

# A Plan for the South City Centre: Shaping the Future, Celebrating the Past



Prepared on behalf of Norwich City Council and the Homes and Communities Agency  
by David Lock Associates  
with Peter Brett Associates, CgMs Consulting, Gardiner & Theobald

June 2013

## Opportunities and Studies

In developing the plan the project team has examined all aspects of the way in which the area contributes to the life of the City; the way people move around; the value of the buildings and spaces; the needs and aspirations of those who live and work within it and the opportunity and priorities for investment. From this analysis a vision emerges, with a considerable level of local support, which:

- Embraces significant new, modern development on some key sites.
- Delivers comprehensive regeneration, for a mix of uses, on the St Anne's Wharf Site as a priority.
- Supports and guides entrepreneurial activity which, although tentative and sluggish at present, is delivering incremental infill development and the restoration and refurbishment of historic buildings and tired and defunct office buildings.
- Seeks a broad land use strategy which concentrates commercial activity around the fringes of the City Centre and consolidates the residential community within the remainder, but also, crucially, protects and further embellishes the intricate mix of activities going within individual buildings and development blocks, particularly along the river and around King Street.
- Is sensitive to potential for conflict between different activities taking place in an intimate urban environment and seeks to mitigate potential disturbance.
- Works with, rather than against, the historic scale, grain and prevailing character of the area.
- Recognises potential to 'rebalance' the community with more family homes with gardens rather than apartments.
- Celebrates and protects the quirky, niche, creative and marginal activities, which add so much to the area and the community, but could so easily be squeezed out, if investment potential is exploited without appropriate checks and balances.
- Restores, enhance, reveals and exploits the very considerable environmental assets which the area offers, particularly the river.

## DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY SITES

In terms of the plan proposals there are **four key development opportunity sites**: The opportunities are significant in scale and are likely to be realised over a period of maybe 10 years or so.

- 1 St Anne's Wharf** – a major opportunity for residential led development providing a mix of town houses with gardens, apartments (around 94 dwellings in total), and small scale commercial and employment space (around 2000 square metres). Development proposals must reflect the scale and character of adjoining development, particularly on King Street, with new areas of public realm focused on the River Wensum. Significant archaeological remains beneath the site, limited Zone 1 and Zone 2 flood risk on part of the site and potential for some issues around ground conditions may require some modest attenuation measures to be incorporated into the scheme.
- 2 Mountergate West** – a mixed use opportunity providing a mix of apartments (around 70 dwellings) and commercial floorspace (6000 square metres) together with a new multi-storey parking facility of circa 600 spaces. Introduces a strong built form frontage to Mountergate and the Rose Lane junction, with opportunities for an enhanced, fine grain street pattern and the retention of the community gardens. A second option for a more intensive, commercial headquarters led development could accommodate a greater amount of commercial floorspace (15,000 square metres) also with a circa 600 space car park and around 50 apartments.
- 3 Garden Street** – a residential led development providing opportunities for predominantly town houses with gardens (around 70 dwellings) taking advantage of the topography of the site. Options for the location of a 2 form entry primary school (3000 square meters) on part of the site, subject to the requirements of Norfolk County Council, and a more limited number of townhouses ( 16 dwellings). Redevelopment is subject to the appropriate relocation and reprovision of existing car parking spaces elsewhere. Issues around ground conditions may require some attenuation measures to be incorporated into the scheme.
- 4 Land around Normandie Tower and Argyle Street** – a smaller residential scheme comprising development of land around Normandie Tower (around 12 dwellings) and the redevelopment of decommissioned properties on Argyle Street (around 12 dwellings). Potential to be explored for refurbishment of the exterior of Normandie Tower.

## PRIORITY PUBLIC REALM PROJECTS

In terms of the broad framework for environmental enhancement there are **six priority public realm projects**, some associated with built development proposals, some not. The public realm is defined as the streets, spaces and walkways that provide access for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicle uses; a setting for development and places for activity to take place.

- A St Anne's Wharf**: comprising Lady Julian Square giving access to the River Wensum and St Anne's Place providing a setting for development.
- B King Street**: rolling out enhancements along the remainder of the street.
- C Rouen Road**: enhancing pedestrian footways and crossings, and introducing tree planting together with formalised on-street parking arrangements in part designed as a traffic calming measure.
- D The Wooded Ridge**: introducing a coordinated approach to the use and management of the wooded ridge focused around zones for wildlife conservation, interpretation of the city walls, and informal recreation.
- E Wensum Corridor**: examining the potential for enhancing access to and appreciation of the river environment and setting.
- F Rose Lane and Ber Street**: providing enhancements particularly to the pedestrian environment to enhance the setting of frontage buildings and reduce the impact of severance across busy vehicular routes.

## STUDY AREAS

In the longer term it is hoped that affording priority to these projects will be a catalyst for further regeneration in areas where there is no immediate prospect for change, or where small scale opportunities, some of which are already taking shape, can contribute to broader objectives or sub-area master plans. Two such areas have been identified as part of the master plan proposals.

These comprise:

**Study Area 1: King Street Wensum Bank.** An extremely attractive and characterful area rich in history and supporting a varied mix of small businesses, venues, community and education activities (Wensum Lodge). Small scale interventions and management must protect and enhance this character.

**Study Area 2: Mountergate East.** A longer term opportunity that could support a mix of city centre uses and enhanced access to the river.



## Opportunity

The St Anne's Wharf site is the most prominent and significant opportunity site within the study area. Now largely vacant, with only the crumbling Howard House standing within its northern boundary, the site is a potent symbol of the impact of recession and the considerable ongoing challenge of breathing new life into previously developed sites.

The nature and character of the site and its immediate context make it a priority for investment. The site is visually prominent, adjoining one of the principal and historically important thoroughfares into the city and a key crossing point on the River. It has a river frontage and three key street frontages. Some of the oldest and most important buildings within the city lie within and in close proximity to the site and it is underlain by very significant archaeology. The heritage interest adds character and cachet to the address. The highly successful regeneration of the northern part of King Street and the renovation of Dragon Hall have brought new uses, new residents and new businesses into the immediate area, raising expectation and setting a quality benchmark for further revitalisation.

Within the local community there is a great deal of frustration that the regeneration of the south city area has faltered and there is intense pressure for change to bring new investment to this site and to restore Howard House. Many residents came forward with thoughts and in some cases well developed ideas about the future use of the St Anne's Wharf site – these have helped to shape the strategy presented here.

The existing planning consent reflects the very buoyant market conditions which prevailed at the time it was secured. The scheme provides for an intense pattern of mixed use development including a large number of apartments in buildings ranging up to more than 40 metres in height. The scheme was ambitious even at a time when values were peaking. In current market conditions and those which can be anticipated over the next several years, a scheme of the scale, mix and form previously proposed is simply not viable.

Failure to deliver the consented scheme has given many within the local community chance to reflect upon what would best serve the city and the south city area. Though appealing, in principle, there is little prospect of realising ambitions for non-commercial uses (a botanic garden, a park, an art gallery or a concert hall were all suggested). Commercial return for landowners and investors on a privately owned site, where there are very substantial costs and constraints associated with bringing it back into use, has to be a primary consideration.

A scheme driven by the need to maximise commercial return is also likely to fall short however. It is apparent that the future of the St Anne's Wharf site is about far more than just realising significant development potential. Bringing the site back into effective use is the key to unlocking many other aspirations for the area and signalling a new phase of sensitive revitalisation. The community expect the redevelopment of St Anne's to set the standard; reinforce and complement local character; help to deliver a more diverse residential offer and new business opportunities; create a new focus for the area; and provide amenity for local residents.

For all these reasons, it is vital that the pressure for change and the priority that must be afforded to bringing the site forward, do not lead to compromise: opportunity must not be squandered for a quick result to relieve the considerable and understandable frustration in the lack of progress over recent years. An approach needs to be found that balances commercial return, delivers wider benefits and helps initiate a wider cycle of investment and regeneration.



One of the Resident's Grand Designs!



The Site Today



**CABINET**

**5:30 pm to 7:05 pm**

**12 June 2013**

Present: Councillors Arthur (chair), Waters (vice chair), Bremner, Kendrick, Sands (M), Stonard

Also present: Councillors Stephenson and Wright

**1. APOLOGIES**

No apologies were received.

**2. PUBLIC QUESTIONS / PETITIONS**

One petition was received in relation to the proposed sale of parking land at Earlham Park. The petition was introduced by Sandi George and was worded as follows:

“We the undersigned, are tired of Norwich City Council selling off or giving to, the UEA for their various development projects, our land, without it would seem, any regard to the Citizens of Norwich. Earlham Hall and Park were given to the Citizens of Norwich by the Guerne Family so who gives the Council the right to sell it off and give our parking spaces to the UEA because there are insufficient parking space for their staff and workers within their plans? We need more parking spaces, not less. Do not deprive us of the opportunity to visit the Park which gives pleasure to all and allows us to relax in a natural environment. Enough is enough! It has to stop and it has to stop now!”

A response to the petition was given by Councillor Waters, deputy leader:

“A petition was received with in excess of 900 signatures against the transfer of the car park to the UEA. Following on from the receipt of the petition the council has also received a list of concerns that the organisers of the petition have. Whilst the report is below the line, because of the commercial nature of the transaction, we wish to assure the petitioners that members do have their list of their concerns and will take these into consideration when reaching a decision.

## **5. CONSTITUTION REVIEW – POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK**

Councillor Waters, deputy leader introduced the report.

**RESOLVED** to recommend that council:-

- (1) adopts the amendment to article 4 and revised appendix 2 of the constitution;
- (2) asks the head of law and governance to amend the council's constitution accordingly.

## **6. GREATER NORWICH CITY DEAL**

Councillor Arthur, leader of the council, introduced the report.

In response to a member's question, the leader said that any decisions would be taken by consensus, with full democratic accountability. She explained that the Local Enterprise Partnership is a conduit for resources and that the driving of policy will be done by Greater norwich authorities.

## **7. NORWICH ECONOMIC STRATEGY 2013 – 2018 CONSULTATION DRAFT**

Councillor Arthur, leader of the council, introduced the report.

**RESOLVED** to approve consultation on the draft economic strategy 2013 – 2018.

## **8. SOUTH CITY CENTRE VISION AND INVESTMENT PLAN**

Councillor Arthur, leader of the council, introduced the report.

In response to a member's question, the planning officer confirmed that there were no indications of structural problems with Normandie Tower. He said that the intended cladding will improve appearance, energy efficiency and lifespan of the building.

**RESOLVED** to:-

- (1) agree to publish the South City Centre Vision and Investment Plan; and,
- (2) agree to progress proposals for the Mountergate West areas follows:
  - a) phase 1- prepare a business case for a decked car park for further consideration by Cabinet
  - b) phase 2- work with the Homes and Communities Agency to bring forward detailed proposals for housing and commercial development on the remainder of the site.