

**MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL
REPORT FOR RESOLUTION**

REPORT TO: Executive

DATE: 22 October 2008

SUBJECT: Whitworth Street West: Development Framework

REPORT OF: The Chief Executive

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek the Executive's approval on proposals for a new Development Framework for the Whitworth Street West area of the city centre. The framework is intended to respond to the pace of change in the city centre, and the need to maintain and enhance its competitiveness both nationally and internationally by positioning itself effectively to meet the future needs and requirements of city centre occupiers. The Framework will help to provide the economic and spatial context for the area that is capable of accommodating the growth in key economic sectors, and will enable this area to be brought forward for redevelopment in a way that complements existing developments in adjacent areas within the city centre.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is recommended to:

- i) Endorse the new Development Framework for Whitworth Street West, which is summarised at Section 4 of this report;
- ii) Request the Chief Executive undertake a public consultation exercise on the Development Framework with local residents and businesses;
- iii) Subject to the outcome of the public consultation exercise, request that Planning and Highways Committee take the Framework into material consideration when determining planning applications within this area.

FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE REVENUE BUDGET

None at present

FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CAPITAL BUDGET

None at present

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Whitworth Street Hub: Development Framework – Room 318, Town Hall

WARDS AFFECTED

City Centre

IMPLICATIONS FOR:

Anti –Poverty

No

Equal Opportunities

No

Environment

Yes

Employment

Yes

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Manchester city region is the most important economic generator in the north of England, delivering over half of the North West's total economic output and generates in excess of £50Bn GVA per annum, making it the largest city region economy outside London and the south east. Over the next 15 years the city region is expected to grow overall.
- 1.2 The city centre of Manchester drives the regional economy. It has benefited from phenomenal growth over the last ten years, driving unprecedented levels of commercial and residential development. During this period it has attracted an estimated £2Bn of investment and created around 45,000 jobs.
- 1.3 The city's economic growth to date has been driven by the rapid expansion of a number of key sectors, particularly financial and professional services, media and creative, public administration, leisure, tourism and the service sector. These are the sectors that will continue to underpin the City's future growth prospects.
- 1.4 The city centre has now achieved a critical mass of economic activity and is set to experience further, significant, employment growth. The Manchester City Region Development Plan forecasts over 100,000 new jobs will be generated over the next 15 years. To accommodate this anticipated growth the city centre needs to continue to grow and diversify its employment base. To fulfil its potential it must be able to accommodate the property needs and requirements of a growing and diverse range of occupiers.
- 1.5 The economic health, vitality and competitiveness of the city centre is crucial to the long term economic success of the regional economy. So long as it continues to expand the city centre can, and will, play a fundamental role in building a modern, sustainable and competitive regional economy based on high value, knowledge intensive activity.

2. Delivering Future City Centre Expansion Opportunities

- 2.1 To facilitate this further growth the city centre must provide a variety of accommodation types and floorplates, and encourage not just the growth of indigenous businesses but new regional, national and international ones. Areas of the city centre capable and suitable for accommodating this expansion are increasingly limited. In recent years landmark developments at Spinningfields and Piccadilly (both once seen as peripheral) have complemented a revived traditional core city centre offer to accommodate the City's expansion requirements.
- 2.2 However, predominately as a result of their success, opportunities to drive future growth in these areas has now reduced significantly. As the City looks to its future it needs to identify, and deliver, fresh expansion and growth opportunities in order to remain competitive.

- 2.3 Opportunities for providing the flexibility of product required by the next generation of occupiers (many of whom are highly price sensitive) within the traditional boundaries of the city centre are limited. Members have previously endorsed proposals to promote commercial development, as part of wider planned and co-ordinated mixed-use initiatives, across a small number of what were previously considered fringe city centre locations.
- 2.4 Much of the expansion potential of the city centre lies in and around its southern gateway approaches and along the City South area. Historically growth opportunities in this area have been limited by poor quality local infrastructure and the sense of 'dislocation' from the rest of the city centre created by the barrier effect of the railway line between Oxford Road and Deansgate stations.
- 2.5 There are, however, already a number of clear indicators that expansion of the city centre southwards is a deliverable ambition. The development of Deansgate Locks, the Bridgewater Hall and associated Barbirolli Square office development provided the initial impetus for growth. Later developments in and around Manchester Central consolidated that expansion. The single, most visible sign of the southerly expansion of the city centre though has been the Hilton Tower. A dominating feature on the city's landscape, delivery of the Hilton Tower has fundamentally transformed perceptions of the southern approaches to the City, firmly establishing the southern end of Deansgate as a viable business location and heightening investor and occupier confidence in this important gateway to the City. Other new development, particularly the Axis office scheme at the opposite end of Whitworth Street West will help to enhance this location as a destination of choice.
- 2.6 Following on from the success of these initiatives, major new development proposals have emerged in recent years at a number of large, undeveloped parts of the area to the immediate south of the traditional city core. Substantial mixed-use development frameworks have been approved for the City South area, First Street and the Great Jackson Street areas in particular. Combined, these development areas have the potential to accommodate a wide range of city centre expansion opportunities and drive forward the growth agenda for the City for many years to come.
- 2.7 New development at First Street has already commenced with a £50m investment in new office accommodation, land remediation and public realm provision now well underway (see report elsewhere on this agenda). However, the sustainability and long-term success of First Street, and other critical growth areas, will depend upon their full integration into the physical and economic fabric of the traditional core of the city centre, rather than remote from it. It will also be important to ensure that the area is properly connected to adjacent communities in Hulme.
- 2.8 Failure to achieve proper integration will result in only low level economic growth in these areas, fundamentally inhibiting the required expansion of the City as a whole.

3.0 The Whitworth Street West Development Framework

- 3.1 The preparation of a new Development Framework for the Whitworth Street West area is an essential part of encouraging and promoting the seamless expansion of the traditional city core southwards, thereby enhancing the economic competitiveness of the City over the next decade or so.
- 3.2 The area including and immediately surrounding Whitworth Street West has, for many years, suffered from a lack of high quality or sustained investment. Despite its significant geographic attributes, it has, to date, failed to deliver consistently high levels of economic activity. As well as being a significant missed opportunity in its own right, this situation is seriously hindering the economic potential of identified growth areas such as Great Jackson Street and First Street, to its immediate south, by reinforcing the feeling of dislocation and isolation that for so long has held back investment and expansion in these areas.
- 3.3 The implementation of a number of high quality, well integrated and well connected development opportunities within the Whitworth Street West area is required to continue the significant investment between the established core and the emerging growth areas on the periphery of the city centre.
- 3.4 The Whitworth Street West area is naturally placed to become a crucial 'stepping stone' in terms of encouraging the natural expansion of the city centre. It is imperative that developments in the area are of the highest quality and, when combined, create the critical mass of economic activity necessary to promote and encourage investment and growth opportunities in more peripheral city centre areas.
- 3.5 The importance and magnitude of the opportunity demands a thoughtful and co-ordinated approach to development. This is best achieved through the mechanism of an agreed Development Framework. Piecemeal development on a fragmented basis would jeopardise the enormous potential offered by the area, and, more importantly, fundamentally damage ongoing efforts to improve the wider competitiveness and functionality of the city centre as a whole.

4.0 The Development Framework – Key Elements

- 4.1 The new Development Framework for Whitworth Street West establishes the foundations for the medium to long term transformation of the area, and seeks to capitalise on its unique attributes to create a thriving part of the city centre where people will want to work, socialise and live. It does this by proposing a new scale and density of built form, promoting a well balanced mix of new uses and a vibrant and diverse streetscape and public realm.
- 4.2 The core components of the framework are as follows:

Enhancing the quality of the City's primary gateway from the south

- 4.3 The Framework seeks to ensure that this important gateway to the city centre from the south reflects the highest quality development that the City has to offer. The quality of the built environment should be of the highest architectural standard, and developments around the key junction of Albion Street and Whitworth Street West could and should increase in scale to mark the significance of this gateway.
- 4.4 Development should also respond to the areas excellent public transport links and seek to improve and enhance movement to, and through, the area for those arriving or departing from the City by rail or Metrolink.
- 4.5 The Development Framework envisages the area developing in a manner consistent with the rest of the city centre, with its established urban form and dense and compact city blocks. The proximity and accessibility of the area to good public transport links leans towards its emergence as a predominately high density environment.

Improving accessibility and connectivity

- 4.6 A critical ambition of the framework is the improvement of accessibility to and through the area for pedestrians, cyclists, public transport and general traffic. Accordingly, the Framework seeks to promote a realistic approach to vehicular management and integration, and attempts to mitigate the potential negative impacts of the car by proposing well considered vehicular access routes to individual buildings and effective and efficient vehicle movement arrangements.
- 4.7 Given the edge of centre location of the area, it will be crucial moving forward that the area is fully integrated with the wider city centre transport strategy, including the introduction of metro shuttle facilities and adequate provision for taxis. The metro shuttle bus in particular offers a high quality public transport service capable of effectively connecting Whitworth Street West with the rest of the city centre's primary public transport network.
- 4.8 The Council, together with GMPTE has commissioned a study to develop a strategy to improve the public realm, enhance pedestrian linkages and upgrade public transport facilities with particular focus on the bridge link between G-Mex, Metrolink and Deansgate station. This strategy will deliver a short, medium and long-term vision, accommodating planned increases in Metrolink capacity, to take account of proposed developments, not just at Whitworth Street West but also First Street, additional development adjacent to Manchester Central, and at Castlefield Quay. The opportunity to enhance and develop the public realm and infrastructure in this area will be critical to its overall success.

Achieving a Sense of Place

- 4.9 The precise form, function and mix of uses appropriate in respect of individual buildings within the area will change with time as property market and

economic conditions alter. However, the Framework is intended to identify at the outset the proposed mix of uses that are deemed appropriate in seeking to achieve the critical sense of place needed to ensure all round vibrancy and vitality across the area, whilst complementing activities available elsewhere in the city centre.

- 4.10 As well as providing an opportunity for new high profile, high quality office space for indigenous or inward investors, the area lends itself well to the delivery of smaller, more flexible floorplates that will appeal to a range of occupiers (particularly those seeking to own their own office space) and new/refurbished small business offices suites and workspaces, aimed specifically at the small/independent business sector.
- 4.11 Considering the locational advantages of the site, and its proximity to Manchester Central in particular, it is ideally suited to the development of additional hotel facilities, perhaps in the form of a landmark mixed-use building, which would help to frame this important gateway to the city centre. A hotel facility should not compete with other significant new hotel developments, and a 3 / lower 4* offer should be complementary to existing and planned schemes.
- 4.12 The Whitworth Street West area already has a significant residential population and, while demand for residential has weakened over the last few months, ensuring that continuing high quality residential development is encouraged to augment recent growth will be an important part of delivering an active and vibrant evening, night time and weekend population over the next few years. The type of residential development proposed will be dependent on market demand at the time of development, expected to be in around 3 years time. However, a range of tenures to appeal to a broad range of occupiers is anticipated.
- 4.13 Throughout the area, it is anticipated that active ground floor activities including small scale retail outlets, bar/restaurant, cultural and community facilities, gallery, leisure and café uses will animate the streetscape and contribute fundamentally the achievement of a sense of place.
- 4.14 The Development Framework establishes a strong urban design vision for the area but it is not intended to be prescriptive in defining a particular architectural style for specific buildings. However, the key objective will always be to secure high quality contemporary buildings, which achieve the highest possible architectural standards.
- 4.15 Striking a balance between commercial, retail, leisure and residential uses throughout the area will help to create an urban environment that can accommodate day time and evening users. A street pattern that promotes overlooking of streets and spaces, which will promote safety is a key theme.
- 4.16 The Framework encourages variety and individuality in the built form but provides a strong contextual setting for all development activity. In many respects a measure of the success of the framework will be in its ability to

accommodate change. Attached is an indicative layout plan of the area. A copy of the Development Framework will be placed in the Member's Library.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 Re-connecting the southern fringes of the city centre with the established core of the City Centre will offer significant economic and social benefits and deliver long-term qualitative change. The proposals at Whitworth Street West will be complemented by further development opportunities proposed for First Street (see report elsewhere on this agenda) which will help to confirm this area as a destination of choice for new investment.
- 5.2 The Whitworth Street West area is naturally placed to become a crucial 'stepping stone' in terms of encouraging the natural expansion of the city centre. It is imperative that developments in the Whitworth Street West area are of the highest quality and, when combined, create the critical mass of economic activity necessary to promote and encourage investment and growth opportunities in more peripheral city centre areas.
- 5.3 The area has the locational advantages and capacity to house a diversity of essential functions that will be easily accessible. It will deliver a range of flexible buildings and a variety of floorplate sizes. As such it will appeal to a wide range of commercial occupiers.
- 5.4 Under the auspices of the Framework, Officers will work closely with local landowners to bring forward a range of high quality, mixed-use and well connected development opportunities, that will deliver new expansion and growth opportunities for the City and complement recent success made in establishing the city centre as the driving force of the regional economy.
- 5.5 Recommendations can be found at the front of this report.

