Taking the Barnsley Town Centre Strategy forward to deliver
May 2022

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1. Introduction

Purpose

1.1 This report supplements the URBAN DESIGN, SUSTAINABILITY & POST-COVID STRATEGY for Barnsley Town Centre completed by Urbed. We refer to this master document as the Strategy throughout this report. ADE Regeneration (ADE) has worked as a sub-consultant to Urbed. ADE inputted into the Strategy at the evidence gathering stage, providing socio-economic context information, property market reviews and a review of the impact of Covid-19 on town centres across the UK.

1.2 On completion of the core Urbed work, ADE was asked to provide Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (the Council) with a summary report on how delivery of the Strategy could be moved forward. This report summarises our work. The purpose of this report is to provide a high-level suite of actions that can be progressed to begin delivering the recommended changes.

Work undertaken

1.3 As part of this commission ADE completed the tasks set out below:

- ADE reviewed the proposed Strategy and supporting documents.
- ADE produced a consolidated list of projects to deliver the vision of the Strategy.
- ADE undertook a site tour of Barnsley town centre, to understand the Strategy proposals in the context of the town centre. ADE first visited the town centre in the first month of the Urbed commission. This was pre-Covid, so we visited again in early 2022 as it was critical to understand the post-covid context of the town centre.
- ADE reviewed the ownership of land in the key areas of interventions.
- ADE summarised the property market in Barnsley and highlighted how this impacts on the routes to delivery.
- ADE consulted the lead project officer and the Urbed team to understand the Council's risk appetite, funding capacity, officer capacity and views on the local market.
- ADE produced a proposed route to delivery for each of the interventions proposed.

1.4 In completing the work ADE was not commissioned to produce technical due diligence on any interventions. We have not undertaken or reviewed technical studies, undertaken legal title reviews, completed development appraisals or any form of land valuations. Our work highlights a recommended high-level approach to delivery, it points to the next steps required to develop investable projects, it does not recommend investment of Council resources into capital projects ahead of further due diligence being undertaken.

Structure of report

1.5 This report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 – Covers background information and summarises the outputs of the Urbed Strategy. It details our observations from our visits to the town centre. This report does not seek to replicate the Strategy and for full details the reader should read this separate document.
- Section 3 – Sets out the conditions of the Barnsley property market and draws conclusions on how this will affect the delivery of the Strategy.

- Section 4 – provides a high-level summary of land ownership in some of the key intervention areas highlighted in the Strategy.

- Section 5 - describes our recommendations on how the Council begins working towards the delivery of the Strategy. We provide a summary table covering all interventions, describing the intervention, likely cost and timescales and possible delivery route. This concludes with a concise list of suggested next steps.

Further Information

1.6 If you have any queries regarding this work, please contact:

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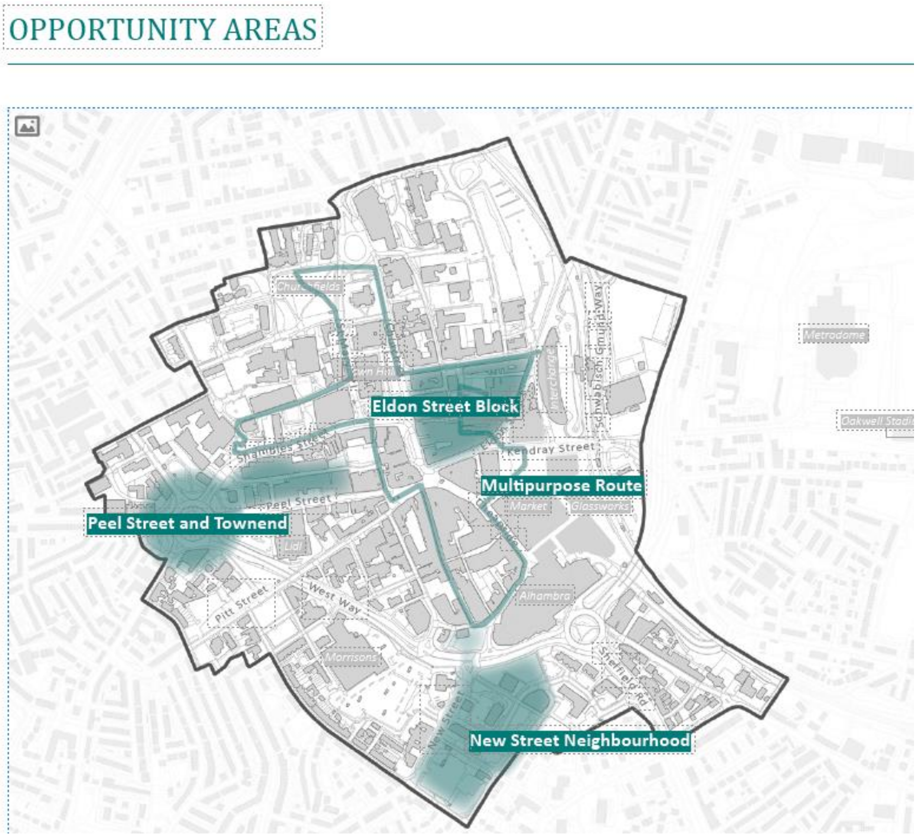
2. Background information and the Strategy

The proposed Strategy

2.1 URBED, supported by ADE and LEDA, were commissioned in November 2019 to produce an Urban Design and Sustainability Strategy for Barnsley Town Centre, taking into account Barnsley Zero 40 and Zero 45 targets. In May 2022 Urbed delivered a DRAFT strategy as the culmination of this commission. It is that Strategy that we have considered in this report.

2.2 The strategy details some key areas of interventions which can be seen in the Figure below. This includes a proposal to create a well-being route. In our review of interventions, we have also added the Pitt Street area and The Seam development to our analysis.

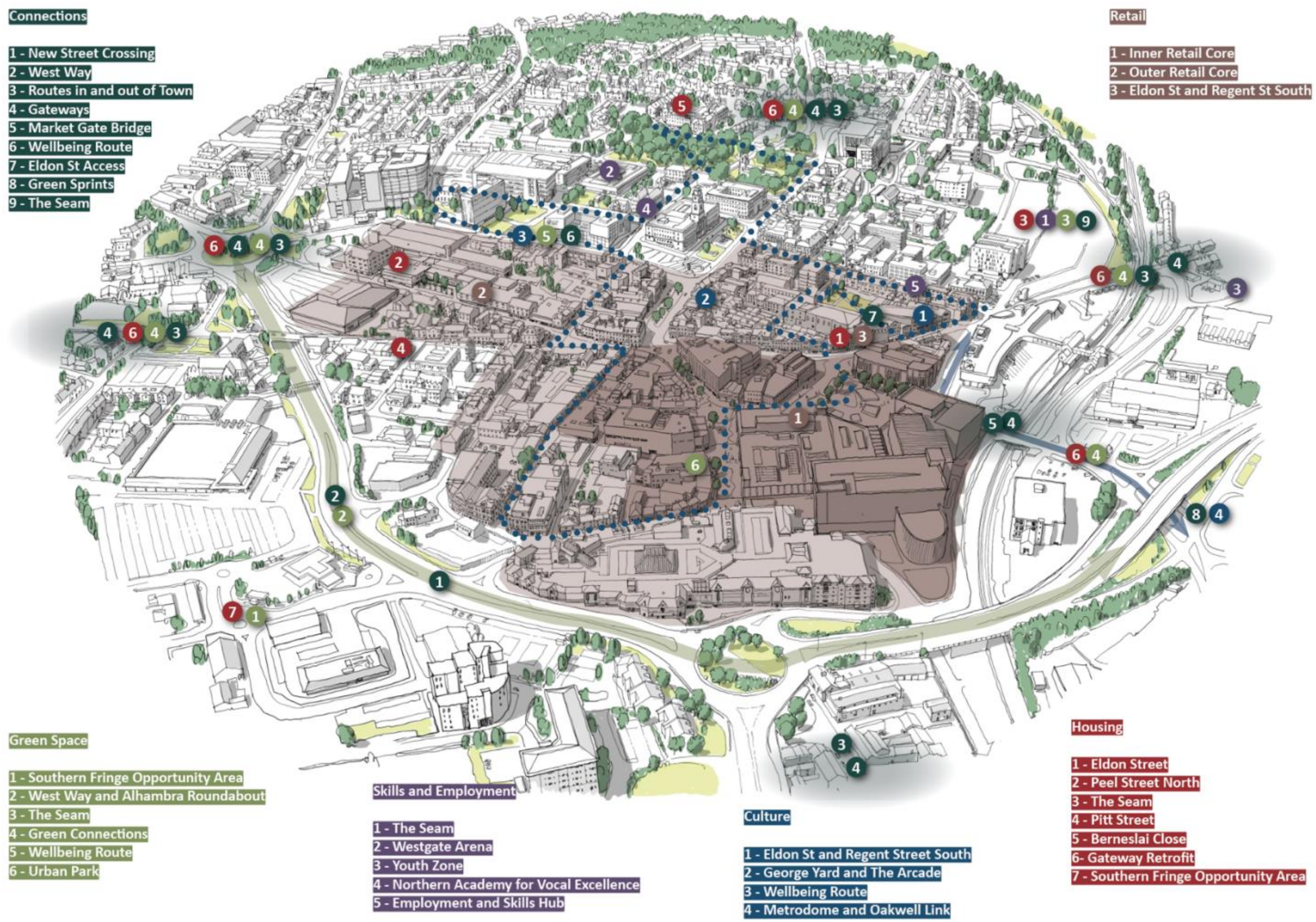
Figure 1 – Opportunity areas of action highlighted in the Urbed Strategy.



2.3 The Urbed Strategy considered 6 themes upon which each type of change they recommended for the town centre was considered. These themes were: retail, culture, skills and employment and housing, green space and connections. We have replicated these themes in grouping the delivery of the Strategy's actions. Figure 2 below lists a series of interventions proposed by Urbed under each theme.

Proposed intervention from the Strategy

Figure 2 – Urbed proposed interventions for Barnsley Town Centre (Source: Urbed)



Views from the site tour

2.4 ADE most recently visited the town centre on a Friday weekday in April 2022. It was during the Easter school holidays and a market day so it may have been that the town centre was busier than the average weekday. None the less our observations from the site tour were as follows:

- The town centre was busy with healthy footfall across the retail core.
- The investment in public realm, the Glass Works and environs was clear to see and this core of the town centre felt coherent and vibrant.
- The markets were well used and the food hall busy at this particular lunch-time. The open-air market had a critical mass of stalls and also appeared to be trading well.
- There were clearly vacant units still to be filled in the Glass Works and the upper floors of the Alhambra, however all other areas of the retail core had strong levels of occupancy.
- There were understandably higher levels of vacancies in the periphery of the town centre reflecting the challenging UK retail economy (see below).
- As you walk away from the town centre towards its edge the pedestrian experience deteriorates and wayfinding becomes harder. This is all set out in the Urbed Strategy, and was confirmed to us from our own experience on the ground.
- On the whole, the town centre appeared to have bounced back well from Covid, although the structural changes to the economy are having and will continue to have an impact on the town centre, which is currently manifested in the pace of take up of units in the Glass Works and lower demand for retail reinvention space.
- We did not observe the town centre outside of the core retail hours, but expect given the use types (low levels of residential and evening uses) that the retail core would have low levels of footfall.

3. The Barnsley property market

3.1 This Section outlines at a high level the current property market context for retail/leisure, commercial and residential uses in Barnsley town centre.

3.2 With the exception of some retail uses the majority of uses are not viable independently. However, a number of uses can be progressed with investment support from the Council and public sector funding (see below).

Retail / Leisure

3.3 The retail sector is arguably currently the most challenging property sector across the UK, with the growth in on-line retail and demand for out-of-town and edge-of-town retail causing significant competition with town centre 'High Street' retail. A further issue outside the Council's control is the high level of rates.

3.4 Over recent years Barnsley has sought to tackle this head on through the new Glass Works development, the redeveloped Barnsley Market and visual improvements to the block above Costa Coffee complementing the Alhambra shopping centre and existing high street. This has helped to ensure Barnsley town centre is a shopping destination for more people of all ages and with a wider range of disposable income. With quoting rents at up to c.£320psm (£30psf) and attainable rents in the low-mid £200psm (£20psf) range, subject to rental/fit out incentives, this has demonstrated the scope for a high quality and viable retail offer in Barnsley.

3.5 However, there remains a significant amount of lower quality retail reinvention space in areas such as Pitt Street and Peel Street available at below £110psm (£10psf). High quality redevelopment / refurbishment of the retail space will not be viable at this level. Contraction and refocusing of the retail offer are needed as outlined in the masterplan so that supply and demand more closely align to support a more buoyant retail reinvention offer.[1]

3.6 The Glass Works redevelopment includes a cinema and broader leisure offer which, along with the Metrodome/Calypso Cove to the south of the town centre, meets the majority of the town's leisure needs. However, as evidenced in many towns and cities by the emergence of a strong demand for experiential leisure such as 'escape rooms', there may be some private-sector led temporary leisure uses in secondary commercial space whilst broader regeneration plans are brought forwards.

Commercial

3.7 Barnsley has a good demand for and supply of modern office space for small and medium sized businesses in DMC 01 and 02. Offices within DMC 01 range from 7.5-100 sq m (80-1,100 sq ft) with prices starting at £160pcm which equates to c.£260psm (£24psf).[2] DMC 02 brings further office space as well as co-working space and a 'makers lab'.[3] However, these rental levels reflect the high quality of facilities and services available within this serviced office environment (e.g., concierge and super-fast WIFI).

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[1] https://Seam.zoopla.co.uk/to-rent/commercial/retail-premises/south-yorkshire/barnsley/
[2] https://Seam.barnsleydmc.co.uk/meeting-space-barnsley/office-space-2/
[3] https://Seam.barnsleydmc.co.uk/app/uploads/2020/09/DMC-02-Brochure.pdf

3.8 Barnsley has an oversupply of secondary office space available across the town centre ranging from £55-85psm (£5-8psf).[4] As alternative uses are found for town centre buildings (e.g., residential) this should reduce the supply and enable a more buoyant secondary office market to emerge.

3.9 New build office values will lie between the two, but at below £215psm (£20psf), even with end occupiers, it will not be viable to develop new build offices without grant support and/or enabling development.

Residential

3.10 With the exception of Berneslai Close[5], there is no recent comparable town centre residential new build values to draw upon. Second hand resale values on the routes into the town centre[6] and the below rental levels coupled with a yield of say 6% suggest sales value of c.£2,200-2,300psm (£205-215psf). Even with a new build premium taking values to say £2,500psm (£235psf), the development of new homes for market sale on brownfield sites would face viability challenges. The regional and national picture is that residential sales inflation is just about keeping pace with construction inflation at the c.10% level, with strong rural sales for people looking for a better quality of life supporting a similar trend in Barnsley. However, by value inflation not exceeding cost inflation it means the viability challenges faced with new build housing will not change for the foreseeable future and in the town centre it may potentially worsen.

3.11 The low level of new development for market sale has contributed to buoyant demand for market rent and resilient market rent levels in second hand stock. Examples include £575pcm rent for a recent 1-bedroom apartment letting at Plaza Quarter[7] and £650pcm for a current higher quality 2-bedroom terraced house.[8] However, even so, viability is also difficult for new 'build to rent' at these rental levels, particularly with the facilities renters expect. That said, refurbishment for market rent may be viable if costs are below new build levels, which, given the condition of some buildings and VAT, may not be the case.

3.12 Provided it is not a Section 106 requirement, the availability of significant Homes England Affordable Homes Programme grant means affordable housing of various tenures has the potential to be viable. This applies to both general needs affordable housing and specialist accommodation for older people including extracare. The demand for market housing for older people has been demonstrated by the recent Berneslai Close scheme and it is likely that similar demand exists for affordable housing.

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[4] https://Seam.zoopla.co.uk/to-rent/commercial/offices/south-yorkshire/barnsley/

[5] Whilst McCarthy and Stone are quoting much higher sales values akin to £3,500 psm there will be sales incentives and the quality of facilities and level of services available will not be comparable to new build. This is not therefore a direct comparable but as sales complete this will help to give confidence to valuers and lenders.

[6] https://Seam.onthemarket.com/details/11829079/

[7] https://Seam.bricknells-rentals.co.uk/property/plaza-quarter-fitzwilliam-street-barnsley/

[8] https://Seam.onthemarket.com/details/11805762/

4. Property ownership in key areas of intervention

General town centre

4.1 Barnsley Town Centre as a whole has very significant public land ownerships. The Council is a major land holder, with other public bodies (such as the College, Police and NHS) also owning assets. This provides great scope for the Council playing a key guardianship role in the evolution of the town centre. This is not always the case, and the Council's land ownership is more significant than in other comparable places ADE has recently worked.

4.2 There are areas where land ownership is concentrated in public sector ownership (The Seam, retail core, Pitt Street) and others (Cheapside, Southern Fringe and Peel Street) where land ownerships is more fragmented and private sector orientated.

The retail core

4.3 Land ownership by the Council in the retail core is significant. The Council owns the freehold to both the Glass Works and the Alhambra shopping centre and large swathes of the public realm space in the area. The Alhambra shopping centre is leased to a private sector owner with multiple sub-leases beyond this. So, although the Council will not have day to day control of the Alhambra it does have a land holding interest. To the North of the retail core (Eldon Street) and West (Cheapside) land ownership is much more fragmented. The Council do have the freehold interest in a retail block on Cheapside (the New Look store block) which does provide it with some scope to instigate change if it is required in this particular location, subject to extinguishing leasehold interests.

The Seam

4.4 The Seam site is one contiguous free-hold land ownership, owned by the Council. There appears to be no leasehold interests in the site owned by the Council. Bordering the site to the north is the College and land owned by BT. To the south within the land block is private land ownership, but this is excluded from The Seam Masterplan proposals.

4.5 The simplified land ownership of this site lends itself well to the Council promoting this site for development, which could happen quickly. Aside from viability the key challenge will be to provide alternative car parking, e.g. through a multi-storey block, to replace the surface parking provision which represents most of the Council's developable interests in this location. The Council has finding to undertake a multi-storey as part of a first phase of development.

George Yard and Eldon Street

4.6 Eldon Street is categorized by fragmented land ownership on the Western side of the road. There are both multiple freeholds and often sub-leases. There are a number of medium and small retail units, without any significant land holdings consolidated by one party. The Council has a large ownership of the public space around George's Yard. The Civic buildings (which is owned by the Civic Enterprise Company) is a major land interest. Both the entry to George's Yard and streets that border it are characterized by fragmented private sector land ownership.

Pitt Street

4.7 The Council is the freehold owner of several large pockets of surface level parking in this area. Buildings to the south of Pitt Street are in private ownership, but this is to some extent consolidated by a few owners, with some sub-leases. Whilst not straightforward, it is conceivable that land assembly could be undertaken by the Council to instigate development on both sides of Pitt Street.

Peel street

4.8 To the South West of Peel Street, Lidl is a significant land owner with freehold interest. The Council has some small freehold ownership on the north-western fringe of the site but this is confined to open space and verges (in isolation not significant enough to constitute a development site). DWP has land ownership, occupied by the Job Centre, which could lend itself to housing development should this site no longer be required. The low-density retail park on the north west could be made higher density with surplus car parking developed, but this site is in private ownership, with several leasehold interests (so this would be complex to bring forward for development). The middle and eastern part of the site has very fragmented land ownership. Although there is some consolidation of freehold interests there are numerous leasehold interests. Any land assembly for development in this area would be complex.

Westgate

4.9 The Westgate area does see significant public sector land ownership, albeit across different bodies (the Police, the Council, a central government department). There is private sector ownership to the North of the area which is in one freehold ownership, but with multiple leasehold interests. Whilst land assembly might not be straightforward to achieve a comprehensive development site, there is the potential to achieve this over time given the strong public sector interests.

Southern Fringe

4.10 The Southern Fringe area does have a large amount of Council freehold ownership. The private sector ownership is largely consolidated to one owner. However, there are many pockets of private sector leasehold interests, making land assembly on this site not straightforward. We would consider, given the complexities of landownership, that this site would be a longer-term aspiration.

5. Approach to delivery

Introduction

5.1 This Section provides the summary of our advice on how to take forward the Strategy towards delivery. We first summarise the approach in Table XX. We then provide more narrative that unpacks our recommendations.

5.2 During this summary we conclude that the Green Space and Connectivity projects should be aggregated into a programme of Public Realm projects. We therefore provide some detail on drawing this programme together.

5.3 The final action we have added centres on monitoring and evaluation. The Council's internal team is well underway ensuring there is a process in place to monitor the town centre's health and vibrancy. It is critical that contemporary data plays a role in shaping the delivery and reacting to events. We therefore felt it appropriate to ensure this workstream has a prominent place in the delivery plans for the Strategy.

Summary

5.4 The proposed Urbed Strategy sets a future vision for what Barnsley Town Centre should be. In order to get there a series of minor and major changes will be required. Some of these interventions are already well defined and planned for, whilst others are at an earlier stage.

5.5 The table below summarises these core interventions, potential early-stage costs and most probable means of delivery. Our summary is based on a desk-top review of available evidence, but not any form of technical detail or feasibility studies. We outline where further work is required to establish the project, cost and delivery route. All costs, unless otherwise stated, are purely illustrative to give a sense of the scale of intervention required.

Table 1 – Summary table of delivery approach to the Barnsley Town Centre Strategy

Ref	Project Name	Description	Cost	Delivery	Years
Retail					
R1	Glass Works and Markets	Active asset management to activate and secure lettings for new space created	NA	The Council continue to move this forward with internal lettings team and external support	1 to 3
R2	Eldon Street	Shop front improvements and activating upper floors, encouraging independent uses	£2m - £4m	The Council to play active role in pilot refurbishment of the Harrals building, Space Agency could play a role in managing any voids that emerge, possible shop front grant scheme to play a role in aesthetic improvement	2 to 5
R3	Alhambra	Active monitoring and engagement with owners	NA	The Council to monitor and engage with leasehold owner and asset manager. Private sector led delivery	1 to 10
R4	Changing uses across the proposed retail intervention area	Ensuring a smooth transition of consolidating the core retail area, and movement of retail away from peripheral locations, facilitating growth of Indy Town	£0.3m - £0.5m	Policy driven and supporting role played by Space Agency, engage with owners to establish potential for facilitation, partnering or acquisition, undertake detailed feasibility study in selected locations, put together overarching funding and phasing strategy including public sector support	2 to 10

Ref	Project Name	Description	Cost	Delivery	Years
R5	Space Agency	A new body established to play an active role in managing void space. Including instigating mean-while uses across the Retail Intervention Area.	£0.3 - £0.5m	The Council to explore the scope and feasibility of Space Agency	1 to 15
Culture					
C1	Eldon Street	Promotion of Eldon Street for niche independent traders, which could include makers, crafts and cultural activities. See R2	See R2	See R2	1 to 3
C2	George Yard and The Arcade	Engaging to fill empty units, encouraging food and drink area into arcade. Spaces to fill, and environmental improvements. Short term cheaper vibe changing interventions, licensing to activate the space.	£0.25 - £0.5m	Space Agency to play a role, public realm interventions via wider programme. Look into fiscal incentives	1 to 3
C3	Multi-purpose route***	Improve a core route around the town centre to create a continuous walking loop	£2m - £4m	See P1	2 to 5
C4	Metrodome link***	Improving the pedestrian links between town centre and Metrodome	£1m - £2m	See P1	2 to 5

Ref	Project Name	Description	Cost	Delivery	Years
C5	Westgate area	Opportunity to increase density of development and introduce employment and possibly housing on this site	£20m - £30 (private sector led)	Feasibility study to be undertaken. Brief and land assembly strategy to be considered. The Council likely to play facilitation role, with development private sector led	2 to 10
Skills / Employment					
SE1	The Seam Campus development	Major development opportunity to deliver mixed use development, complement a digital workspace campus at its core	£56m (£11m FHSF, private)	Council direct delivery (Phase 1), support by grant funding already secured. Critical to move forward at pace	1 to 10
SE2	Youth Zone	Training and youth facilities as part of Onsideproposals	TBC	To be moved forward by Onside,	1 to 3
SE3	Workspace projects in Westgate	Existing low density and inefficient buildings replaced over time	Unknown	Feasibility work to be undertaken to establish vision and plan for delivery	2 to 10
SE4	Northern Academy for Vocal Excellence	Permanent Home for the Northern Academy for Vocal Excellence and other choirs	TBC	In progress	1 to 3

Ref	Project Name	Description	Cost	Delivery	Years
SE5	Employment and Skills Hub	A work and skills hub in the Town Centre maintaining a visible presence for the employment and skills services that are provided to residents	TBC	Council led	1 to 3
Housing					
H1	Eldon Street	Housing is being incorporated into the upper floor of the Harral's building as part of the Heritage Action Zone. Similar proposals will be considered on their merits.	TBC	Private sector delivery, enabled by grant funding already secured. Explore award opportunities. Undertake high level feasibility study to identify other suitable interventions, engage with owners to establish potential for facilitation, partnering or acquisition, undertake detailed feasibility study in selected locations, put together overarching funding and phasing strategy including public sector support	1 to 5
H2	Peel Street North	Partial demolition of existing buildings including Peel Street Arcade. New mid-density housing + active ground floor uses. Land assembly needed for delivery.	TBC	Undertake high level feasibility study to identify suitable interventions, engage with owners to establish potential for facilitation, partnering or acquisition, undertake detailed feasibility study in selected locations, put together overarching funding and phasing strategy including public sector support	1 to 5

Ref	Project Name	Description	Cost	Delivery	Years
H3	Housing as part of The Seam development	The Seam Development will incorporate housing, creating a vibrant and sustainable neighbourhood where people live, work, learn, try new ideas and enjoy public spaces. Subject to soft market testing residential could include both market (e.g. PRS) and affordable tenures	TBC	Beyond Phase 1 which the Council are delivering, conclude soft market testing, procure delivery partner(s) through appropriate framework and enter into development agreement.	1 to 5
H4	Pitt Street	The development of new and retrofitted mid-density housing along Pitt Street. A pilot project could test a few units with the potential to expand along the whole street.	TBC	Undertake high level feasibility study to identify suitable interventions, engage with owners to establish potential for facilitation, partnering or acquisition, undertake detailed feasibility study in selected locations, put together overarching funding and phasing strategy including public sector support	1 to 5
H5	Berneslai Close	McCarthy & Stone retirement living development comprising 49 one- and two-bedroom apartments for the over 60s. This project is already in progress.	NA	Private sector delivery. Sales are underway for this development now known as Beckett Grange. Explore award opportunities	1

Ref	Project Name	Description	Cost	Delivery	Years
H6	Gateways	Sustainable retrofit and refurbishment at gateway locations and on arterial routes heading in and out of the town, including around Town End Roundabout. Demolitions may be considered where retrofit and refurbishment is not sufficient to address amenity issues (e.g., noise, air quality) and where space is required for provision of active travel and public transport infrastructure.	TBC	Undertake high level feasibility study to identify suitable interventions, engage with owners to establish potential for facilitation, partnering or acquisition, undertake detailed feasibility study in selected locations, put together overarching funding and phasing strategy including public sector support	1 to 5
H7	Southern Fringe Opportunity Area	New housing and a change of the overall use and character of the New Street area is a priority, including improvements to the West Way crossing into the town centre. In the wider Southern Fringe Opportunity Area, no specific sites have been identified but the area has potential to deliver housing close to the town centre	TBC	Undertake high level feasibility study to identify suitable interventions, engage with owners to establish potential for facilitation, partnering or acquisition, undertake detailed feasibility study in selected locations, put together overarching funding and phasing strategy including public sector support	1 to 10
Greenspace					
G1	Greenspace periphery projects***	Series of smaller scale green space improvements and introductions around the outside of the town centre	£0.5m - £1m	See P1	2 to 5

Ref	Project Name	Description	Cost	Delivery	Years
G2	Urban Park ***	Creation of an urban square near the centre of the retail core, potentially using Council owned land	£1m - £2m	To be promoted by the Council, including potential demolition of surplus retail stock	2 to 5
G3	Multi-purpose route***	See P1	See P1	See P1	See P1
G4	West Way and Alhambra***	Improved space between West Way and Alhambra to improve the pedestrian experience	£0.5m - £1m#	Delivered as part of wider public realm programme	2 to 5
G5	The Seam	Green spaces and high-quality public realm forming part of Seam vision	£1m - £1.5m	To be led by private sector delivery partner, informed by design brief and Strategy	2 to 10
Connections					
CN1	Travel Hub at Seam	Integrated cycle and pedestrian facilities as part of the Seam development	£0.5m - £1m	Paid for from FHSF, delivered as part of The Seam programme	2 to 5
CN2	Multi-purpose route***	See P1	See P1	See P1	See P1

Ref	Project Name	Description	Cost	Delivery	Years
CN3	Taming of West Way***	Low-scale interventions to improve the aesthetics and pedestrian experience at key gateway	£0.75m - £1m	See P1	See P1
Public Realm programme					
P1	A programme of public realm improvements	A programme of interventions brought together as a programme to ensure coordination and complementarity of project to achieve the Strategy vision. Projects in the programme are denoted by '***' in the able above	£10m - £15m	Work undertaken to scope, design and cost all interventions expected. Funding strategy conceived on the back of this work. Possibility of programme bid for external funding	2 to 5
Monitoring and evaluation					
M1	Monitoring and evaluating the delivery and health of the town centre	Comprehensive health monitoring of the town centre	£0.1m - £0.3m	Internal Council team already in place and plans made	2 to 10

Retail

5.6 The strategy proposes focusing traditional retail in a tight area around The Glass Works, with a retail reinvention area of more independent shops and a diverse range of other uses, possibly branded as “Indy Town”. Retail around the periphery of the town centre over-time will be expected to shrink and move closer to the retail centre. In order to achieve this BMBC will need to concentrate on filling the empty units in The Glass Works.

5.7 The retail reinvention area and the rest of the town centre, will undergo a period of transition. In order to mitigate the scarring of this transition (empty units, physical deterioration) we have proposed BMBC consider playing an active role through the creation of a Space Agency. This would be an independent body established to help bring novel and interesting uses into vacant spaces. URBED have previously been involved in the development of a similar organisation in Garston, where small businesses were enticed in to occupy empty units with lower rents. A team with a unit on the high street would market vacant properties and refurbish and maintain them to improve the attractiveness of the street.

5.8 A similar organisation in Barnsley could support the diversification of uses in the retail reinvention area and periphery of the high street, support local businesses and support the implementation of carbon saving measures. This Space Agency would require revenue funding to pump-prime its early activities and we recommend the possibility of exploring central government funding opportunities for this purpose.

Proposals for a Space Agency

Role of the space agency – the role of the Space Agency will be to be as a curator of vacant space in the town centre. It will seek to bring interesting and culture led uses into empty space. Either through mean-while issues, or more permanent uses the Space Agency will bring together property owners and users and broker occupancy terms.

Desired objectives – its objectives will be to maintain vibrancy in the town centre whilst it undergoes a period of transition, to accelerate the pace of change in the secondary part of the town centre via the promotion of independents and new use types.

New entity shape – We would anticipate the Space Agency to be a new entity, and not part of the Council. All be it, owing to its likely funding from the Council, and reliance on the Council, the Council would expect to exert some governance control over the new entity via board input and a MOU or delivery contract. A new entity will need to be agile and able to respond quickly to opportunities. A new entity would expect to have its own governance structures and dedicated staff.

Partners in delivery – The new entity would work closely with the Council. It could be managed by an existing agency or specialist body, via a procurement competition. It will be critical that the new entity taps into the best practices of the private sector property market, whilst still doing things differently to achieve its unique set of objectives.

Financial model – The ambition would be to test whether the Space Agency could be self-funding over the longer term. This could be through agency commission on finding occupiers, making a margin on renting and sub-letting space. It is likely that the Space Agency would require pump-priming in the form of revenue costs to cover set up and staff costs in early years, but a feasibility should test whether it could be self-financing longer-term.

Market interest - Having tested with some operators who specialise in the management of creative space we believe there would be private sector interest in partnering with the Council in this endeavour. There are also specialist consultants who would be well placed to help with the feasibility study e have proposed.

Culture

5.9 For a town the size of Barnsley the cultural assets in the town centre are already strong, with enhancements over recent years with the improvements to the Civic, new library and Cinema. The Northern Academy for Vocal Excellence will further add to this. The Strategy therefore concentrates on making the most of the existing assets, but improving links between them, creating space to and uplifting the aesthetics of the core cultural area. Activating George's Yard and introducing Food and Beverage retail in the arcade are proposed interventions. The collection of green space and connection improvements we propose are packaged together as part of a wider town centre programme of public realm interventions.

5.10 The ownership structure of George's Yard and Eldon Street make any comprehensive development plans complex and possibly unnecessary. The series of interventions are therefore smaller in scale on purpose and looking to build on the existing building masses and attractions.

Skills & Employment

5.11 Barnsley College is a great asset for the town centre and will be core to it for many years to come. The Council should continue to facilitate the College's growth.

5.12 A Youth Zone is proposed for the town centre, with the project sponsor Onside having reportedly secured funding. Youth Zones are purpose-built spaces that provide young people aged between eight and nineteen, or up to twenty five with a disability, affordable access to high-quality sports, arts and leisure facilities and activities. From our knowledge of the Youth Zone activities elsewhere this is likely to have a very significant positive impact on Barnsley Town centre. To highlight its impact, we recommend that a baseline of the town centre economy is undertaken before and after the Youth Zone programme as well as the other data baselining which will inevitably happen. The Youth Zone project will significantly add to the skills and training opportunities for local young people and should be facilitated.

5.13 The Council now has secured funding to undertake some enabling works which will improve the viability and attractiveness of The Seam masterplan site. The Council is well underway in moving forward with a next phase of development that would deliver a multi-storey car park, travel hub and some key elements of public realm. This unlocks the ability to build on the surface level car park and improves the viability of the remainder of the site. Beyond the early phases we believe there is appetite from developers to move forward delivery quickly on this site. The Council may wish to retain control of future phases of development or seek a development partner. There is likely to be strong market demand for the delivery of a hotel, housing and, subject to grant being used to fill a viability gap and the Council taking a lead, also commercial offices to expand the existing digital campus.

5.14 The Westgate area offers opportunities for mixed use and higher density employment space and housing. This is an area where we recommend The Council spend more time through a feasibility study establishing the development potential for the area and what actions it needs to undertake to achieve this.

Housing

5.15 Communications and awards - A strong communications strategy is needed to regularly reinforce progress, outlining progress with key milestones including acquisition, planning applications and consents, start on site, completion and occupation. Positive news stories could for instance feature the stories of people who have, for instance, been able to get on the housing ladder or downsize (at Berneslai Close) releasing other housing elsewhere. Award shortlisting and success should also feature in this communications strategy.

5.16 Refurbishment of the Harral's building (H1) and development of Berneslai Close (H5) are now delivered or underway. Given the high quality of these projects, award opportunities (particularly around design, but also planning, construction, heritage etc.) should be explored to celebrate these achievements and bring attention to the potential of residential development in Barnsley. Similarly, as other residential projects are completed, further award opportunities should be explored.

5.17 Maximising the use of Council resources - The Council should use its land / property interests across the town centre (see above) to enable (re)development / refurbishment where possible, which may include joint ventures with existing land / property owners or new developers. To help unlock challenging projects, the Council should take a flexible approach to realising the value of its assets, including benefiting from revenue streams, deferred land payments and/or overage.

5.18 To further support critical projects such as development around the Seam (H3) the Council should make full use of its balance sheet and broader resources, for example through prudential borrowing/on-lending and/or income strip leases.

5.19 Bringing in other public sector funding - To successfully deliver many of these projects, the Council will need to bring in public sector funding from Central Government, Homes England, SYCA and other sources. The Council has the benefit of being able to tap into the Government's 'levelling up' agenda. Funders are also looking for reliable delivery in line with their timescales. The Council needs to be in the best possible position to secure funding by having as many high level and detailed feasibility studies as possible, backed up by funding and delivery strategies, and business cases that demonstrate projects are deliverable with funding support. Surveys and enabling works (such as demolition) which help to support 'oven ready' sites will also be beneficial. The Council should invest in these steps to create 'bottom drawer' scheme where possible to maximise the prospect of securing future public funding.

5.20 Facilitating development and phasing - A number of the projects (H1, H2, H4, H6 & H7) include land/buildings in private sector ownership. The scope to encourage and facilitate land/building owners to progress developments should be explored (e.g. by contributing to feasibility costs, assisting with accessing grants or facilitating an introduction to a developer partner). Council-led land assembly should be explored as a last resort if this is not possible.

5.21 On these developments phasing can help to demonstrate progress both to funders and the public and to enable the recycling of funds.

5.22 Selecting the right partners - Developers with a track record of high-quality regeneration and public sector partnering should be selected on appropriate projects. Developers should reflect public sector risk sharing in reduced development returns, which should help to address the viability gap on some projects.

5.23 Sustainability, off-site construction and social value - The gateway retrofitting (H6) and various refurbishment opportunities (H1, H2, H4 & H7) have individual and collective potential to contribute to the Council's zero carbon aspirations.

5.24 The Council and land / property owner should take a long-term view on its investment, with the potential for savings on energy bills to contribute to paying back up-front costs. In cases where the Council cannot benefit from these savings, such as private ownership or social housing, opportunities for grants targeting low and zero carbon should be explored. To further support sustainability, reuse of existing buildings should be maximized unless redevelopment is essential to address viability or make a placemaking statement.

5.25 The Council should capitalise on its role as land/property owner to encourage, through developer procurement and development agreements, off-site construction techniques to speed up delivery and improve quality. By showcasing the benefits, as part of the above communications strategy, this should encourage local developers/builders to adopt these approaches. Similarly, opportunities should also be made available to local small and medium sized builders as part of construction supply chains.

As well as aligning closely with the Council's own strategies, these approaches should appeal to public funders.

Green space and connections

5.26 Barnsley town centre has already achieved some great results in the uplifting of its public realm in its core. The Urbed Strategy highlights areas where further improvements are required to deliver the Strategy vision (including establishing a well-being route, a new urban park, green space improvements around the periphery of the town centre and improvements to some key gateway locations). We recommend that these interventions are packaged together as a programme. We recommend that a programme of more detailed studies is undertaken to establish the designs and costs of these. Once completed, a holistic vision for public realm improvements and a delivery strategy can be established. At this point we would suggest the Council consider whether the programme forms part of a comprehensive town centre improvement project that could access central government funding when new funding is announced.

Funding

5.27 Lots of the projects we detail have funding secured or will be private sector led. Future High Street Funding has already been secured which gives the town centre significant resources to begin delivery. The SY Renewal Fund is a key source of potential funding and, for projects that clearly align against its objectives, the Council should advance dialogue with the SYCA on this matter.

5.28 We recommend that decisions are made as to what Town Centre projects should be prioritised and worked on so that if, and when, Government announces new funding, Barnsley stands the best chance of winning in a competitive bidding round.

Being Opportunistic

5.29 The delivery strategy above talks about the world as we know it now. However, the Council will need to be agile and flexible to grab opportunities as they arise. It has already done this with projects such as the Youth Zone. The Strategy should be seen as an overall framework for delivery, but not so rigid that it cannot flex to incorporate uses and opportunities that may arise.

5.30 Examples could include the use of The Seam site for Government relocations, other major sites for urban parks, cultural attractions or education expansion. We believe the pursuit of perceived major opportunities should be considered against the Strategy vision and objectives, and could be discounted if they work counter to this, but the zoning and uses suggested in the Strategy should not act as a barrier should unforeseen opportunities arise.

Immediate next steps

5.31 Delivery is underway in many areas and should continue. A series of more detailed feasibility studies are required and should be scoped and commissioned. The public realm, green space and connection improvements should be drawn together as one programme of interventions, with the potential to target external grant funding to deliver these. The idea of a Space Agency for Barnsley town centre should be considered in more detail as the transitioning of space in the Retail Intervention Area and periphery of the town centre will be critical to the overall delivery of the Strategy vision. The list below provides a more detailed list of interventions:

- Continue the process of completing lettings for the Glass Works.
- Commission a feasibility study into the viability and scope of a new Space Agency for Barnsley town centre.
- Commission a feasibility into the development potential of the Pitt Street site

- Bring forward a comprehensive development opportunity for The Seam campus, securing a development partner(s) as a matter of urgency

- Facilitate the delivery of the Youth Zone project.

- Commission detailed scoping, design and costing for the programme of green space and connections project to pull together a comprehensive delivery plan for the town centre. This could be a precursor to bidding for external grant funding to help deliver.

- As a longer-term priority, look at the development viability of the Westgate, Southern Fringe and Peel Street areas.

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