

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Date:	30 January 2023
	Cabinet		8 February 2023
Subject:	Endorsement of a five year vision for Gloucester City Centre		
Report Of:	Leader of the Council		
Wards Affected:	Westgate ward		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	1. Gloucester City Centre, Our 5 Year Vision 2023-28		
	2. Membership of the Gloucester City Centre Commission		

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of the work undertaken over the past 18 months by the Gloucester City Centre Commission, and to invite Cabinet to endorse a five year vision for Gloucester city centre that has been produced in consultation with the City Centre Commission.
- 1.2 The vision is an aspiration for the city centre, drawing on the views of its users, residents and businesses, and the organisations that support them.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the information in the report and make any recommendations to Cabinet.
- 2.2 Cabinet is recommended to **endorse** the Vision for Gloucester City Centre as prepared on behalf of the Gloucester City Centre Commission and to take account of the vision in future decisions relating to the future of the city centre.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 The Gloucester City Centre Commission emerged from the Gloucester Regeneration Advisory Board in 2020. Chaired by The Dean of Gloucester, the Commission comprises representatives of around 20 organisations that play a role in the city centre. The list of the membership is at Appendix 2 and it includes representatives from business, public and community sectors, covering interests in economic growth, the environment, heritage, social inclusion and community engagement amongst other topics.

- 3.2 The Council is represented at a member level by The Leader and by senior representatives of each of the other two parties. Administrative support has been given to the Commission by Officers of the City Council and Gloucester Cathedral.
- 3.3 The Commission provides an impartial overview of the city centre, presenting a forum for debate and offering advice to the Council and its partners on their interventions to stimulate sustainable and inclusive regeneration and growth. The Commission has recognised its need for diversity and has taken steps to include a more appropriate mix of genders and to include groups that represent communities and interests within Gloucester.

4.0 The preparation of a five year vision for the city centre

- 4.1 The Council charged the Commission with the production of a 5 year vision for the city centre to provide a strategic overview of the issues that will lead to the creation of a successful place. It would do this by galvanising the expertise amongst its membership and the views of users of the city centre whilst drawing on academic thinkers and the experience of other similar places.
- 4.2 The vision has been informed by a visit in October 2021 of the Historic Places Panel (report to Cabinet of July 2022 refers). The Panel comprises independent expertise within the built environment sector from across the UK and aims to advise local authorities and others on the revitalisation of historic places. The Panel met with several members of the City Centre Commission and provided the Council with a report, offering conclusions and recommendations on the future of the city centre. The vision addresses many of the points raised by the Panel.
- 4.3 The vision also draws on the conclusions of the city branding research carried out by Thinking Place Ltd in 2021 for the Council. The study refers to Gloucester's majestic history as well as its edgier, industrial, urban cool, which has the potential to really set it apart and be a connector to culture and a younger generation. It refers to the city as the urban oasis amongst a sea of glorious green, and it points to the opportunity for Gloucester to develop as an ethical, environmentally friendly and climate conscious destination reflecting the aspirations of many of its young people and tying into its cultural ambitions.
- 4.3 The vision will guide the preparation of strategies and policies affecting the city centre; it will strengthen bids to the Government and other funding bodies, and it will create a forum to monitor and steer future interventions by partner agencies. Most importantly, the vision will be a live, active document, creating and nurturing debate and input to a common shared vision of Gloucester's future.
- 4.4 The City Centre Commission met on four occasions during the period September 2021 to August 2022. During that time it delivered four symposium style meetings, each addressing a different perspective on the future of the city centre, and each led by an expert in the relevant subject matter.

Symposium 1: The natural environment

Considered how the city centre should develop in the context of reducing carbon and enhancing nature. The event considered the relationship of the city to the River Severn and its natural environs, the need to increase the amount of green space and trees, and the need to increase walking and cycling whilst reducing dependency on the car.

Symposium 2: The built environment

Addressed how to improve the built environment and the public realm in the context of the ongoing regeneration programme. It considered the need for flexible and adaptable buildings and spaces that are designed by and for users, and it looked at the importance of reducing the carbon footprint of development and the need to drive up standards of design in new build.

Symposium 3: the local economy

Looked at the state of the local economy and the transition of the high street away from retail and towards a far more diverse, 24 hour economy. This will be based on experiences, new and growing industrial sectors such as Digital and Creative industries, and major growth catalysts like the new City Campus and the The Forum.

Symposium 4: engaging the community

Addressed the importance of engaging users of the city centre in its design, development and marketing, reflecting the growing presence of the two Universities and the consequent growing young population. It considered the importance of culture and the arts in offering a medium for effective engagement of people, and it addressed how to build on Gloucester's strengths as a multi-faith and diverse community.

5.0 Research to inform the vision

- 5.1 The vision has also been informed by research undertaken by the University of Gloucestershire. Commissioned by the City Council the University was charged with undertaking research amongst the local public and businesses on how Gloucester City Centre should look and feel five years from now. To that end the University conducted research between September and November 2022, including an online survey and a series of face to face focus groups. The aim was to canvas a wide range of viewpoints from across the city and the survey alone received over 500 responses from a representative range of participants. The focus groups were undertaken with a diverse range of groups, and allowed for in depth exploration of aspects raised by the survey.
- 5.2 The overwhelming finding was that people generally believe that the city has the opportunity and potential to become a thriving and attractive city. Focus group participants said they felt the diversity and inclusivity in Gloucester were positive factors, with the city being community and family oriented. The City is seen as authentic, welcoming, diverse and inclusive although concerns were raised, in particular from minority ethnic groups about representation at a senior level within the key organisations in the City.
- 5.3 Respondents raised concerns about the run-down look and feel of the City Centre, specifically the number of empty retail units, but the majority were optimistic about the impact of future developments. The high street (and the Gate Streets) are seen as being in most need of development and investment.

- 5.4 The separation between the Quays and the City Centre was noted by several respondents. Focus group participants felt that access and support for those with disabilities and mobility problems could go some way to overcoming this.
- 5.5 The majority of respondents indicated that a more environmentally friendly city, with better access to green spaces was desirable, but most saw this as a lower priority than investment in business support, given the cost of living crisis.
- 5.6 Homelessness within the city was raised in the survey and the focus groups. People felt the nightlife within the city was limited, with the City Centre being empty in the evenings, leading to safety concerns. Women and the age group 25-34 were the least likely to feel safe in the City.
- 5.7 It is officers' intention to commission a similar engagement exercise towards the end of 2024 to track the progress of the city centre.

6. The Draft 5 year Vision

- 6.1 Cabinet's views are invited on the draft Vision, which is included at Appendix 1. The vision is intended to provide an overarching view of the city centre's future and to reinforce and stretch those existing strategies that have been adopted by the Council. It includes reference to performance indicators that will be used to measure and track the performance of the city centre over the next five years.
- 6.2 The vision is summarised by the following statement of intent:

By 2028 Gloucester city centre will be an attractive, safe and vibrant place where people come together, and enterprise and nature thrive. It will be transformed from a centre based on traditional retail to one that is repopulated with residents, workers and visitors enjoying a variety of experiences throughout the day and night. Business will sit at its heart with a diverse community of small firms in growing sectors of the economy. It will be full of nature, with accessible green spaces within and adjacent to the city centre, and well-designed development playing its part towards reaching zero carbon.

Above all it will be Gloucester – proud of its unique heritage, culture and identity.

7.0 Social Value Considerations

- 7.1 There are no direct social value considerations arising from the report, however, the vision highlights the priorities and needs of the city centre that might form the focus of social value activity delivered by developers over the next five years.

8.0 Environmental Implications

- 8.1 Consideration of the future of the local and global environment underpins the vision, and the first subject to be addressed by the City Centre Commission was the importance of protecting and enhancing the natural environment in shaping Gloucester's journey.

9.0 Alternative Options Considered

9.1 None

10.0 Reasons for Recommendations

10.1 To demonstrate the Council's commitment to creating a successful place in Gloucester city centre, and the important role it plays in coordinating the plans and activities of partner organisations to the same end.

11.0 Future Work and Conclusions

11.1 The document presented at Appendix 1 will form the basis of the Vision, and this text will be published with appropriate graphics and images to make it engaging and to inspire input. It will be presented on a website linked to the Council's own site alongside the following:

- A graphic storyboard showing how the City Centre Commission prepared the vision
- A summary of the engagement research carried out by the University of Gloucestershire and links to other research carried out on similar topics
- Videos of brief interviews with entrepreneurs and other young people offering their priorities for the future of the city centre
- Links to associated Gloucester strategies, such as the Heritage Strategy, the Destination Marketing Strategy, and the Transport Strategy
- A depository for thoughts and views, which will be accessible by any member of the public

11.2 The vision document refers to specific actions that will be taken to ensure that it remains relevant and 'alive' over the next few years.

- ❖ Action 1: Gloucester City Council to endorse the City Centre Vision and encourage the other City Centre Commission members to also endorse it.
- ❖ Action 2: The vision, the city centre user research and other material will be presented on a dedicated website, inviting members of the public to submit their views on the progress of the city centre
- ❖ Action 3: The City Council and its partners in the Gloucester City Centre Commission will draw on the vision to inform decisions relating to the city centre. It will underpin relevant strategies and funding bids submitted to the Government and other relevant bodies.
- ❖ Action 4: The City Council will commission a repeat of the city centre user research in late 2024 to obtain an update of local views on the city centre and a measure of progress towards achieving the vision.
- ❖ Action 5: the City Centre Commission will continue to meet to track progress of the implementation of the vision and the progress of the city centre.

12.0 Financial Implications

- 12.1 Administrative support was provided to the City Council to assist the organisation of the City Centre Commission's meetings by staff of Gloucester Cathedral. The sum of £10,000 was paid to the Cathedral to this end. A further sum of £15,000 was paid to the University of Gloucestershire, following a competitive tendering exercise, to undertake the research amongst users of the city centre. These costs have been off-set by a contribution of £20,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- 12.2 Funds have been provided to Gloucester Cathedral and University of Gloucester as noted via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Regeneration Reserve. No additional budget required as a result of this report.

13.0 Legal Implications

- 13.1 The general power of competence under the Localism Act 2011 enables the Council to do anything that individuals generally may do subject to any statutory prohibitions, restrictions, and limitations.
- 13.2 Therefore, the Council may agree to work in collaboration with the City Centre Commission and may agree to take the Values into consideration during their decision-making process. However, where there is a conflict between the Vision and internal and/ or external policies and procedures, the latter must take precedence.

14.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

14.1

Risks	Opportunities
Following its adoption the vision is not taken forward or becomes ignored <i>Mitigation: through the activities summarised in section 11, it is hoped to keep the vision 'alive'.</i>	To influence the priorities and activities of key organisations whose work impacts on the city centre, and to take decisive steps towards achieving the Council's own priorities.
	To strengthen the City Council's community leadership role by setting out a clear vision for others to sign up to.

15.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA) and Safeguarding:

- 15.1 The vision has been prepared with the users of Gloucester city centre in mind, and those same users have had a direct influence on it, whether that be via the organisations that sit on the City Centre Commission or through the user engagement carried out by the University of Gloucestershire.
- 15.2 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact; therefore, a full PIA was not required.

16.0 Community Safety Implications

16.1 The safety of people within the city centre is a theme that has been considered in the drafting of the vision, and it makes specific reference to this issue.

17.0 Staffing & Trade Union Implications

17.1 None

Background Documents:

Appendix 1
Gloucester City Centre
Our 5 year vision, 2023 to 2028