

**Notes of the Regeneration and Neighbourhoods OSC**  
**Town Centre Projects Site Visits**  
**9<sup>th</sup> September and 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

In order to see the progress of the town centre Capital Projects, Clare Turner, the Cathedral Quarter Development Manager, took Members on two visits to the bus station, Cathedral Square and the new Premier Inn. These visits took place two months apart to allow Members to see how the projects were progressing in their final stages.

**Visit One- 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

**Present:** Cllrs Surve, Casey, Connor, Entwistle, Whalley and Whittle.

**Also Present:** Clare Turner – Cathedral Quarter Development Manager and Rebekah Mottershead – Scrutiny Support Officer

**Apologies:** Cllrs Ali, Hollings, Slater and Wright.

Members held a brief discussion around the delayed opening of the bus station. It was noted that new contractors had now been hired and, despite the challenges faced, work had now continued and the station was due for completion by early 2016. It was noted that the thoroughfare from Ainsworth Street to Church Street would be open in time for early December.

It was reported that the new Premier Inn was scheduled to open in the first week of November and had already received many bookings. Members noted that the hotel would also have a restaurant that would be open to the public which would offer free Wi-Fi.

The Task Group was shown the sites of the two new car parks, one was designated for the office block and would be free after 5.30 and at weekends for public use, and one was designated for the Premier Inn. It was noted that the department had a 'lift and shift' agreement with the hotel for potential to build a multi-story car park in the future should it be required once the second phase of the development was completed.

Members were informed that the hoardings around the Cathedral Quarter would be removed once it was safe to do so, and that target to open this area up would be mid-November.

It was noted that the office block, One Cathedral Square, was owned by Legal and General but the Council had the head lease for 25 years. Members heard that the building would house high spec office units, and that the space could be let as a whole or on a unit by unit basis.

It was reported that the office space had generated a lot of interest but as of yet no businesses had committed to rent. Members questioned if this was a cause for concern for the department. They were informed that it was unusual for office

buildings to be let off plan and that there was to be an open evening in mid-November to showcase the space to perspective clients.

Members questioned what the prospective rental income was to be on One Cathedral Square and were informed that whilst the building had been designed to emulate city centre provisions, the rental would be around half the price of high spec spaces in a city.

Members also questioned if website or social media hits could be analysed to ascertain potential interest in the development. Clare advised that the department would have access to such figures and would be utilising social media accordingly. She indicated that real life photos rather than computer generated images would soon be added to the site to allow people to view how the development looked. It was noted that this would be completed once the hoardings had been removed.

It was reported that the train to Manchester would soon be running every half hour, which would open up the development for those wishing to commute. It was noted that the train station had been partially refurbished. Members were advised discussions were underway with national rail with regards to the clearing of the exterior footways around the station.

Members suggested that an advertising board be placed within the train station or on the platform similar to that in bigger stations which would highlight the new development and the restaurants/retail outlets locations and opening times.

Clare advised that the maintenance of the new development was to be under warranty for twelve months. Members queried what measures were in place for once this had expired, particularly given the further budget efficiencies to be faced by the Council. Clare indicated that the department would work closely with Environmental Services to ensure maintenance of the grounds was completed moving forwards.

The Task Group noted the works that had been completed on the Cathedral building so far and that 'Dandy Row' would be reopened to allow traffic through to the new underground car park that was to be part of the Cathedral development. It was noted that because of the conservation regulations to be adhered to on the Cathedral, this building work would be completed slightly later than the rest of the development.

Clare advised that other areas of the town centre would also be refurbished, such as Jubilee and Bridge House, alongside the second phase of the development. It was reported that because of the safety aspect of demolishing the building. The Exchange building would be removed once the temporary bus station had closed to ensure the public could be kept at a safe distance.

Members were impressed with how far the development had come on since their visit last year and requested an additional visit in the site to view the inside of the hotel and the premier inn once building work was completed.

## **Next Steps**

That a further site visit be arranged for Members to see the completed Cathedral Quarter development.

## **Visit Two – 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

**Present:** Cllrs Surve, Casey, Entwistle, Whalley and Whittle.

**Also Present:** Clare Turner – Cathedral Quarter Development Manager and Rebekah Mottershead – Scrutiny Support Officer

**Apologies:** Cllrs Ali, Connor and Slater

Once the Cathedral Quarter development was nearing its completion, the Task Group reconvened to view the inside of the new office space and the Premier Inn hotel.

Members were impressed with how far the development had progressed since their visit on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015. They felt that the green space and seating areas around the newly refurbished statue of Queen Victoria had created an attractive and welcoming space for the public to enjoy.

The Task Group met with the Assistant Manager of the new Premier Inn, who took them on a tour of the facilities the hotel offered. It was reported that the new restaurant 'Thyme' was open to the public from breakfast and had 30 covers. Members were informed that the bar would also be open to the public and would hold a 'happy hour' between 6 and 8pm daily.

Members heard that the building had been completed to the highest standard, with many rooms being almost soundproof. The Task Group was shown a standard bedroom for the hotel and noted that there was special up lighting in the hotels signature colour and a flat screen, wall mounted plasma television. Members were impressed with the quality of the rooms and questioned the typical nightly booking fee. They were informed that advanced saver bookings could be made from as little as £39.

The Assistant Manager advised that the hotel was already at approximately 60% occupancy. Members questioned if discussions had taken place with the events team at King Georges Hall to facilitate mutual discounts for theatre goers. It was reported that such collaborations would need to be negotiated with the head office rather than the hotel management.

It was noted that the hoardings had now been removed for the development, and Railway Road, including the new bus lanes, had now opened to the public. Members raised concerns at the location of the directional signs which indicated the route drivers must take through this new section of highway, feeling that the designated route was somewhat confusing and brought drivers too close to the footway. The

Task Group heard that Capita Highways would be best placed to answer queries regarding road design.

Clare guided the Task Group around the office space in the newly completed One Cathedral Square. It was agreed that this building had been designed and finished to a high specification, and its proximity to the train station, teamed with its own car park made it an attractive offer both for local businesses and those wishing to relocate/commute.

Members were informed that the rent for the office space would be approximately £15 per square foot, which was around half the amount of similar specification space in or around a city. Clare advised that the development had generated a lot of interest.

It was reported that three restaurants and an independent coffee shop had expressed their interest in the area and the department was confident that all the outlets would be filled in the near future.

Clare informed the Task Group that although the development was now open, there were still a few areas to be completed, such as the planting of trees. Members felt that whilst there may be an initial adjustment period to allow residents to become accustomed to the new space, the development would be fundamental in generating business growth and futureproofing the Borough's economy.

### **Next Steps**

It was agreed;

1. That the Cathedral Quarter Development Manager be thanked for showing the Task Group around the new Capital Projects
2. That the Director of Regeneration be invited to the December meeting of the Committee to provide Members with a final overview of the Cathedral Quarter development now it was reaching its completion