

Scrutiny Review of The Strategic Direction of the Edgar Street Grid Project

**Report by the Community
Services Scrutiny Review
Group – January 2011**

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Members of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee agreed to conduct a Review of the Strategic Direction of the Edgar Street Grid project on 11th October 2010.
- 1.2 A scoping statement for the Scrutiny Review (Appendix 1), including the Terms of Reference were approved at the meeting on the on 11th October 2010. The key aim was to consider the future strategy of the Edgar Street Grid project as part of Hereford Futures Programme. It was agreed that the Review Group would comprise all Members of the Committee, and would be chaired by Councillor TM James, with Councillor KG Grumbley as Vice Chairman.
- 1.3 The Review took place on the afternoon 15th and the morning of 16th November 2010. This report summarises the findings concluding with recommendations to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.4 The Review Group would like to express its thanks to all internal and external officers and organisations who were interviewed at part of this review.

2 Next Steps

- 2.1 When approved by the Community Services Scrutiny Committee, this report will be presented to Cabinet for consideration.
- 2.2 The Community Services Scrutiny Committee would then expect Cabinet within two months of receipt of the report to consider the report and recommendations and respond to the Committee indicating what action the Cabinet propose to take, together with an action plan.

3 Method of Gathering Information

- 3.1 The Review took place on the afternoon 15th and the morning of 16th November 2010. The two half days, open to the public, included a presentation by and an interview of, the Chief Executive of Herefordshire Futures, representatives from Stanhope and the Sanctuary Group, the developers. This was followed by interviews of interested and related parties (Appendix 2), which enabled an exploration of the key issues concerning the scheme, as outlined in the Terms of Reference (Appendix 1). A subsequent informal meeting was held on 6th December for Members of the Scrutiny Committee to put forward recommendations.

4 Background

- 4.1 The ESG area is a 100 acre redevelopment site to the North of the existing Hereford City Centre. Bounded by Edgar Street to the West, the Cardiff to Shrewsbury railway line to the North, Commercial road to the East and Newmarket and Blueschool Streets to the South. A map of the ESG area is attached at Appendix 3.
- 4.2 ESG Herefordshire Ltd was a joint venture company set up, following Cabinet approval on 15th July 2004, by Herefordshire Council and Advantage West Midlands (AWM) to coordinate the redevelopment of the site. The Company's remit has now been replaced by Hereford Futures Ltd. Since its inception there has been close liaison between the Company, Herefordshire Council, and AWM.

- 4.3 The options for the development of the site as a whole were initially considered as part of the Unitary Development Plan process conducted by Herefordshire Council and expanded upon through a subsequent master planning exercise instigated by ESG.
- 4.4 The principal development sites consist of a Retail and Leisure development, located on the current livestock market site, and an Urban Village comprising of residential development sites, new canal basin, and realigned Widemarsh Brook. Additional development will occur within the New Area, a mixed use development site centred on Catherine Street, and the Transport Hub, a new interchange between the various forms of public transport within the city, located at the Railway Station.
- 4.5 In the course of the Review, a number of key themes emerged from discussions. These were:
- Consultation with the public regarding the ESG project
 - Linkages between the ESG site and City Centre
 - Phasing of construction of the Old Cattle Market and the Urban Village
 - Treatment of and effect on businesses within the ESG area.
 - The potential for traffic disruption in the City as a result of construction works
 - Pedestrian and vehicular access

5 Consultation

- 5.1 Proposals for the ESG area were included within the draft Unitary Development Plan, and subject to a statutory six week public consultation period October to December 2002. In 2003, the ESG Masterplan took the draft UDP proposals as a starting point. As well as consultation undertaken through a local advisory group, website, media and working with a local school, two specific consultation exercises were undertaken during 2003. Key themes emerging from this consultation were:
- Proposals should include additional car parking capacity
 - Not to worsen traffic congestion and support for proposals such as park and ride and a new outer relief road
 - Provision of new bus station close to railway station
 - Football Ground should be redeveloped at its current location
 - Support for new Library and Canal basin
 - Comments from landowners and businesses re their future investment decisions and the scope for relocation assistance
 - Proposed food retailing on the Livestock Market site should be well designed and incorporate car parking.
- 5.2 Proposals for the ESG area were then included within the revised draft of the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan, and published for six weeks statutory public consultation as before. A public inquiry into objections to both versions of the UDP was held from February to June 2005 and included consideration of objections to the Plan's ESG proposals. The UDP was adopted in its final form in March 2007.
- 5.3 The ESG Masterplan was produced between 2007 and 2008 and significant consultation was undertaken over this period with organisations, other stakeholders and members of the public. A consultation statement was produced and is available via the Hereford Futures Ltd website. In terms of responses from the general public, some 164 questionnaires were received, overall indicating 77% in favour of the Masterplan proposals. 83% agreed with the proposed expansion of the city centre, with 72% agreeing with the downgrading of Newmarket and Blueschool Streets to reduce the barrier between the historic city centre and the ESG area.

6 Linkages to the City Centre - pedestrian and vehicular access and Phasing of construction of the Old Cattle Market and the Urban Village

- 6.1 The Committee felt that it was very important that any new development should have strong links to the existing retail centre from the outset and that construction works should cause minimum disruption both to the city and traffic flow.
- 6.2 In the evidence they provided to the Committee, the representatives of Stanhope Plc recognised that linking the scheme with the existing city centre was a vital aspect of the project. In order to ensure that this would happen, improvements to the crossing on Newmarket Street would be included in the planning application, additional car parking would be provided, and highway works to improve the flow of traffic through the city in advance of the Edgar Street to Commercial Road Link Road and Cycleway. A new vehicular access from Blackfriars Street was proposed in order to intercept visitors by car before the majority reach the Edgar Street Roundabout or travel along Newmarket Street. Additionally it is proposed that the existing subway beneath the Street should be replaced with a new surface level pedestrian crossing providing a more direct route for pedestrians to walk to the public right of way adjacent to the Tesco Store and into Eign Street.
- 6.3 In order to cause minimum disruption to traffic flow, cars would be allowed to turn right up Widemarsh Street in order to access the Garrick Multi-storey Car Park and the Blackfriars Street site access junction, thereby voiding the need to travel along Newmarket Street. Allowing cars to turn right out of Wall Street when leaving the Tesco car park would also help to reduce pressure on the Edgar Street Roundabout.

Recommendation 1: Development of the Old Cattle Market Site and construction of the link road should be carefully phased in order to avoid major disruption to traffic flow in and through the city.

Recommendation 2: Provision of car parking to the east of the City should be considered.

7 Treatment of and effect on businesses

- 7.1 The Committee interviewed three businesses on the proposed route of the Edgar Street to Commercial Road Link Road.
- 7.2 The committee heard that the uncertainty of the development of the link road was deeply unsettling for the businesses making it impossible for them to make any coherent business decisions. Additionally, in their communication with council officers and Hereford Futures officials, businesses felt that they were getting mixed messages and would instead prefer a single point of contact.

Recommendation 3: That Hereford Futures Ltd and Herefordshire Council officers adopt a coherent, coordinated and open approach to the businesses on the Edgar Street Grid site.

8 Key Findings

- 8.1 The committee based its lines of enquiry around 13 key questions. On the documentary and witness evidence provided the committee agreed the following:
- 8.2 It is vital that the new development has strong links to the existing retail centre from the outset and construction works should cause minimum disruption both to the city and traffic flow.
- 8.3 That the ESG project is vital to delivering the county's ambitions for economic development. The committee had no doubt or reservation concerning the overall long term economic benefits provided there was minimum disruption to the city.

- 8.4 The current financial climate had resulted in a delay to the construction of the Link Road and Urban Village, whereas the Stanhope scheme has been reduced in size
- 8.5 Although regional development agency funding would no longer be an option Hereford Futures would be looking to source investment from new government initiatives such as Tax Increment Financing and Regional Growth Fund in order to finance developments.
- 8.6 That private business would play key role in the success of the overall delivery of the scheme.
- 8.7 The proposed outcomes are to create a vibrant city centre that offers a whole day experience for visitors and residents and to create a comprehensive solution for transportation and parking.
- 8.8 Alternative options for the site were considered during the UDP consultations but no viable alternatives for the site were identified.
- 8.9 The committee were content that sufficient public debate was given to the sites uses in the early years of planning the project
- 8.10 Throughout the review process a range of data was presented to the committee which demonstrated public support for the current ESG project thereby justifying its continuance.
- 8.11 Whilst there were no firm proposals early in the process of consultation, it was hoped that a contribution could be made towards partially funding a library building within the New Area. It is clear that this is no longer possible. The remaining elements of the redevelopment are proceeding: a multi screen cinema, department store, public realm areas, new homes, new livestock market, Higher Education centre, flood alleviation scheme and other infrastructure. Elements of the proposals, notably the Link Road, have been delayed but will still happen.
- 8.12 The committee were concerned that businesses had not been treated with consisted fairness and in a businesslike manner.
- 8.13 It is desirable for the link road to be a first priority and that it should be delivered on time preferably before the development of the old cattle market site

10. Summary of Recommendations

The Review Group recommended that:

- 1 Development of the Old Cattle Market Site and construction of the link road should be carefully phased in order to avoid major disruption to traffic flow in and through the city.**
- 2 Provision of car parking to the east of the City should be considered.**
- 3 That Hereford Futures Ltd and Herefordshire Council officers adopt a coherent, coordinated and open approach to the businesses on the Edgar Street Grid site.**
- 4 That regular Edgar Street Grid updates to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee should include financial information which provides details on how much has been spent on the project to date and by whom.**

REVIEW:	Review of the Future Strategy of the ESG Project	
Committee:	Community Services Scrutiny Committee	Chair: Cllr TM James
Lead support officers:	Penny Jones	

SCOPING

Terms of Reference
This review covers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The future strategy of the Edgar Street Grid project as part of Hereford Futures Programme.

Desired outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To create an understanding of current and long term strategy for the ESG project. To identify how the future strategy will be resourced and implemented. To understand how the future plans contribute to the wider regeneration of Hereford City and the county. To reflect on priorities in relation to the current financial climate.

Key questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the current and long term strategy of the ESG project? How does the project meet the economic development ambitions of the city and the wider county? How has the financial climate had an impact on a change of strategy? How will the strategy going forward be financed? What is the role of private business? What are the predicted outcomes and impacts? Are there any viable alternatives for the site? Was sufficient public debate given to site uses in the early years of planning this project? What precise data is available to demonstrate public support for the current ESG project in order to justify its continuance? How have the plans which promised large private investment for many facilities now changed? In other words, what are we not getting from what was originally promised during early consultation? Have the businesses currently located on the Edgar Street Grid been fairly and professionally treated? Can the Retail Quarter be developed in isolation of the link road given the effect this will have on the connectivity of the Quarter with Hereford's historic centre? How will access by vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian be facilitated to and between the old and new City centres?

Corporate Plan Priorities

Economic and Enterprise

Timetable	
<i>Activity</i>	<i>Suggested Timescale</i>
Pre-meeting with scrutiny members	Mid November 2010
2 review days with partners and stakeholders	Beginning December 2010
Discussion Session	End December 2010
Scrutiny Meeting – report presented	January / February 2011

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Interviewees

Commissioners and Developers

Hereford Futures Ltd	Jonathan Bretherton, Chief Executive Gerrard Williams, Development Director
Herefordshire Council	David Nicholson, Strategic Delivery Manager Mairead Lane, Construction Manager
Sanctuary Housing	Gareth Scannell, Senior Development Manager Andrew White, Head of Development, Midlands and North
Stanhope Plc	Gary Bourne, Development Director Alistair Shaw, Development Director

Stakeholders

Hereford City Council	Steven Kerry, Town Clerk.
Hereford Civic Society	Garry Thomas, Chairman
Rockfield DIY	Leon Wolverson, Chief Executive
Reprodux Printers	Alison Holmes, Chief Executive
ESG Business Association	Andrew Sanders, Chairman

A statement was received from Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce