
Cabinet
Council

10th February 2015
24th February 2015

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Employment – Councillor K Maton

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director of Place

Ward(s) affected:

Primarily St. Michaels although there is some overlap into Foleshill, Radford and Sherbourne. The future development proposals for the City Centre are also expected to have an impact on the City as a whole.

Title:

Coventry City Centre Area Action Plan (AAP) – The Preferred Approach

Is this a key decision?

Yes - The proposals have a direct impact on more than 2 wards, whilst the future prosperity of the City Centre will have a direct impact upon the City as a whole.

Executive Summary:

The development of a successful City Centre is an essential component of promoting the growth and prosperity of Coventry. For many visitors, investors, business and local people the City Centre is a gateway to Coventry that represents their principal location for work, learning, leisure, retail and community provisions. It offers a fantastic opportunity to exploit our historic assets, our rich 20th century heritage and showpiece innovative 21st century buildings and public realm, which together will create a unique city centre environment. The draft City Centre Area Action Plan (at Appendix 1) sets out how this can be promoted and achieved.

At a time when Coventry's population continues to grow, its city centre will continue to be a focal point, but must respond in order to stop a period of decline, primarily within its retail offer. This is placed in context through the Councils Shopping and Centres Study (2014), which identifies Coventry as the country's 13th biggest city but with a retail centre ranked 58th. As such, there is a clear disparity between the city's population and the quality of its retail offer.

In recent years however, significant investment in city centre public realm improvements have complemented substantial investments in job creation such as the new Severn Trent head offices and hi-tech business at the University Technology Park. Likewise, more people are now living in the city centre following delivery of new homes over the last 10 years. Coventry University also continues to grow, not only in terms of its student numbers, but also its national and global reputation and the size and quality of its campus.

This Area Action Plan looks to build upon these recent successes and provides a platform for the future to help guide and deliver new developments and investment and support the Councils City Centre First strategy. It includes well known and established proposals such as Friargate, City Centre South and the completion of Belgrade Plaza, but also introduces new ideas and aspirations. For example, new residential led regeneration around the area north of Corporation Street and Fairfax Street, continued growth of the Technology Park, new approaches to city centre parking provision and longer term aspirations for the regeneration of the northern half of the city's retail area.

In addition to new buildings, the Area Action Plan provides a fundamental focus on urban and landscape design, environmental quality, protection of historic assets, green infrastructure, water courses and new routes and linkages helping people move around the city centre and its adjoining areas in an easier and more coherent way. These aspects will all be fundamental in continuing to improve the overall feel of the City Centre and the quality of its built environment.

The development of an Area Action Plan is therefore essential to help provide a clear overview of how all these different aspects can work together to improve the city centre whilst shaping and directing future development. It is important to note that the AAP cannot however define exactly how specific sites will be developed, but it can set clear markers and provide a firm steer as to how development could be brought forward. This provides a blueprint for the city centre, allowing it to respond to the rapid change that it is expected to face in the coming years.

In this context, the Area Action Plan has been developed in two specific sections. The first will consider overarching policy guidance focused around four key areas:

- city centre heritage;
- the built environment;
- the natural environment; and
- parking.

The second section will provide a more detailed overview of:

- 9 quarters that have been identified around specific characteristics and include:
 - i. The Business Quarter – Friargate;
 - ii. Cathedrals and Cultural Quarter;
 - iii. The Civic Quarter;
 - iv. Far Gosford Street Quarter;
 - v. Health and Learning Quarter – Swanswell;
 - vi. Leisure and Entertainment Quarter – Sky Dome and Belgrade Plaza;
 - vii. Primary Shopping Quarter – the retail core;
 - viii. Technology Park Quarter – Parkside; and
 - ix. University and Enterprise Quarter

- 2 regeneration areas to the north of the city centre, focused around Bishop Street and Fairfax Street; and
- An area of planned stability with small infill opportunities to the south of the city, focused around Warwick Row.

Both sections follow on from an introductory section which explains where the city centre currently sits and where it looks to go in the future.

Recommendations:

- 1) The Cabinet is requested to recommend that the Council approves the "City Centre Area Action Plan – The Preferred Approach (2014-2031)" document and authorises a period of seven weeks public engagement beginning on Friday 27th February 2015 and ending on Friday 17th April 2015.
- 2) The Council is recommended to approve the "City Centre Area Action Plan – The Preferred Approach (2014-2031)" document and authorises a period of seven weeks public engagement beginning on Friday 27th February 2015 and ending on Friday 17th April 2015.

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1 – Coventry City Centre Area Action Plan – The Preferred Approach

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

Yes - 24th February 2015

Report title: Coventry City Centre Area Action Plan (AAP) - The Preferred Approach

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 City centre planning policy is currently contained within the Coventry Development Plan (2001). This was intended to deliver and manage development between 1996 and 2011 as such it has been more than 13 years since these policies were written, meaning they have become dated, implemented or superseded.
- 1.2 The Council first published a draft City Centre Area Action Plan for public consideration in November 2009 which was followed by a revised draft in April 2010. Although published for a period of public engagement the final document was not submitted to the Secretary of State due to significant changes taking place in national planning at that time and the impacts this had on local policy development.
- 1.3 In order to robustly progress an AAP, it is important to have a higher level policy document in place in advance, or at least being developed in parallel. As such, the intervening years have focused on developing a new Core Strategy or more recently a Local Plan. As a result, the Council have not been able to return to developing the AAP for the city centre until now.
- 1.4 Coventry's population is now in excess of 317,000 people and is continuing to grow. Indeed, the city is experiencing a sustained period of population growth for the first time since the 1960's and as a result population projections now identify Coventry as having one of the fastest growing populations in the country. This represents a game changer for the city and requires significant attention in order to provide adequate homes, job opportunities, retail floor space and social and community provisions. The Council's City Centre First Strategy helps emphasise the importance of this Area Action Plan in helping deliver such provisions.
- 1.5 Coventry is the country's 13th largest city, but the influence of the city centre reaches wider than the city's boundary and covers a population in excess of half a million people. The spend power within this catchment is also significant at in excess of £1,200 million; however, only a third of this spend is currently drawn to the city centre. This is also emphasised by the city centre's current national ranking, which currently sees the city centre sit 58th in the nation's retail rankings according to spend, lagging behind other similar centres in terms of the quality and range of shops. With this in mind there is a clear disparity between the size of city's population and the standard of its city centre retail offer. With the Council's aspirations to grow and become a top 10 city again and this level of spend power expected to increase significantly, it is clear that improvements in both quantity and quality of floor space are required to help increase the market share exerted by the city centre.
- 1.6 The principal aim of this AAP (See Appendix 1) is therefore to provide the platform from which to regenerate the city centre. This not only involves new retail provision, but more new homes, employment space and leisure, social and community provisions. It will also provide a strategic overview of accessibility issues including parking, pedestrian movement and associated infrastructure. This is to be managed through the development of two specific sections within the AAP. The first includes four strategic policy areas, whilst the second covers nine quarters reflective of different uses and characteristics and three areas of regeneration. These can be outlined as follows:

Four Strategic Policy Areas

- City centre heritage – This section provides an overarching policy basis for any development that may relate to the city’s heritage assets. This primarily includes statutory and locally listed buildings, conservation areas and scheduled ancient monuments. The policy also considers how development will assess and record archaeological findings and where appropriate preserve and protect them.
- The built environment – This section provides an overarching basis for promoting excellent urban design through new developments, architectural lighting, public art and materials and locally distinctive architecture. It also provides a basis for creating new routes and linkages and ensuring people can move around the city centre in an easier and more coherent way. The section also considers how tall buildings could work in the city centre and manages their relationship with the most important views of the city’s three spires.
- The natural environment - This section provides an overarching basis for incorporating green infrastructure across the city centre and promotes an idea of a green spine running from the extended Greyfriars Green in the south to Swanswell Pool in the north. The section also considers water courses (blue infrastructure) and explores opportunities for deculverting. Other drainage and flood risk issues are considered as well as looking at minimising the impacts of pollutants through the city centre.
- Parking - This section provides an overarching basis for managing parking opportunities across the city centre. This includes provision for cars, cycles and buses/coaches. The section considers how and where people park and how existing provision relates to city centre attractions. The AAP seeks to maintain the existing number of spaces across the city centre but from fewer locations, highlighting a number of surface level car parks as development opportunities. The Salt Lane and Cheylsemore car parks are specifically identified for becoming multi-storey provisions, whilst the redevelopment of Barracks is to be linked to City Centre South. Other multi storey opportunities would also be considered around Friargate, Fairfax Street and Parkside. The section also promotes cycle parking as an integral part of new developments and builds upon the concept of an electric city and driverless technology.

The Quarters (see Figure 9 in Appendix 1)

- The Business Quarter – Friargate: Friargate is identified as the principal location for new office provision across the city centre. A minimum of 185,000sq.m of office floor space is to be allocated, with an allowance for supporting retail and commercial uses at ground floors to create active frontages. At least 400 homes are also proposed for allocation, whilst the improvements to connectivity across the Ring Road are highlighted.
- Cathedrals and Cultural Quarter: Enhancing Coventry’s heritage and cultural offer is an essential element of attracting investment to the city and promoting its image. As part of this area the site at the junction of Hale Street and Trinity Street is proposed for the allocation of 60 homes.
- The Civic Quarter: This quarter focuses on an area of expected redevelopment, with a number of buildings to be vacated in the coming years. The policy offers a flexible approach to future developments but seeks to retain some of the area’s historical character of public service.

- Far Gosford Street Quarter: This quarter focuses on the recent activity to enhance the historic buildings and public realm around Far Gosford Street, including the creation of Far Go Village. The provision of new hot food takeaways in this area will no longer be supported.
- Health and Learning Quarter – Swanswell: Improving links to this area with its recent health and education developments is a priority. The former Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital site in particular provides opportunities for a new school provision to help serve the increase in new homes across the city centre. The remaining listed buildings, which also form part of the former Hospital site will be promoted for conversion to new residential provision.
- Leisure and Entertainment Quarter – Sky Dome and Belgrade Plaza: The completion of the Belgrade Plaza for a mix of uses is a priority. The quarter also identifies redevelopment opportunities around Watch Close and at Ringway House. In relation to Spon Street any further hot food takeaways will not be supported.
- Primary Shopping Quarter – the retail core: The Primary Shopping Quarter responds to national guidance and is established as the focal point for new retail uses in Coventry city centre. New primary frontages are also established and reflect the original shopping precincts as well as West Orchards. A minimum of 37,600sq.m of gross retail floor space is proposed for the plan period, with around a third of this expected to be delivered as part of City Centre South. Indeed this scheme is identified as a key priority for improving the city centres retail offer in the next 5-10 years. Longer term aspirations are then identified around the northern half of the precincts, which could include an expansion of West Orchards. The conversion of Cathedral Lanes to a predominantly restaurant based establishment is supported, as are opportunities to remove the Nationwide building and the Upper Precinct escalators in order to improve connectivity.
- Technology Park Quarter – Parkside: This area focuses around the University led Technology Park and hi-tech job creation. The policies look to promote the expansion of the park and propose allocating around 27,000sq.m of new floor space and around 285 new homes. Part of the quarter is also identified as the London Road Gateway, which looks to enhance the frontage of this area to the Ring Road and London Road. As part of this, opportunities to improve connectivity to the inner city centre at Junctions 4 and 5 will be supported.
- University and Enterprise Quarter: This area focuses upon the continued growth of the university. As such, land at Gulson Road is proposed for a second phase of the Engineering building. The site of Priory Halls is proposed for redevelopment for new homes, whilst opportunities to enhance connectivity through the area and improve its integration with the wider city centre are encouraged. Opportunities to enhance the setting of the Cathedrals and other listed buildings are of particular importance in this area.

Regeneration Areas

- The Bishop Street regeneration area is expected to be a primarily residential led redevelopment of what is largely a vacant and under used part of the city centre. A range of other uses will also be supported to help create active frontages, whilst the connectivity along Bishop Street to the canal Basin is highlighted as a priority.

- The Fairfax Street regeneration area is again identified as a primarily residential led redevelopment opportunity. Of particular importance is the opportunity to remove the slip roads at Junction 2 of the Ring Road and utilise this space to create significant enhancements to the built and natural environment and links between the cathedrals and Swanswell Pool.
- The Warwick Row area is expected to remain largely unchanged over the plan period. There may however be opportunities for small infill developments or appropriate changes of use, which will be supported in principle. The one opportunity of note is the vacant land at Friars Road, which is proposed to be allocated for at least 35 new homes.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 Two realistic options have been considered as part of this process. The first of these is to do nothing and not progress an Area Action Plan for the city centre. This option has been discounted as without a specific policy basis for guiding city centre development there is a real risk of piecemeal developments that fail to reflect the character of the city centre and which amplify the existing issues around connectivity and quality.
- 2.2 The second option is presented within this Report and the Paper at Appendix 1. This involves engaging key stakeholders and the local community in relation to future proposals for Coventry city centre. These proposals have been informed by evidence and development needs, as well as the opportunities that exist throughout the city centre. With support from the Sustainability Appraisal process, this considers all reasonable alternatives and seeks to engage local people and key stakeholders in the development of the new City Centre Area Action Plan.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 The development of this version of the City Centre Area Action Plan has had regard to a wide range of detail consultation events that have taken place across the city centre in recent years. For example, it has taken into account previous consultation activity and feedback from the 2009 and 2010 versions of the AAP as well as views and thoughts expressed through consultations relating to specific development proposals including: Friargate, Broadgate, Bishopgate and City Centre South.
- 3.2 It is proposed that this version of the City Centre Area Action Plan will be subject to a period of consultation between 27th February – 17th April 2015. The responses received and outcome of that consultation process will be the subject of a future report.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 Subject to approval by Cabinet and Council, the new City Centre Area Action Plan – The Preferred Approach will be published for a period of 7 consultation referred to at paragraph 3.2 above.

5. Comments from Executive Director of Resources

5.1 Financial implications

There are no material direct financial implications of the proposal to consult on the attached CC AAP. The costs of public engagement are minimal and will be funded from existing budget provision.

The CC AAP as presented details a number of major development and growth opportunities which if progressed could have significant financial implications in terms of either investment cost or disposal receipts. These developments will be considered in turn on a business case basis and reported to members as appropriate detailing relevant implications, including the impact on business rates.

5.2 Legal implications

The proposed consultation period of 7 weeks exceeds the usual minimum specified by the regulations, and by the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement, for a planning policy consultation period. This will provide extra time to engage with local people and key stakeholders.

The proposed engagement period will help to ensure that the Council can demonstrate that it has considered all reasonable alternatives when considering its approach to developing the city centre, and that it has continued to involve the local community and others with an interest in the process. This substantially increases the chances that, in due course, the Area Action Plan will be found to be legally compliant by the independent Inspector.

In addition, through this consultation the Council will continue to engage constructively and actively with its neighbouring authorities as part of the Duty to Cooperate, as set out in Section 33A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as introduced by the Localism Act 2011).

It is considered that this consultation process conforms to the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Localism Act (2011) and other associated regulations, the National Planning Policy Framework 2012, and Planning Policy Guidance (2014).

The City Centre Area Action Plan once adopted by the City Council will be a material consideration in relation to any planning application that relates to the area covered by the Action Plan. This Action Plan will also form an integral part of the Coventry Development Plan when adopted

6. Other implications

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

- A prosperous Coventry: The growth and regeneration of the city centre will support the creation of new homes, jobs, retail floor space and leisure, social and community provisions. These will help support a more prosperous Coventry.
- Citizens living longer, healthier, independent lives: The Area Action Plan will promote new green and blue infrastructure within the city centre, which will help promote active travel and improve mental health. Improvements to accessibility through new routes, linkages and transport options will support aspirations to be an 'Age Friendly City'. The AAP also seeks to minimise pollutants and try and reduce existing levels by supporting more active travel and low emission vehicles.

- Making Coventry an attractive and enjoyable place to be: The growth and regeneration of the city centre will support the creation of new homes, jobs, retail floor space and leisure, social and community provisions. The Area Action Plan will also promote new green and blue infrastructure within the city centre. Together this will help make Coventry a more attractive and enjoyable place to be
- Providing a good choice of housing: The Area Action Plan identifies a number of opportunities for new homes within the city centre. There is also a clear commitment to create a suitable balance between the provisions of new student accommodation, older persons housing and market homes.
- Making places and services easily accessible: The Area Action Plan is committed to promoting sustainable development with adequate provision of infrastructure and improved accessibility to key services and facilities. The document also highlights the importance of connectivity and accessibility within and around the city centre to help create more coherent routes and linkages and maximise gateway opportunities.
- Encouraging a creative, active and vibrant city: The Area Action Plan clearly establishes the city centre as the hub for new retail, office, leisure and community investment. The provision of new housing across the city centre, in a range of types and tenures, will also help to promote the centres vibrancy and vitality.
- Improving the environment and tackling climate change: The Area Action Plan contains a section on the natural environment. This specifically looks at improving environmental quality and minimising the impact of pollutants on the urban environment. Examples such as developing more energy efficient buildings, opportunities around the electric city concept and promotion of low emission vehicles will all help the city centre to reduce its carbon emissions.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

Due to the nature of this engagement process there are limited risks associated with this version of the City Centre Area Action Plan. By virtue of its nature, the paper itself seeks to minimise the risks that may arise at the next stage by engaging with key stakeholders and local people early in the process. The principal risks will become clearer at the next stage of the Action Plan once the final approach to planned city centre developments are known.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

No direct impact.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

The Council will be undertaking a full Equality and Consultation Analysis (ECA) on the new City Centre Area Action Plan as it is developed over the coming months. The consultation period, due to start in February, will inform the ECA and enable the impact of the Action Plan on key protected groups in the city to be fully understood and considered by elected members prior to finalisation of the Plan. As part of that analysis, the Council will have due regard to its public sector equality duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

Notwithstanding, through the development of new homes, employment opportunities, retail floor space and leisure, social and community provisions, there are likely to be significant economic and social benefits to the city centre and the city as a whole. This will be promoted by urban regeneration and the redevelopment of land currently sitting vacant and derelict as well as increased opportunities for job creation, the delivery of new infrastructure and improvements to accessibility.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

At this point, there are no implications for (or impact on) the environment, as the proposal is to carry out a technical engagement exercise. Detailed assessment of these issues can be found in the Sustainability Appraisal Report (SA/SEA) that will be made available as part of the consultation period. The SA/SEA considers each of the options that are the subject of the consultation.

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

There are no implications for partner organisations that cannot be mitigated or managed through the supporting work that has already been undertaken and will be prepared by the Council as it moves towards the final version of its City Centre Area Action Plan.

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