
Report to: Place Panel

Date: 30 January 2020

Subject: **Urban Design Support**

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1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To update the Panel on the design support programme being delivered by the Combined Authority, which has been funded by the Ministry of Homes, Communities and Local Government's **Planning Delivery Fund**.

2. Information

Planning Delivery Fund

Design Quality Fund

- 2.1 The Combined Authority was allocated £180,000 in 2018 under the heading Design Quality Fund, to support partner councils in development of masterplans for large strategic sites, focussing on housing around transport hubs, and to deliver design training and facilitate knowledge sharing across the Leeds City Region. This funding was used to commission a consultant, Barton Willmore and to appoint the Urban Design Manager in May 2019.

Capacity Assessment

- 2.2 The Urban Design Manager and Barton Willmore have undertaken an assessment of design capacity across the region's planning authorities. This included:
- surveys sent to local planning authorities and their human resources teams to assess design skills and resources, how shortfalls were met, and barriers to meeting capacity needs;
 - 3 workshops to discuss the survey results with Heads of Planning and planning, highways and regeneration officers, to establish further detail about

problems in delivering good quality development, and to identify ways that the Combined Authority could help;

- Two masterplanning workshops, to focus on briefing, creating, delivering and managing masterplans;
- individual meetings between local authorities and the Urban Design Manager, where key development sites for masterplanning support were explored;
- researching local design policy and guidance and producing a summary, which is included in the Barton Willmore report.

2.3 The survey results showed that many of the authorities felt that in order to deliver a good standard of design, they required more urban design/public realm advice. There was also a need for more development economics / viability skills. Recruitment and retention of urban design staff was cited as a key issue. When asked what support was required from the Combined Authority, all the respondents said that sharing best practice and training would be an important function, and there was also an appetite for cross-borough coordination, design advice and assistance with recruitment.

2.4 The workshops were well attended, with representation from all ten authorities. There were open and positive discussions, with some helpful ideas for how the authorities could work together and with the Combined Authority to improve placemaking capacity. These included:

- Executive member and officer design training
- Engaging developers early, for instance through a modified pre-app process
- Creating a region-wide design charter
- Stronger design policies and development briefs
- Sharing resource, tools and information such as successful appeals on design grounds
- Development of a design network
- Proposals for more effective recruitment and retention of staff

2.5 From this process, a long list of support proposals was drawn up, and Heads of Planning were asked to prioritise. The top priorities were as follows:

2.6 **Assisting with the development of masterplans** across the City Region, by acting as 'critical friend', providing advice on briefs and design codes, reviewing masterplans etc.

2.7 **A design training programme** for planning officers and executive members. This would cover national and local design guidance and policy, and use design tools such as Building for Life, a recognised national housing quality tool. The objective would be to assist officers and members to engage with land promoters and developers throughout the planning process, to understand design expectations, maximise placemaking potential and enable sustainable development.

2.8 **The establishment of a Leeds City Region network** of design and planning professionals, with associated meetings, seminars and site visits. The emphasis would be on each local authority member to share their knowledge to assist others – for example, Bradford could help authorities wanting to

develop design guidance by talking about their recent experience in developing their new Neighbourhood Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document.

- 2.9 **A web forum and library**, hosted as part of the Combined Authority's website, which could be used by authorities to share best practice, compare policy, guidance and experience and to highlight relevant events or site visits. This would also include information about new methods of construction and examples of their use, as well as focussing on the clean growth and health outcomes from good urban design, for example reducing car dominance, improving air quality and encouraging active travel and social interaction.

Draft report

- 2.10 Barton Willmore has produced a draft report detailing the findings of the capacity assessment. It is being amended following comments and will be sent to Heads of Planning early in the new year.

Work Programme 2019-21

- 2.11 It is proposed that the Urban Design Manager spends some time (20%) on assisting the Combined Authority internally, including on governance for the Transforming Cities Fund, as critical friend for the Streets for People programme and inputting on the assurance process for projects. The rest of her time will be divided equally between bespoke masterplanning support (as defined in 2.6) and general support (2.7, 2.8 and 2.9).
- 2.12 Specific sites have been prioritised for design input, in consultation with each authority and in line with the Planning Delivery Fund bid's aims to support development based around transport hubs and which can deliver sustainable, clean growth. These are:

- Bradford – City Village and Southern Gateway
- Calderdale - Garden Suburbs - Local Plan, Brighouse, and Halifax station gateway
- Craven - Skipton Station Masterplan
- Harrogate - West of Harrogate sites
- Kirklees - Chidswell, Dewsbury Riverside, Bradley Park
- Selby - ICL, Selby and Crosshills, Selby
- Pontefract Town Centre Masterplan
- York - ST15 (Elvington Lane) & ST14 (Wigginton Rd)

Support has already begun on 6 of these 8 priority sites. Barnsley and Leeds did not nominate masterplans for support.

- 2.13 Work has begun on drafting structure and content for the web forum and library, including links to key design guidance, research, articles, local planning policy and guidance, good practice, events, news, blog and a section where partners can share masterplan briefs, design codes, viability appraisals and details of appeals.

- 2.14 The first Leeds City Region design network meeting is being planned. This will be a half day event in February or March, hosted at Wellington House, to establish the network for sharing best practice. It will focus on design guidance and design review and there are offers to present from Integreat Plus (the region's design review panel provider) and Essex Design Services, who have developed award-winning design guidance for their region. It will also include presentations from some of the local authorities on these subjects – for instance, Bradford and Wakefield, who have recently developed design guidance, and Kirklees, who have used the design review process.
- 2.15 Consultation with Heads of Planning has begun on developing a training programme for officers and Executive Members. This would focus on shorter sessions for Executive Members by the Urban Design Manager and longer ones for planning and highways officers, bringing in expertise on viability, masterplanning and highways from external organisations.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 Of the funding pot of £180,000, around £67,000 remains. Some of this will be spent on the training programme and some on input to the design network over the period until April 2021.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

5. Staffing Implications

- 5.1 There are no staffing implications directly arising from this report.

6. External Consultees

- 6.1 No external consultations have been undertaken.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 That the Panel notes and comments on the content of the report.

8. Background Documents

None.

9. Appendices

None.