

Sheffield City Centre: shaping the future

A discussion paper

Sheffield Executive Board (SEB) discussed the future of Sheffield City Centre at its March 2013 meeting. The Board agreed that the last decade had seen significant improvements throughout the city centre but that there was still much work to be done. It was felt that we need to work together on the development of a bold and ambitious vision for the future that reflects changing trends and takes advantage of new opportunities. Despite the challenging economic environment the SEB is certain that there is significant scope to define and shape the future for our city centre.

This paper is both a response to the emerging city centre master plan refresh, and a reflection of the issues discussed at Sheffield Executive Board. We encourage you to contribute to the discussion and welcome your views and ideas on how we can all help to shape a strong and distinctive vision for Sheffield.

1. A multi-functional centre

Sheffield city centre has many functions. It is a place to learn, work, live, relax and shop. Yet we know that many people who live in or close to the city only use the city centre on rare occasions. It is important that we ensure that these multiple functions can attract all generations and the widest possible range of communities and end users. The city can develop all these elements, offering high quality opportunities and experiences for people who work, live and visit the city.



Key questions and challenges

How can we further diversify the uses of the city centre? How can we make the city centre more attractive to those that use it only rarely? How can we make the most of complementary functions so that the city centre offers a distinctive and entirely different experience from Meadowhall or other northern cities such as Manchester or Leeds?

2. A distinctive identity

Our city centre should reflect what makes Sheffield distinctive from other cities. The landscape, heritage, architecture and cultural infrastructure, including festivals, are key components as is the widely acclaimed public realm design and green spaces, which are well used by local people. With the new market due to open in 2013 and an emerging range of creative and independent shops there should be further scope to strengthen a strongly differentiated experience.

Key questions and challenges

Is there more we can do to enhance the distinctiveness and unique qualities of Sheffield city centre? What are the functions that help make Sheffield different to any other city? Should we compete head-to-head with other UK cities that have larger or more prestigious stores? If the city centre is about more than shopping, how can we encourage more people to see the centre in a new light?

3. The new retail experience

With on-line shopping increasing every year and expected to reach 30% of all retail sales within 3-5 years, city centres and high streets will need to adapt to this fundamental change in the way people buy goods. It is widely recognised that shopping will need to be more directly linked to on-line purchasing and provide a richer experience for those choosing to visit high street shops. Many commentators predict that shopping will need to be more closely linked to leisure, cultural and more rounded experiences and that our city centres will need to adapt to this if they are to continue to be attractive to end-users.

Whilst this is a threat to the status quo, it is also an opportunity to develop a new type of retail experience, working with online and retail companies to showcase and experience their products. It may also offer more opportunities for independent and new retail businesses, operating on a local or regional level. Sheffield can plan for future trends and work with local, regional and national retailers to combine online shopping with an exciting and vibrant day out experience, offering leisure, retail and cultural (including sports) packages as a distinctive product mix.



Key questions and challenges

Do we need more independent (local and regional) retail businesses in the city centre or should we focus on larger national chains and prestige brand names? What types of collaboration between relevant sectors might help Sheffield compete to offer a more distinctive package? How can the city centre and Meadowhall collaborate more to take advantage of each other's strengths and pulling power?

4. City centre and technology

With smart phones and tablets now widely (but by no means exclusively) used, the technologies deployed by consumers, visitors and citizens have changed radically in the last 10 years. In many parts of the world, city centres are introducing applications and technologies which reflect the way people use mobile computing as an integral part of their city experience. Equally, access to digital resources and to the learning potential of the internet remains a key issue for equality of opportunity and access to the best resources for all of Sheffield's communities. With bus, train and tram services providing real time information, there is scope for new initiatives in other areas of the city centre.

Key questions and challenges

What other initiatives could be developed to better harness the power of new technologies in Sheffield city centre? What outstanding examples are you aware of from other parts of the world? How can new technologies contribute to improving the visitor experience (whether student, business, tourist or South Yorkshire day tripper)?

5. City centre workplaces

While sub-regionally the city is the leading commercial centre and is home to some significant public sector and commercial businesses, Sheffield has considerably less (in employment terms) than in cities of a comparative size across the UK. Sheffield Executive Board identified that there needs to be some consideration as to how the city positions itself to attract new businesses as well as supporting the growth of high performing indigenous companies.



The city needs greater diversification and more core business district offices, yet enquiries for areas of more than 1000 sq metres are far lower than in previous decades. With the way people work also changing, Sheffield needs to develop a strategy that is sufficiently focused to differentiate itself from Nottingham, Leeds and Manchester, but sufficiently flexible to adjust to an economic context which has a far higher proportion of small businesses.

Key questions and challenges

What are the specialist sectors that Sheffield can develop and attract which offer a niche or distinctive specialism in comparison to other UK cities? What are the factors that will make the city more attractive to a wider range of small businesses? How can we do more to help attract businesses that employ 50 people or more in the city centre? What do current occupiers think of Sheffield's offer and how could it be strengthened?

6. A city centre for all

A vibrant city centre is one which is attractive to all, a place which is accessible for young people, older people, families and friends. This means continuing to offer a wide range of experiences that are affordable and of interest to all those communities. It is also about ensuring that the city centre remains friendly, safe and welcoming to everyone. The city centre needs to be easily accessible from all parts of the city region with high quality and affordable public transport, safe and attractive routes to encourage more walking and cycling and affordable and good quality car parking.

The city centre should also be a place where there are sufficiently diverse leisure and cultural functions for all ages, generations and across all the religious and cultural communities of the city region.

Key questions and challenges

To what extent are visitors to the city centre able to find out about the diversity of cultural, sporting and leisure resources that are easily accessible from their hotel or apartment? What is the experience of international and UK students who are new to Sheffield? What would local communities and residents like to see improved? What are the big successes in the city centre and how we can build on these?



7. A city for learning

We want Sheffield to further develop its reputation as a leading UK city for education. With one of the most successful and largest colleges in the UK and outstanding higher and further education traditions, the city is an international location for learning. With significant new investment by all the city centre educational institutions, there ought to be scope to attract more employers and to leverage this multi-million investment to attract new businesses and opportunities for employment.

Equally with one of the largest providers of e-learning in Europe based in the city, Learn Direct provides services all over the UK and there is a cluster of related distance learning businesses also located in the city region. In the foreseeable future, investment in higher level skills, personal and professional development will continue to be important sectors in their own right and Sheffield has the potential to provide a distinctive and high level offer in this important sector.

Sheffield is also developing the idea of 'Learning Companies', where students learn their trade and professional skills whilst running a real business (under supervision), such as a pop-up restaurant. Other ideas include pop-up retail showcasing and selling jewellery and other artifacts from silver smithing students. To demonstrate Sheffield's commitment to Health and well-being and international reputation for Food research, the city centre could include demonstration pop-up workshops to do daily cookery and diet demonstrations from the experts in our colleges and universities.

Key questions and challenges

What more can be done to leverage further private sector investment on the back of the significant growth of learning institutions in the city centre? How can we strengthen links across the learning institutions? How can we more directly link learning to economic growth in Sheffield?

8. Culturally vibrant

Sheffield has strong cultural organisations and institutions with a long track record of innovation and wide public engagement. But the city has for many hundreds of years also been a place where people

have used their ingenuity and creativity to make things. This was reflected in the 20th century with leading silversmiths, designer makers, fine artists, musicians and performers and is still central to the cultural distinctiveness of Sheffield.

The city centre reflects these distinctive qualities in public art, award winning public realm, a cluster of cultural facilities within easy walking distance and a growing community of alternative contemporary art and alternative galleries reflecting a large community of practicing artists and designer makers.



Sport is also part of Sheffield's broader cultural offer; the city has world class athletes and facilities as well as a growing advanced research and manufacturing sector linked to medical, psychological and engineering companies that specialise in sport equipment and services.

Key questions and challenges

How can we extend and further develop the benefits arising from these organisations and individuals without new public sector investment? How can we collaborate to lever more private sector partnerships or investment in these important sectors? Does the city centre fully reflect Sheffield's cultural offer? Key buildings such as the Graves (as a central library and gallery) require investment, what should be the city's priorities?

9. City living

Sheffield city centre is now home to more than 16,000 people and with a new school (apprenticeship college) currently under construction, the city is becoming progressively more adapted for city living. In addition, with many residential communities located within easy walking distance of the city centre, and some emerging housing schemes (private and public sector) underway, there is further potential to increase the number of families living within 15 minutes walk of the city centre.

Unlike Manchester and Leeds where there is a large number of one and two bedroom high rise homes (built during the last boom), Sheffield has the potential (and the land) to attract more family and low-rise housing types as well having innovative projects including Park Hill and Kelham Island already underway. With high quality transport infrastructure and a broad range of centrally located health and wellbeing facilities, the city has great potential for increasing a more rounded approach to city living.

Key questions and challenges

Can Sheffield position itself as a more family friendly city centre than other UK cities? How can we encourage small and medium scale investment in other city centre locations to attract new residents into the city centre? Are there new opportunities such as Castlegate (with the market being moved to the Moor)?

10. Sustainable City

Sheffield already has some outstanding resources including its District Heat and Power Network and green roof initiative. With extensive grass roots interest in sustainable initiatives; urban gardening, cultivation, estate management, cycling and a vigorous network of social enterprises and not-for-profit organisations, there is great potential for further enhancing Sheffield's environmental credentials. However with specific challenges on air quality and flooding there is also much work still to do.



Key questions and challenges

What new initiatives can be taken to further progress Sheffield's sustainability? How can we convert important challenges around air quality and flooding into economic opportunities? How important is sustainability to residents of Sheffield?

What do you think?

We want to hear what the people of Sheffield think the city centre of the future might look like, and what we need to do now make sure Sheffield's is one of the best.

You can contact us on email at sheffield.first@sheffield.gov.uk, find us on Twitter as [@SheffieldFirst](https://twitter.com/SheffieldFirst), or visit our website at www.sheffieldfirst.com.

Find out more

Sheffield City Council are consulting on a refresh of the City Centre Masterplan at the moment and are due to finish this process later in 2013. Look out for a planned public exhibition in May and further conversations throughout June.

Two recent reports on the future of retail may be of interest. Firstly, an Arup Foresight & Innovation report published in November 2012 looking particularly at the impact of technology on traditional retail (downloadable here: http://www.arup.com/Home/Publications/Future_of_retail.aspx); secondly, a recent report in *The Economist* looking at how online retailers are starting to look at traditional stores to enhance their business models (downloadable here: <http://econ.st/YtahY6>).

Finally the Portas Review, which looked at the future of high streets and was published in December 2011 contains much that is of interest (downloadable here: <http://bit.ly/14vll2U>).