

# LEEDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GROUP

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17 March 2011

Planning Services (Central Area Team),  
Leeds City Council  
Leonardo Building  
2 Rossington Street  
Leeds  
LS2 8HD

Dear Sirs

## **SOVEREIGN STREET: DRAFT PLANNING STATEMENT: FEBRUARY 2011 REPRESENTATIONS BY THE LEEDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GROUP**

The following representations have been prepared by the Leeds Sustainable Development Group (LSDG), a network of individuals who share a commitment to the future of Leeds. The LSDG aims to contribute to Leeds' wide-ranging debate about the 'vision' and to investigate new approaches to create truly sustainable forms of development for the city. We recently held an open meeting that stimulated interesting debate about the Sovereign Street area and its relationship with the City Centre South. The meeting was well attended with a cross section of interested people, including some of your colleagues from Planning Services.

### **Sovereign Street Draft Planning Statement - What we welcome**

We welcome the Council's document which is a positive and clear development brief for the site, providing for the consideration of new connections to the South of Leeds city centre, as well as the provision of high quality public open space within the city centre. In particular, we welcome and support the following:

1. the opportunity provided for the creation of a lively, pedestrian oriented public space at the heart of the City Centre, as defined by the Unitary Development Plan, with a real mix of complementary building uses, forming part of a hierarchy of public realm weaving through the urban form, not only enhancing the environment but also establishing a viable community with all the associated opportunities to facilitate new cultural activities
2. the commitment to significant connections using the public realm and a pedestrian bridge to the South Bank strengthening the development of the Riverside Area (Proposal Area 21) providing a catalyst for further development south of the river, improving connectivity through and beyond the site and also bridging the gap physically and socially between the North and South of Leeds

The LSDG fully supports and appreciates the opportunity to engage with LCC in respect of the proposals for Sovereign Street. There is a huge opportunity for Leeds to make a clear choice to take sustainable development seriously and to make a radical change in the way we now plan the whole of our city centre for the future.

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It is our view that the Sovereign Street Draft Planning Statement (DPS) should be considered in close relation to and at the same time as the South Bank DPS and that both should form part of a more holistic consideration of the sustainable development of the City Centre South as defined by the city centre boundary in the Unitary Development Plan (UDP).

### **The opportunity to provide a significant public open space**

Currently the Sovereign Street site is a valuable piece of real estate from which we understand the Council takes circa £750,000 per annum in temporary car parking income.. However, the site's location, immediately adjacent to the train station provides an opportunity for a significant contribution to be made to the existing public realm in the context of new mixed use, new buildings. We recognise that in these times of severe budget cuts the Council will have to make a value judgement about public realm (park and bridge) set against capital receipt(s).

The public space should create opportunities for cultural attractions and public art exhibitions as well as enhancing the quality of the urban environment for the potential increase in residents within the City Centre. As this space will be both a 'local' facility and a significant part of a hierarchy of open spaces providing links both North to South and East to West, the brief for this space will need to be very carefully considered. As this space will be a 'through route', the creation of links to the North, through the arches to City Square are vital. We are not entirely convinced that the open space does need to be primarily 'green' although this should be a part of it. There are inherent difficulties in dedicating the space as a sitting out/picnic area given the close proximity of the proposed relatively high buildings surrounding the space.

In regard to the delivery of the public open space we do not agree wholeheartedly with the approach proposed in paragraph 4.1 with reference to 'S106 contributions'. Fundamentally, the Council owns the site and can directly control the development that takes place i.e. there is no need for S106 contributions. We would advocate a 'development agreement' approach whereby the preferred developer is contractually bound to deliver the park. This approach gives the Council much greater 'control' over the phasing and delivery of the park i.e. via the development agreement – rather than the S106 cash contribution potentially 'disappearing' into a public realm 'pot'.

Will the setting out of the 'park' be held up until all three developments are built? This may infer a lengthy wait before the 'catalyst' for development of the City Centre South is completed, thus diminishing its role somewhat. We suggest that there should be a clear requirement for the first building to be developed to fund the provision of the public open space so that there would be no need to divide the space into three parcels.

Furthermore, there should be an 'off-site' S106 contribution from each plot towards the cost of the pedestrian bridge over the river. We understand the cost of the public realm attributable to each building and the S106 for the bridge will have to come off the residual land value for the site (something which the Council will have to agree with its Finance team vis-à-vis the loss of car park revenue).

### **The provision of a pedestrian bridge, as part of the development of the public realm around Sovereign Street, is a catalyst for opening up the whole of the City Centre South**

The provision of a pedestrian bridge as part of the public open space at Sovereign Street will act as a significant catalyst for the development of the whole of the City Centre South area, including Leeds South Bank, as defined in the LCC's DPS, dated July 2010 (see LSDG letter providing representations, dated 4<sup>th</sup> October 2010). The bridge is a vital part of the network of connections to the South Bank park and for the future development of the remainder of the City Centre South area (as defined by LSDG) and there should therefore be a commitment to its funding as part of this development

We envisage the development of Sovereign Street being a starting point for realising the vision for the South of Leeds. For this catalyst to deliver its full potential, the vision for the Sovereign Street site as

well as for the wider City Centre South area need to be made clear. The LSDG open meetings and discussions with residents and workers of Leeds show that proactive communication between the council/developers and the community are limited and often convey a multiplicity of messages (visit 'Meetings' on [www.leeds-sdg.com](http://www.leeds-sdg.com) for notes of key points made at the open meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011). To engage the 'users' of the city with the exciting and unique potential of the City Centre South area there is a need to convey a clear, united vision that can really capture imaginations. A promotion of the potential vision for this part of Leeds could form part of the initial development at Sovereign Street, in the form of public exhibitions on the site prior to and during the development.

An example of a successful project with strong similarities to the Sovereign Street proposals is the Centenary pedestrian bridge now connecting The Calls to Brewery Wharf and other developments beyond. At the time of construction, this bridge was coined as "the bridge to nowhere", however its contribution to the main objective was realised by way of the successful development of the immediate area on the south bank (Brewery Wharf). The contribution of Centenary Bridge is directly comparable to that of the proposed bridge connecting Sovereign Street to the Meadow Lane area and as such provides a successful precedent illustrating the highly productive potential of what are relatively minor developments.

The LSDG open meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011 highlighted a consensus that a new pedestrian bridge across the river is more important than a relatively small park on the Sovereign Street site (compared with that proposed within the South Bank). As such, can the implementation of a new bridge into the site begin "tomorrow" acting as a catalyst for the Sovereign Street development and allowing us to take a step forward without having to wait for developers for the site to come forward?

### **The 'bigger' opportunity – not to be missed**

The area that should be considered in preparing a sustainable plan for a new development at Sovereign Street extends significantly further than the area currently offered for consultation. The stated visions in Section 3 of the Sovereign Street DPS and Section 3 of the DPS for the South Bank should form part of, or be derived from, a wider vision for the whole of the Leeds City Centre South (see LSDG plan) which in turn should be part of a shared vision for the whole of the city centre. The Planning Statement misses an opportunity to fully address the wider issues which need to be resolved if the provision of a bridge and the resultant development of the South Bank is to be developed in a truly sustainable way – namely:

- Commercial drivers – the reason to provide a pedestrian bridge to the South of the river
- Highways – reducing car dependence and the impact of road traffic in the city

These themes are described in more detail below.

### **Commercial drivers – there needs to be a reason to go south of the river**

The proposed City Park in the South Bank DPS has the potential to 'make a new market' in terms of perimeter development. However, given the potential scale of the South Bank development opportunity, it is also essential to work 'with the market' i.e. to build-on and link the existing assets on the South Bank which generate footfall and therefore commercial value. In this respect the South Bank has the benefit of some key attributes in the immediate vicinity which should be embraced including the Crown Point retail park, the Royal Armouries and the waterfront itself.

Crown Point Retail Park is a thriving shopping complex which was designed around the car in the 1980s as an 'out of town centre'. There is an opportunity to integrate this into the city centre by not only providing a direct bridge across the river but also by bringing the park down to Hunslet Road and 'reclaiming' the highway for pedestrians. The retail park is the same distance south of the river as Harvey Nichols is north but few people consider walking to Crown Point. Providing retail opportunities complementary to the traditional retail core, Crown Point could also, in due course, deliver the local

shopping needs of the many residents who will occupy the surrounding housing schemes and local workers. Parking could be reconfigured around the back of the shop units and green space introduced into the existing square.

A phased approach to the provision of the infrastructure required to facilitate the new residential and employment development opportunities in the wider areas immediately to the South of the proposed bridge link should be established, starting with the links to the existing city centre.

### **Highways – reducing the impact of road traffic in the city**

The Sovereign Street area is inextricably linked to the well established city centre infrastructure 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 the relevant parts of the infrastructure.

A significant element is the existing road network and the need to establish a sustainable hierarchy of roads to accommodate both through and local traffic throughout the city centre on both a macro and micro scale. The proximity of the existing loop road to Sovereign Street highlights the need to consider alternative routes that will remove the current barrier the loop road presents to the movement of pedestrians in this area.

At the same time as considering the provision of a pedestrian bridge linking the Sovereign Street area to the Meadow Lane area, it is important that the reduction of traffic on Hunslet Road and Meadow Lane is considered. This will reduce the barrier between the existing city centre and all other areas to the South caused by the very extensive roadspace and surface car parking immediately to the South of the river.

This could be facilitated by re-signing the A61 around the John Smeaton Viaduct. However, a long term highways solutions needs to be considered which will divert all through traffic from both the South Bank area and the established city centre providing potential for enhanced pedestrian links between the key commercial drivers and focal points mentioned above.

The completion of an effective, continuous inner ring road and the re-routing of the loop road are two significant components needed to establish an infrastructure in the city centre south area that will reduce the impact of the car while enhancing safe walking and cycling routes. This requires the Planning Statement to contemplate improvements to key infrastructure such as Armley Gyratory. This wider thinking *could* result in other 'wins' for the city including removing the private car from City Square - leaving this space for buses and taxis only.

### **Conclusion**

Leeds has a once in a lifetime opportunity to establish a framework to achieve its Leeds Initiative objectives. It is great to have the opportunity for debate, but let's use the opportunity to create a framework which will enable the delivery of not just some new buildings and a public space, but all the elements of a truly sustainable development in both the Sovereign Street area and the South Bank area, in the context of the need to deliver a framework for the delivery of sustainable development for the whole of Leeds City Centre South.

The "next steps" to making Leeds city centre truly sustainable must be based on a clear commitment to a shared vision for sustainable development. This will require that all contributory elements are included in the vision. Only by establishing a shared vision of how we want to live in our city in the future can we effectively establish a framework that the Sovereign Street and South Bank Planning Statements seek to provide.

We have deliberately extended our response so that it is more than a comment on just the Sovereign Street Draft Planning Statement, in the hope that our contribution will lead to the consideration of the

*Central Area Team  
Planning Services*

relationship of this site to the wider area of the city centre south and its connections to the potential development areas beyond.

We also continue to hope that we can promote an enhanced way of working in partnership with Leeds City Council, so that we can develop ideas by way of co-operative and constructive dialogue in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DL', with a stylized flourish at the end.

DAVID LUMB  
On behalf of Leeds Sustainable Development Group

cc Martin Farrington : Acting Director City Development