LIST OF APPENDICES

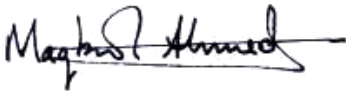
Appendix 1: Urbed Town Centre Strategy Document
Appendix 2: Summary of consultation responses
Appendix 3: Baseline report
Appendix 4: Barnsley Town Centre Zero Carbon Transition Strategy LEDA
Appendix 5: Delivery Strategy Ade Regeneration

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Consultation draft version of the Urbed Town Centre Strategy
<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/media/19473/barnsley-urban-design-low-carbon-strategy.pdf>

If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Financial consultation & sign off	Senior Financial Services officer consulted and date  12/05/2022 <i>This box must be signed to confirm that there are no financial implications.</i>
Legal consultation & sign off	Legal Services officer consulted and date Jason Field 11/05/22

Report Author: Paula Tweed
Post: Planning Policy Group Leader
Date: 10th May, 2022