

The New South Bank:

A Vision for Leeds City Centre South



Highlights

- The Leeds Sustainable Development Group (LSDG) is a network of interested parties who share the objective of creating a sustainable city and, in particular, a commitment to enabling such a community on the 'New South Bank'.
- The area between the River Aire and the M621 motorway is characterised by extensive vacant and underused sites which could accommodate significant housing development, offering families an opportunity to live close to the city centre.
- There is currently no comprehensive plan for this southern part of the City Centre, with the area falling within a number of separate policy statements – some parts, including those which would be affected by High Speed 2, do not have any adopted local planning policy.
- Building upon the Council's City Centre Park initiative, the Cycle Superhighway and NGT, the LSDG has facilitated the provision of a Free School and is progressing a new pedestrian/cycle route to two new colleges.
- The LSDG is seeking to encourage the adoption of a framework which will provide investors, landowners, developers and, most significantly, potential residents with a degree of certainty about the delivery of other essential community facilities – this will support the early development of significant family housing.
- Alongside a physical Vision, the LSDG seeks to develop an economic, social, environmental and cultural Vision, creating a unique opportunity to transform the city.
- A key is to build upon the positive elements now emerging and to ensure there is a proactive and holistic framework to deliver a shared Vision.

Introduction

The Leeds Sustainable Development Group (LSDG) is a network of academics, entrepreneurs, professionals and residents who share a commitment to Leeds and wish to work with Leeds City Council (LCC) to achieve the common objective of Leeds becoming the 'Best City in the UK by 2030'.

Since March 2010, the LSDG has been operating under the terms of a Charter which emphasises the promotion of truly sustainable development as part of the 'Best City' vision, learning from the many excellent 'Compact' and 'Smart' approach precedents used to regenerate regional cities such as Malmö and Freiburg.

The LSDG has focussed its activity on the southern part of Leeds City Centre between the River Aire and the motorways (see Map 1). Over the next 20 to 30 years, this area will see major regeneration and can be a site for exemplar sustainable development. There are many vacant or under-utilised sites and premises which represent a tremendous 'once in a generation' opportunity to create a truly sustainable city centre neighbourhood of family housing, employment and community facilities.

The Group has made representations on a number of LCC draft planning policies and statements, commented on key planning applications and reviewed significant investment projects such as High Speed 2 (HS2). It has developed informal partnerships with land-owners and occupiers in this part of the city. The LSDG has been instrumental in forming the Leeds Academy CIC, which is a partnership between the LSDG and The Gorse Academies Trust to deliver a new 1,500 pupil mainstream Free School in the area, and in facilitating the development of 'The Stray', a pedestrian/cycle route through the heart of the area.

In order to build upon these initiatives and help LCC deliver a new structure for this emerging district, the LSDG feels that there is an opportunity for all stakeholders to work together to create a visionary framework for the area. The purpose of this prospectus is to set out the rationale for delivering a culturally enriched sustainable community in the New South Bank and to explain the principal activities, some of which have already been progressed, in terms of Context, Location, Intent, Issues and Way Forward.

The 'New South Bank' between the River Aire and the M621 motorway offers special opportunities to create a medium-density, mixed-use extension to the city centre



Context

Through consultation with residents and the expertise of partner organisations, the Leeds Initiative has developed a city-wide Vision that will serve the needs and wants of the residents and businesses of Leeds.

The key aim for the period 2011 to 2030 is to be the 'Best City in the UK', meaning that:

- Leeds will be fair, open and welcoming
- Leeds' economy will be prosperous and sustainable
- all Leeds' communities will be successful.

Like other national and international cities, Leeds is faced with a number of key challenges. The city's population is projected to rise to around one million, its economy is still recovering from the effects of global recession and the consequences of a changing climate have become all too apparent. In addressing these challenges, Leeds must continue to be a forward-looking city and have a clear plan for the future.



With the Core Strategy setting a context for delivering this vision, there is a need to translate these city-wide policies and proposals to more local initiatives on lines envisaged in the Localism Act including:

- empowering communities to do things their way – by creating rights for people to get involved with, and direct the development of, their communities
- opening up government to public scrutiny – by releasing government information into the public domain, so that people can know how their money is spent, how it is used and to what effect
- strengthening accountability to local people – by giving every citizen the power to change the services provided to them through participation, choice or the ballot box.

A true commitment to a public private partnership would extend the City Vision to individual areas by identifying projects needed and then getting passionately behind them. That means boldness, and also humility, because it is impossible to see round every corner and not everything planned will be right.

A framework for the whole of the New South Bank would be a focus for a public-private partnership charged with delivering visionary change in the city, creating an exemplar neighbourhood showcasing best practice in terms of urban regeneration.

“A vision is neither a ‘blue print’ nor a kind of ‘mould’ that will be applied to ... (an area. There is no) ... direct instrument in the planning system that might translate the vision into actions. On the contrary, it is a continuous process which has periods of higher and lower activity, using the various existing planning instruments at municipal or regional level”.

From a paper by P Ache on Helsinki

Location

Map 1 shows an initial view as to the extent of the New South Bank area. The boundary is not 'cast in stone' and should in any event be permeable. The geographical extent of the Vision document will be tested as part of any exploration of issues, before being agreed with adjacent communities.

The area developed over the years as the base for the Leeds manufacturing and engineering economy and much of that still remains, particularly south of Hunslet Road. Along the waterfront, new residential and leisure buildings has been constructed over

the last 30 years and there are pockets of recent apartment and employment development elsewhere.

However, this area now has some 210 acres (85 hectares) of vacant or under-utilised sites and premises, all of which represents a significant opportunity for the city. This is also an area of transition between the opportunity represented by Leeds city centre north of the River Aire and the deprived communities of Holbeck, Beeston Hill and Hunslet outside the defined City Centre.

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Map 1: The New South Bank

To the north of the river, Leeds City Centre is divided into various key areas including the Prime Retail Quarter, the Civic Quarter (Civic Hall, Leeds General Infirmary & Universities), the Prime Office Quarter (Wellington Place and Park Place) and the Leisure Quarters (The Calls, Greek Street and the Arena).

These 'Quarters' all have clearly defined roles which, in the current recessionary environment, consolidate a very large proportion of the private investment into these areas. The New South Bank initiative would bring a fresh impetus and rationale to that part of Leeds city centre immediately south of the river.

The Council recognises this and the area is subject to various town planning policies including:

- Leeds City Centre (UDP boundary)
- Holbeck Urban Village
- Aire Valley Leeds Area Action Plan
- Leeds South Bank Planning Statement.

As can be seen from Map 2 some of these policy areas overlap but in a large proportion of the New South Bank area, there is no policy coverage. There is an opportunity to create an updated, more focused and comprehensive long term framework for the whole area while conforming to this planning policy background.

There is a marked contrast between the established City Centre and Holbeck, Beeston Hill and Hunslet. A more comprehensive framework would engage with these communities, aiming to 'bridge the gap' in terms of physical and psychological barriers between them and opportunities in the City Centre.

The Emerging City Centre Transport Strategy within the Core Strategy will also have implications for the area, with the City Centre Loop potentially diverted through the New South Bank. The strategy introduces the principle of closed transport 'cells' south of Hunslet Road which would mean this wide highway would lose much of its function and could be narrowed down.



Map 2: LCC Regeneration Policy Areas

Finally, the HS2 terminal is to be located in this part of the City Centre (see Map 3). This is a long term project and construction of the northern section of the line (between Birmingham and Leeds) is not due to start until the mid-2020s for completion by 2033. In the interim, this has significant potential to blight large parts of the New South Bank and measures are needed now to help mitigate its effect by identifying 'meanwhile uses' and planning for its delivery.

Intent

“Success cannot be delivered by planning in detail all elements of the change at the outset. Rather, it can be delivered by setting out a clear and agreed vision, and then underpinning this with a roadmap that does not over-plan but that provides a framework for an organic, inclusive process of change to deliver the vision over time for city stakeholders”.

BSI PAS 181 DPC draft: August 2013: *Smart city framework – Guidance for decision-makers in smart cities and communities.*

The area has a very clear identity as part of the defined city centre, bounded by the river to the north, the motorway and ring road to the south and east, and the railway to the west. It retains much of the industrial development which has characterised the area for many years but recently these uses have begun to fragment, with the loss of key ‘heavy’ industries from core sites (Yorkshire Chemicals and Carlsberg Tetley’s Brewery in particular). As a result, the area has been opened up as a prime opportunity for new types of development. But there needs to be a reason to go south of the river.

The proposed City Park has the potential to ‘make a new market’ through stimulating a new series of developments. However, given the potential scale of the development opportunity in the southern part of the City Centre, it is also essential to work ‘with the market’, i.e. to build upon and link to the existing assets which generate footfall and therefore commercial value. In this respect, The South Bank has the benefit of some key ‘attractors’ which should be embraced, including Crown Point Retail Park, many historic buildings, New Dock, Royal Armouries and the waterfront itself.

Crown Point is a thriving 1980s shopping centre which was designed around the car as an ‘out of town’ complex. There is now an opportunity to bring this ‘into the city centre’, extending its role to serve local residents and businesses, complementing the prime retail quarter to the north. The retail park is the same distance south of the river as Harvey Nichols is north but few people consider walking to Crown Point.

Linking the City Park to Hunslet Road and ‘reclaiming’ the excess highway for pedestrians would integrate the retail park into the fabric of the city and provide a focus for community facilities.

The area has played an important role in the history of the city, with the medieval access routes for cloth from the south converging on Leeds Bridge at Bridge End. Holbeck was the cradle of the industrial revolution in Leeds in the late 18th century and Hunslet was the home of its success as a centre of engineering in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Heritage assets in the area include Temple Works in Holbeck Urban Village, Braimes Engineering works, Alf Cooke's Printworks on Hunslet Lane (revitalised as Leeds City College), Salem Chapel (an internet hub) and Tetley’s headquarters building (The Tetley Centre for Contemporary Art and Learning). These buildings have the potential to be key drivers for footfall and commercial activity.

Although the Royal Armouries is a national museum of international repute, it has remained isolated on the edge of the city centre. The owners of New Dock have aspirations to transform the area into a sustainable community which injects much needed spirit and vibrancy into this important part of Leeds. Such plans would be considerably enhanced by integrating the dock and waterfront with a developing residential neighbourhood.

Although now primarily a commercial community, over the years the New South Bank has the potential to change its character and gradually become a mixed residential, business and culture area.

Cultural activity in the broadest sense should be placed at the heart of the New South Bank. The value of culture in enriching human life is widely acknowledged: participation in cultural activity contributes to individuals' general well-being, can improve mental health, impacts positively on educational attainment in young people and plays a vital role in social cohesion. Models of culture-led regeneration and the repurposing of heritage assets for cultural use are well-known and the Vision should look to identify exemplars in this sector and learn from them.

The aim should be to create a Cultural Forum on the New South Bank which, at present, could include The Tetley, Brewery Wharf, New Dock, Royal Armouries, Leeds City College at the Printworks, Leeds College of Building and the Gorse Academy.

Partners would work towards an overarching cultural policy or strategy for the New South Bank which dovetails with aims and ambitions expressed by LCC, Arts Council England and other key stakeholders. The strategy should place principles of inclusivity at its heart and have the ambition to widen participation in culture among existing and new communities in the neighbourhood, particularly those where existing provision, and therefore the level of engagement, is low.

To summarise, what is the current context and what are the available opportunities and mechanisms that can help create the New South Bank vision?

- **Localism** – the current Coalition government has created the statutory framework and sought to devolve powers to local communities through the Localism Act.
- **Resources** – where LCC is being forced to cut its budget, community-based planning presents an opportunity for the Authority to harness local enthusiasm and expertise to help plan for, attract and deliver new investment.
- **Opportunity** – as set out above, there is considerable opportunity in terms of the quantum of vacant and underutilised land for development and it is important that this development (whenever it comes forward) is coordinated and well planned.
- **Focus** – by engaging with land-owners, investors and developers, the LSDG aims to create a focus/rationale for the New South Bank – other areas have a defined role but that for this part of the City Centre still needs to be determined (e.g. one role may be to provide family housing in a mixed use and sustainable environment).
- **Flexibility** – the intention is not to “master-plan” the city or pigeon hole particular sites or land-ownerships into particular uses but proposals need to be debated within an overall sense of how development could be coordinated – this will help avoid piece-meal interventions and missed opportunities, while enabling management of CIL funds more effectively to benefit both land-owners and the wider community.
- **Delivery** – notwithstanding the current economic circumstances, by acting in consort with land-owners and developers, development can be delivered faster than would otherwise be the case – examples include LSDG’s initiatives to help kick-start the City Park by promoting The Stray and obtaining finance for an Academy to act as a catalyst for family housing.

The New South Bank has the potential to take significant housing pressures from the suburbs, creating a new sustainable community on ‘brownfield’ land.

Issues

... 'infrastructure' should form a coherent whole and ... the development pressures of the day should not compromise future options.

An important element for the delivery of the New South Bank Vision would be the creation of a long-term 'infrastructure framework' from which individual land-owners and developers can respond to the market as it changes over time. If the framework has longevity, it will give investors confidence that there is a coherent plan for the area.

A prescriptive land use 'master-plan' will quickly date as the property market changes so consideration should be given to the following more generic issues:

- the creation of a movement pattern and spatial structure which prioritises pedestrian and cycle routes, controls local vehicular use and limits through traffic
- the encouragement of family housing over a larger area which will create the critical mass needed to deliver a sustainable community

- planning of new schools, health, cultural, community and convenience retail facilities which will be required to achieve a truly sustainable development
- the introduction from the outset of environmentally-advanced methods of addressing issues such as energy production and waste recycling/disposal.

The important point is that the 'infrastructure' should form a coherent whole and that the development pressures of the day should not compromise future options. Within any significant 'development plots' identified in the framework, fine grain, phased schemes are to be encouraged. However, it is important to prevent this fine grain becoming 'piecemeal'.

The concept of sustainability which is at the core of the LSDG Charter cuts across wide social, economic and environmental themes. While these themes will be given equal weight, to ensure the framework is manageable, deliverable and focussed it is proposed to concentrate on three key areas.

Accordia, Cambridgeshire



Infrastructure Framework

The infrastructure framework is intended to promote development in a co-ordinated manner across the short, medium and long term, ensuring that short term development

decisions do not impact on the long term deliverability of other projects.

The framework would need to address both social and economic infrastructure:

Social infrastructure

- schools
- healthcare
- community facilities / places of worship
- cultural and leisure activities
- local shopping
- park and green space
- environmental improvements.

Economic infrastructure

- traffic and highways
- flood risk / mitigation
- utilities
- waste
- broadband and telecoms

The New South Bank will be inextricably linked into the well-established city centre and it cannot be planned either in isolation from, or prior to, a detailed and holistic analysis of the options available for amending, extending or rationalising all relevant infrastructure elements.

A significant feature is the existing highway network – there is a need to establish a sustainable hierarchy of routes to prioritise pedestrians and cycle users while accommodating city centre local traffic on a macro/micro scale and ensuring appropriate routes for through traffic.

At present, the roads south of the river are an ‘extension of the motorway’ and serve to take traffic between the M621 and the established city centre (north of the river) as quickly as possible. It is important that traffic on Hunslet Road, Meadow Lane and Crown Point Road is reduced. Linked to investment in additional motorway and rail footbridges, this can help remove the barrier effect between the existing city centre and areas to the south such as Hunslet, Beeston Hill and Holbeck.

In future, when energy is even more expensive and resource constraints are more evident, there will be greater demand for people to live, work and carry out all aspects of daily life within a narrower geographical range. Walking and cycling will be identified as the main means of moving around day to day, so urban form and functions will need to be adapted now to enable more people to live in this way. The Canal Towpath, the Leeds-Bradford Cycle Superhighway, existing cycle routes to Middleton and an extended Stray would tie New South Bank into a sustainable travel network.

The strength of a holistic ‘infrastructure plan’ is to widen the scope of thinking to, for example, localise production and change patterns of consumption by reserving suitable sites for energy generation, water management, waste treatment, food production and local repair, reuse and recycling of materials and goods. These functions may, of course, be integrated into new or altered built structures with other main purposes.

"The potential for a lively city is strengthened when more people are invited to walk, bike and stay in city space. ... After almost 50 years of neglect of the human dimension, here at the beginning of the 21st century we have an urgent need and growing willingness to once again create cities for people"
Jan Gehl "Cities for People" 2010

A 2008 survey by a USA real estate company found that 77% of young adults report wanting to live in an urban core, not in the suburbs where they grew up. They want to be close to each other, to services, to places to meet, and to work, and they would rather walk than drive. They say they are willing to live in a smaller space in order to be able to afford this lifestyle.

Family Housing

The Leeds Core Strategy identifies the need to deliver more housing, requiring that some 70,000 (net) new dwellings are developed between 2012 and 2028 to meet the housing demands and job growth aspirations of the City. At present, it is envisaged that much of this development would take place on the fringes of the city, with all the implications this has for the protection of our green-space, long term commuting, support service viability and the like. The Core Strategy states that *'one of the biggest challenges Leeds faces is to provide enough quality and accessible homes to meet the city's growing population, whilst protecting the quality of the environment and respecting community identity.'*

At present, much of the new housing is to be developed on the suburban fringes of the urban area, expanding existing settlements such as Guiseley and Garforth. Such decentralisation will inevitably increase pressure on congested transport corridors.

The New South Bank area would go a long way to providing these homes. Of the 70,000 new units identified, the spatial policy requires that 10,200 (15.5%) are developed in the City Centre and a further 10,000 (15%) are in the Inner Area which surrounds the City Centre.



Sustainable family housing, Freiburg

The Council has a number of regeneration policy areas which are a focus for investment and development including:

- Holbeck Urban Village: the wider HUV area has the potential for circa 3,800 homes
- the New South Bank is partly within the Aire Valley Urban Eco-Settlement which will comprise some 6,500 to 9,000 new homes
- the Beeston Hill and Holbeck Private Finance Initiative will result in refurbishment of circa 1,245 existing Council homes and the construction of 390 new Council homes.

The New South Bank has capacity for approximately 12,000 residential units (including 8,000 family homes), depending on density assumptions.

The return to city centre living which accompanied the last economic boom was hailed as a urban renaissance but led to a mono-culture of primarily young, single professionals. A sustainable community needs a mixed population which includes all ages.

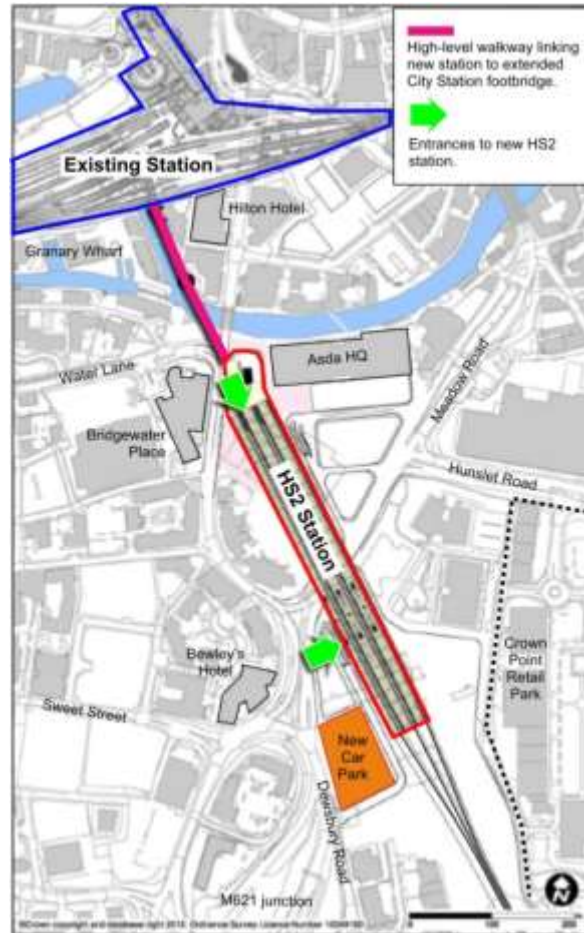
However, family housing will not be developed to the required quality if appropriate social and economic infrastructure is not delivered. Families will not stay in the City Centre or relocate back into the City Centre if there are no 'Outstanding' schools, parks or community support facilities. Some 1,300 primary and 900 secondary school places would be required to serve just the housing units identified above.

High Speed Two

Map 3 shows the Government's preferred location for the HS2 station in Leeds City Centre, at the heart of the New South Bank area. It is absolutely right that HS2 passengers have direct access to the existing mainline station for onward travel. However, as the Phase 2 scheme between Birmingham and Leeds is not due to be completed until 2033, doing nothing in the short term provides the potential for significant blight in the interim.

The alternative is to seize this opportunity to plan for the arrival of HS2 as part of the future fabric of the city. There is no reason for development to stop until HS2 is completed and the preparation of an infrastructure framework will act as a vehicle for debate and discussion about the short, medium and long term impacts of HS2.

The intention would be to use the framework to guide 'meanwhile' uses and permanent schemes such that as HS2 becomes more certain, the developments can respond accordingly.



Map 3: Location of Leeds HS2 Station

The Stray: today and tomorrow



Way Forward

The New South Bank could be the focus for a City of Culture bid, building on the precedent of London's South Bank to deliver a mixed use neighbourhood of international standing

The LSDG already comprises a wide cross-representation of people who live, work or do business in the city. Although focussed on a single area, the preparation of an infrastructure framework that accommodates a vision for the creation of the New South Bank is a natural evolution for the LSDG, allowing it to test the delivery of its wider objectives

In order to establish an 'inclusive' framework, it would be valuable to have representation from a wide range of stakeholders:

residents	community organisations
business owners	land-owners
developers	professional organisations
contractors	local Councillors

The LSDG comprises all of the above people (with the current exception of local Councillors).

It has already held a number of public meetings and invitation-only land-owner/investor meetings. The intention is to build on these contacts and engagements to ensure that, through use of public meetings and electronic communications, enthusiastic participants can deliver a framework with a strong mandate from the wider community.



Sustainable family housing, Freiburg



The LSDG envisages undertaking the following steps in order to establish early engagement and agreement.

This prospectus is part of this process:

- contributing to LCC policy and strategy initiatives within the area
- building relationships with land-owners, investors and local businesses
- approaching local interest groups, the resident & working community, City & Hunslet and Holbeck & Beeston Ward Councillors
- developing a SWOT analysis to determine issues to be considered
- finalising the scope of the framework
- clearly defining the Vision for wider communication to all stakeholders.

Leeds Sustainable Development Group
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