



WAKEFIELD CIVIC SOCIETY

Building interest in Wakefield since 1964

Our Vision for Wakefield

Preface

On 29th February 1964, *The Wakefield Express* published a letter written on behalf of a group of local residents who were concerned about what was happening with regard to the 'architectural and planning future of the city'. With the pressures of a rising population and increasing numbers of vehicles being used on our roads, not just in Wakefield, but across the country, the signatories to the letter were worried that decisions about what happened in Wakefield would be made solely by the Council.

While the authors recognised that it was the responsibility of elected representatives and officials of the Council to determine what should happen, the writers of the letter wanted those decisions to be informed through debate with a cohort of 'interested and instructed' members of the general public who had been brought together under the aegis of a new type of organisation, a 'civic society', examples of which were already being established in other parts of the country.

The purpose of these new societies was described as being 'to educate and interest [their] members in planning, design and architecture; to care for the preservation of what is best from the past; to take action, if necessary, on current development; and most importantly of all, to give thought and study for the future'.

The main proposal outlined in the letter was to hold a public meeting to discuss the establishment of a civic society for Wakefield with the aim of ensuring that the city would continue to be 'a pleasant and fair place' in which to live.

The meeting went ahead, being held at Wakefield Town Hall on the evening of Monday 9th March 1964 under the chairmanship of the then Bishop of Wakefield, and approximately 100 people attended. As a result, a working party was convened and Wakefield Civic Society was born, becoming a registered charity soon afterwards.

Ever since the Society was established, we have taken a keen interest in everything to do with the planning and development of our city and the surrounding area. We review and comment on planning applications, meet with developers and council officials to discuss proposals and to offer our advice. While we have no statutory power, we can point to decisions where our influence can be identified.

While we campaign for the conservation and re-use of the city's older buildings, especially those which are listed or are in Conservation Areas, we are not a 'preservation society' per se; indeed, we are prepared to champion very modern architecture when it is of the highest design quality and we consider that a modern intervention is appropriate. We appreciate that this will sometimes mean that an older building may have to be demolished but what we think most important in such cases is that there is a debate about what is retained and conserved and what is taken down. The Society, is at heart a community organisation and therefore well-placed to facilitate such debate.

As a registered charity, the Society is run by an Executive Committee of volunteers who are trustees of the charity (we do not have any staff). Over the years, many people have taken their turn on the committee. Some of the people who have served (and currently serve) on the committee have been planning experts in their professions or are people who have followed a career in architecture and design; but many committee members have had no such background and are drawn to the Society through an interest in helping to make their city an attractive place in which to live or work. Whatever background our committee members have, they are people who care passionately about what happens to their city. They are proud of Wakefield and want to foster an appreciation of the city's qualities both to residents and visitors alike.

I joined the Society in 1989. Having attended just a few events, I found myself being invited to join the committee, being co-opted in April 1990. I was immediately impressed by the level of debate, the breadth of subject matter and the dedication that my fellow committee members showed to their tasks as they diligently reviewed planning proposals, wrote papers, launched projects and organised exhibitions; all things that we continue to do today – alongside much else.

When I was first elected as President of the Society in 2002, Wakefield had been chosen by Yorkshire Forward (the regional development agency at the time) to be one of the first towns and cities to take part in an 'Urban Renaissance' programme. Working with consultants Koetter Kim Associates and representatives from Yorkshire Forward, the Council established a Town Team whose meetings I attended on behalf of the Society. Other representatives were local residents or came from local businesses and other organisations. Over time, we collectively agreed a vision for what we would like to see happen in Wakefield in the following years. The resulting document, *Developing the Vision*, published by the Council in 2005, set out design themes and key development areas (KDAs) for the city centre and these ideas then fed into the emerging local plan. The vision would go on to inform the planning and development decisions that have been made in Wakefield ever since.

Property matters are often complicated and development schemes can take many years to come to fruition, particularly when a recession strikes, as happened with the financial crisis of 2007-8, but work on some of the KDAs in the vision has been taken forward – the Marsh Way KDA became Trinity Walk, the Westgate KDA became Merchant Gate and the Waterfront KDA is as described with the work to transform

the redundant Rutland Mills into Tileyard North being just the latest part of the jigsaw.

Times change, of course, and cities evolve. With the changing times, our habits and lifestyles change also, in part to take advantage of new technologies that connect us in ways we might never have imagined 20 years ago, and in part to take account of new trends. The vision agreed by the Town Team in 2005 needed a refresh to take account of today's realities, including lessons being learned from the ongoing Covid pandemic. The virus alone has accelerated changes in our habits in ways which could not have been foreseen only a year ago – and some of those changes, such as an increase in on-line shopping and working from home, may well prove permanent and will have an impact on how we use our city centres and their buildings for years to come.

Wakefield Council recently commissioned architecture and urban design firm Farrells to lead on a new master plan for Wakefield and I have fed the Society's ideas into the conversation about what should go into that plan. The master plan is being informed by the work of Wakefield's High Street Task Force and Town Deal Board, on which I also sit as a representative of the Society.

With so much going on, the Society's Executive Committee felt the time was right to document our own thoughts and to share them more widely, not only with our own members but with partners and other stakeholders across Wakefield.

Unfortunately, the Society's committee hasn't been able to meet face to face since February and so our discussions have been held almost entirely via email and Zoom video conferencing but, in a process initiated via the use of a questionnaire issued to members of our Executive and Planning Sub-Committees, and followed up by subsequent deliberations, we are now ready to publish our own vision document.

Compiled for us by Executive Committee member Barry Goodchild MRTPI, who is also a Professor (Emeritus) of Housing and Urban Planning, *Our Vision for Wakefield* sets out our current thinking on what we would like to see happen in Wakefield. The ideas contained here are not intended to be prescriptive – decisions will still ultimately be made by the Council or, in some cases, central government. No, the ideas in this report are to encourage debate – a debate we started almost 57 years ago.

Kevin Trickett MBE,

President

29th January 2021

Regenerating and replanning Wakefield City Centre: a policy paper from Wakefield Civic Society *

Barry Goodchild **

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report summarises how Wakefield Civic Society sees the future of the city centre and is based in extensive discussions by members of the Executive Committee and Planning Sub-Committee. The aim of the report is to find ways of making the city centre a more attractive and more enjoyable place for those who live, work or visit there, whilst retaining its distinctive historical identity. The current problems faced by Wakefield city centre are the product of fundamental changes in the local and national economy and are unlikely to be reversed. Cumulatively, those changes imply a different type of city centre, mostly concerned with cultural and recreational activities rather than either retailing or commercial office employment.
- 1.2 City centre regeneration requires a co-ordinated approach that encompasses urban management as well as redevelopment, improvement and other physical measures. A key recommendation is therefore for more co-ordinated urban management and for additional security measures, for example tackling anti-social behaviour. Moreover, as part of a renewed emphasis on urban management, the Civic Society recommends a review of the effectiveness of street cleaning and maintenance arrangements and, in addition, a review of the effectiveness and coverage of the existing city centre CCTV system.
- 1.3 Otherwise, our proposals fall under four main headings:
 - promoting cultural activities;
 - promoting tourism and visitors;
 - promoting liveability and connectedness; and
 - increasing the number of city centre and inner-city residents.
- 1.4 To go through each heading in turn: The promotion of cultural activities is a theme in many local policy documents, for example those associated with 'Creative Wakefield'. In part, the Civic Society welcomes the promotion of cultural activities as an extension of our long-standing concern with conservation and heritage. In addition, in the context of regeneration, the Society views cultural activities as enabling an inclusive strategy for the city centre economy. In this context, various supporting measures should be considered such as:
 - the creation of indoor and outdoor event spaces, proposals for which we understand are already underway;
 - provision of additional city centre sports facilities and open-air activity spaces.

* <https://wakefieldcivicsociety.org.uk/>
Wakefield Civic Society was founded in 1964 out of a concern for the built environment of our city. As a registered charity (number 236034) and through its membership of Civic Voice and YHACS, the Society is dedicated both to preserving and celebrating our built heritage and to campaigning for new developments to be of the very highest standard and quality possible.

** MRTPI, Professor (Emeritus) of Housing and Urban Planning, Trustee of Wakefield Civic Society
Contact: barrygoodchild@wakefieldcivicsociety.org.uk

- the safeguarding of accessible low-cost work and display spaces;
 - the promotion of co-work housing.
 - the promotion of a good quality digital and on-line infrastructure, capable of delivering free Wi-Fi, fast download speeds and involving the establishment of digital drop-in centres for public use.
- 1.5 To attract visitors, a high standard of urban management, maintenance and security is crucial. Other, additional measures include:
- the promotion of more city centre events, both indoors and outdoors.
 - better signposting;
 - the creation of attractive, continuous pedestrian routes within the city centre and in particular a more clearly defined pedestrian link between the Ridings and Trinity Walk, with a controlled crossing point over the Springs/ Westmorland Street;
 - stricter control on advertisements and shop fronts;
 - higher quality street furniture such as benches and planters for trees and shrubs.
- 1.6 To promote liveability and the quality of life, a determined effort is necessary to improve the local environment and, in some cases, to repair the damage caused by motor vehicles and previous exercises in urban development. This means:
- the provision within city centre streets of more, high quality landscaping, including green landscaping and of places for outdoor activities;
 - consideration, in the longer term, of bringing Ings Beck to the surface;
 - implementation of a landscaping and tree planting programme along the streets and roads that encircle the city centre, with more pedestrian crossing points of these same roads;
 - the introduction of traffic calming measure, and/or further pedestrianisation measures in the city centre.
- 1.7 To promote more, good quality housing, a wide range of different measures are necessary, including.
- the effective control on the conversion of offices and retail premises to housing and, in addition, the control of conditions in houses in multiple occupation;
 - a review, with if necessary additional survey work, of the condition of the city centre and inner-city housing stock, of the needs of residents and of how those needs might best be satisfied;
 - for new mixed-use housing schemes, the making of pedestrian links to Kirkgate and Westgate stations (with, if necessary, the creation of new pedestrian links to Kirkgate) and the provision of access to activity areas and green spaces;
 - on a more speculative note, the creation of a model, sustainable mixed-use neighbourhood in the Waterfront area.

2. Introduction: aims and scope

- 2.1 This paper is about ideas and policies for city centre regeneration in Wakefield. It is a statement of the principles that should underly proposals and has been prepared in response to current discussions surrounding the Town Deal¹ and to the closely related exercise in master planning currently being led by the consultants Farrells². In addition, Wakefield Council is undertaking a consultation exercise on a statutory local plan for 2036 for the district that also, of course, covers the city centre³. There is obvious overlap between the proposed local plan, the master planning exercise and city centre regeneration and an equally obvious need for coordination between the different planning and regeneration elements. There is a distinction, however, between a statutory development plan, mainly concerned with land use, and a statement of regeneration and design principles, as is the concern of this paper. It is hoped therefore that the contents of this paper contribute to debates about the city centre, whilst also providing a yardstick for future discussions within the Civic Society itself.
- 2.2 Promoting a debate and promoting ideas to contribute to that debate means, in turn, the adoption of a flexible concept of the city centre, compared to, say, the master plan or other fixed proposal. A master plan, once worked out in detail, creates a blueprint of the future. In contrast, a discussion of ideas, as here, implies a relational view of urban space, meaning a variable space defined in relation to different activities, landscapes and purposes.
- 2.3 The city centre is defined in the proposed Local Plan 2036 and other documentation in various ways:
- as a core area immediately around the Cathedral and extending to the Trinity Walk and Ridings shopping centres;
 - as the area within the so-called ‘Emerald Ring’ as it is currently understood comprising Marsh Way and the A61 on the east side and on the west a combination of Ings Road and the recently developed Mulberry Way around Westgate railway station;
 - as a broad ‘Inset Map’ area extending to the St John’s area, the Lightwaves Leisure Centre, the River Calder Waterfront and Westgate Retail Park.
- 2.4 When members of the Society’s committee were asked their views in the questionnaire, the centre was defined narrowly to comprise Westgate, Wood Street, Northgate, including the connector roads, the main retail centres (Trinity Walk, The Ridings) and the Civic Quarter. Subsequent discussions have encompassed a larger area, roughly equivalent to the plan ‘Inset Area’ and within about half a mile of the Cathedral, and include the Waterfront and the St. John’s area, both of which are key to the existing and future identity of the city. Clearly once urban design and regeneration ideas are accepted and implemented, a more precise definition of the plan area will be necessary, but for the moment a flexible position is appropriate.
- 2.5 The account starts with the urban design precedents and context of the city centre. This initial section ‘Setting the scene’ is a summary of proposals and previous measures for the city centre and analysis of the causes of the current problem. Subsequent sections deal respectively with how the views of the Civic Society were ascertained, before going on to discuss the results of discussions within the Civic

Society and then analysing in more detail the various ideas put forward in the discussion.

3. Setting the scene – precedents and context

- 3.1 The present planning exercises are not the first to provide a vision for Wakefield city centre. In 2005, Wakefield Council published an outline master plan called 'Developing the Vision'⁴, prepared by the US-based architectural and planning consultants Koetter Kim Associates under the Yorkshire Forward Urban Renaissance programme then in operation. 'Developing the Vision' recognised that 'The city has a distinctive and highly identifiable historic core. Much of its core historic architecture is of very high quality and is still intact.' The document then went on to offer a distinctive vision based on a combination of:
- the conservation of the historic core;
 - the concept of an 'Emerald Ring', a tree-lined boulevard around the historic core;
 - the need for better pedestrian connections within the city centre and between the city centre and its surrounding neighbourhoods; and, finally
 - the use of the waterfront as 'a wonderful resource'.
- 3.2 The above four principles, as stated in 'Developing the Vision', were neither unique to Koetter Kim Associates nor original. Similar ideas were already established in other regeneration projects in the UK and elsewhere in the world. Then, as now, urban regeneration proposals have sought to promote a distinct local, readily identifiable place identity, to reduce the visual and other impact of heavily trafficked roadways and to exploit the advantages of waterfronts and other natural features. The originality of 'Developing the Vision' lay instead in its local synthesis and application.
- 3.3 The subsequent influence of 'Developing the Vision' is evident in the continued protection of the character of conservation areas, in the design, layout and siting of Trinity Walk, in the siting of The Hepworth Wakefield gallery and to some extent in tree planting and other green landscaping projects. Given the significance of 'Developing the Vision', the local plan and master plan documentation should consider explicitly its legacy and the implications of the principles stated therein – for example, whether they should still be applied, whether they need to be taken further or modified as appropriate. The position of the Civic Society is that the principles stated in 'Developing the Vision' continue to offer a starting point.
- 3.4 Nevertheless, a revised master plan and regeneration strategy is necessary in Wakefield owing to radical changes in the local property and employment markets. Over the past few years, from the recession of 2008 onwards, many established city centre economic activities have disappeared or have become reduced in size and scale. City centre retailing has suffered from the growth of out-of-town centres and, more recently, from a consumer shift towards on-line marketplaces, with the rate of that shift being accelerated by the Covid-19 lockdowns. The liquidation of Debenhams as a national retailing company, announced in early December 2020, serves to emphasise the scale of the decline of city centre retailing.
- 3.5 City centre office employment has also declined. Public sector employment sources such as the Crown and Magistrates' Courts, HMRC offices and the police headquarters have either been centralised in Leeds or have moved out of town.

Some local professional firms such as accountants and solicitors have followed, without any apparent counter trend involving the opening of city centre offices by new companies. Some local commercial businesses such as estate agents are, in any case, facing low-cost on-line competition.

- 3.6 Covid-19 restrictions have also promoted working in the home, rather than in the office, and are likely in the view of many to lead to a long-term, though not complete change in the direction of home working, especially for work that involves the use of on-line sources. Since office space will still be needed for face-to-face meetings and other activities, the long-term implication may be a redesign of the office, rather than its disappearance. The implications for a relatively small city centre such as Wakefield are uncertain, however. In commercial office development, the size of an urban centre counts, with development concentrated in and around the largest regional centres and this pattern is likely to continue⁵. As a result, the promotion of commercial office development is unlikely to prove a viable regeneration strategy.
- 3.7 To counter decline, there has been a significant number of mostly public sector investments: In the words one respondent:
‘There are Merchant Gate, Trinity Walk, the New Market Hall (although a failure as such, the architecture is really good), the remodelling of the Bull Ring, the changes made to Coronation Gardens and Jubilee Gardens, the new West Yorkshire History Centre, The Hepworth, renovation of Kirkgate Station, the new Westgate Station, Wakefield One, the refurbishment of Crown Court (which used to be a car park), the Art House, refurbishment of Unity Hall, and so on – plus all the new restaurants. Wakefield today is barely recognisable from how it was in the 1990s.’
- 3.8 The various schemes as completed have mitigated but not eliminated the sense of decline and neglect. The following comments summarise the problems:
‘There are the makings of a very attractive city centre, but the centre seems to be lacking something. In functional terms the chronic loss of shops and reduced footfall makes it a ghost town. In form, the main open-air frontages particularly on Upper Kirkgate are bland or tacky,’
‘The centre isn’t clean. Empty shops are not kept tidy. No green space. ... Top of Westgate has no purpose during the day and looks neglected.’
‘Empty shop units. Too much traffic, unfriendly to pedestrians outside the precincts.’
‘... the number of closed premises and roller shutters detract from the streetscape. Shutters would be better fitted inside the buildings.’
- 3.9 At the same time as the economic functions of the city centre have declined, other jobs have been created in large industrial and distribution estates close to motorway junctions along the M1 and M62, as well as in similar estates in Leeds District and, before the Covid 19 pandemic, in offices in Leeds city centre. There is far more commuting into and out of Wakefield District than before. In addition, extensive estates of new housing with some retailing have been developed to the north and east of the city centre, with the promise of more in the near future.
- 3.10 The challenge is therefore to find new uses for city centre spaces, within an economic landscape where the spatial distribution of activities has changed fundamentally and is unlikely to be reversed. The regeneration of the city centre is, moreover, not simply to find uses for empty and underused sites and buildings. The challenge is to avoid the segregation, social exclusion and dereliction that followed

urban decline in Britain and the US in the 1970s. Empty and underused property will deteriorate if left empty too long. In the context of urban decline, empty property is also used or converted for other, less valuable, and sometimes undesirable purposes, as is already evident in Wakefield. Vacant sites become converted to car parks. Empty shops, empty pubs and empty offices become converted to low-cost and low quality multi-occupied residences, sometimes of an unacceptably poor quality.

4. The methods used to ascertain views

- 4.1. To provide a statement of the views of Wakefield Civic Society, a questionnaire was circulated to members of the Society's Executive Committee and Planning Sub-Committee in the late summer of 2020. There was potential for 22 responses. 18 responses were received, with one person sending apologies because of other commitments and three others not replying at all, despite a reminder.
- 4.2. The questionnaire covered whether the respondents found the city centre attractive, what they liked and disliked in the city centre, whether the city centre had improved over the past ten years, what they saw as the priorities for the future, whether, as part of existing policies, the concept of the Emerald Ring should be retained, what should be done for existing residents, businesses and visitors, which streets and areas should be the main priority for investment and finally what the Civic Society should do differently. Wherever possible the questionnaire asked for qualitative responses, rather than yes/ no answers or ticks on an attitude scale. The answers were mostly detailed and reflected the strong interest of those consulted.
- 4.3. Following the circulation of the questionnaire, the comments were collated and circulated to all the respondents who, in turn, were invited to an on-line discussion session in which 13 members participated. The discussion was recorded. The city centre has also been discussed at other meetings of the Executive Committee and Planning Sub-Committee and some ideas from earlier meetings have also been included in the following account.

5. The range of measures

- 5.1 The key summative question was intended to determine the extent of agreement about policy measures. Relevant members of the Civic Society were presented with a range of nine typical policy measures as currently used in urban regeneration in the UK and then asked whether and to what extent they agreed with their application in Wakefield. The measures comprised:
 - a) Increase the employment population,
 - b) Increase the number of residents,
 - c) Manage a decline in the number of retail premises,
 - d) Promote tourism and visitors,
 - e) Promote cultural activities, education and learning,
 - f) Create a green, walkable and cyclable centre,
 - g) Traffic calming and shared spaces,
 - h) Create better connections with surrounding areas, and
 - i) Promoting the use of nearby parks and waterways.

- 5.2 The varied support for the different measures is shown in Table 1 (end of document). Though there was widespread support for all the policy measures, the promotion of cultural activities and of tourism were the most popular. Managing a decline in the number of retail premises was the most surprising priority and was almost certainly a consequence of the impact of the pandemic lockdown and the emergence of many more boarded up retail units. Previous planning policies in Wakefield and elsewhere have sought, with varying degrees of success, to restrict peripheral retailing activities to protect city centres. The implication of the pandemic closures and of the switch to on-line retailing is a retrenchment and contraction of the retailing core.
- 5.3 To say that retailing requires managed decline is not to say that it will or should disappear. It is obviously important to retain a basic range of city centre retailing units. In addition, it is sensible to retain less expensive retailing units to promote competition, innovation and the satisfaction of minority retail demand, for example in food and beverages. A strategy for cultural regeneration itself implies the existence of 'niche' retailing. Managing decline is, in any case, an exceptionally complex task that impinges on many different interests in the private and voluntary sectors, so requiring intensive and early consultation and detailed studies of all aspects of the existing and replacement use. Further, planning for decline is sensitive to phasing and timing. Demolition without promptly timed replacement merely adds to the number of unused sites and car parks.
- 5.4 Taken together, the responses indicate a very different city centre, a cultural rather than retail centre, with employment and local business prosperity dependent on attracting visitors both locally and from further afield. Many of the other policy measures – for example 'the creation of a green, walkable and cyclable centre', 'traffic calming' and 'promoting the use of nearby parks and waterways' are complementary to the promotion of visitors. 'Increasing the number of residents' is a slightly different policy response, more about using vacant land and empty buildings.
- 5.5 To simplify the account, two of the policy headings may be subsumed under others. Given the decline in conventional 'High Street' retailing and given in addition uncertainties about the demand for office space, promoting employment is only likely if cultural industries grow and if visitors are attracted from elsewhere. In addition, 'managing a decline in the number of retail premises' is itself dependent on the reuse of premises for other economic activities or in some cases selective demolition to promote a more liveable city centre.
- 5.6 Otherwise, the policy measures are grouped under the following headings:
- Promoting cultural activities – an economic strategy
 - Promoting tourism and visitors – conservation, place identity and attractiveness
 - Promoting liveability – creating a green centre, with better connections
 - Increasing the number of residents – more city centre and inner-city housing

6. Promoting cultural activities- an economic strategy

- 6.1 Urban regeneration through cultural activities has been a central and continuing theme of the past few years and is expressed in the networking and support programmes of 'Creative Wakefield' launched in 2019⁶ and in many recently completed or ongoing public sector and private initiatives such as the establishment of the Creative and Performing Arts College (CAPA), the development of The

Hepworth Wakefield gallery as a 'signature' building, the extension to the Theatre Royal Wakefield, the use of the former Market Hall as a digital and cultural space (WX3), the completion of Sun Lane Leisure, the rehabilitation and re-use of historical buildings to be undertaken as part of the Heritage Action Zone in Westgate⁷ for which funding has been recently announced) and re-use of Rutland Mills as Tileyard North with plans for workshops and music studios, bars, restaurants and cafes, conference spaces and a hotel⁸. The bimonthly, Artwalk, (currently being delivered on-line) organised by local artists, is also worthy of note.

6.2 Other nearby cities and districts such as Hull and Sheffield have pursued similar strategies from at least the time of the Urban Renaissance projects of the first decade of this century. The range of recent and current initiatives suggests that Wakefield is well positioned in a general shift towards the creative industries in the north of England economy. In any case, the promotion of creativity at a regional level is a mutually supportive as well as competitive activity.

6.3 As envisaged by the Civic Society, cultural regeneration has a series of dimensions and functions.

First, cultural regeneration is a means of encouraging new jobs, start-up companies, new economic activities and jobs and the occupational skills appropriate to those jobs. There are many types of work in the cultural and creative industries – skilled artisan crafts, support activities in theatre and entertainment, computer gaming and industrial design amongst others. As a jobs strategy, cultural regeneration is well-suited to the relatively high building densities of the city centre and the type of relatively small and medium scale workshops and other facilities (for display, leisure, training etc) that can be accommodated in and around the city centre.

Secondly, cultural regeneration is a means of finding uses for empty shops and other premises. Indeed, the existence of vacant property is a positive advantage if it results in lower rents and so enables artists and artisans to find somewhere to work, to display their products and in some cases to offer instructional courses.

Third, cultural regeneration is a means of turning the centre from a routine 'anywhere' shopping area to a distinctive destination incorporating entertainment and cultural uses with public art and visual attractions all of which generate footfall. The possibility of cultural activities promoting and expressing a distinctive identity was strongly supported in the questionnaire returns – for example:

'Wakefield suffers from geography: we're too close to everywhere else, so it's too easy to go to Leeds, Sheffield, Bradford etc., which means that Wakefield has to offer something distinctive and unique that people want – whether that be artisan shops, cultural outlets or whatever.'

Fourth, cultural regeneration is an extension of the Civic Society's long-standing concern with conservation, heritage and the creation of good quality public places.

6.4 There are various ways that the present exercises in urban regeneration and master planning could be extended in ways that promote cultural activities.

- The Civic Society is aware of and welcomes proposals to create new indoor and outdoor spaces (such as the former Market Hall – WX3 – and the area near to the Cathedral) for public events and entertainments.
- The Local Plan 2036 consultation proposal (Volume 1, p.188) contains a proposal for the former [ABC] cinema site for 'a sports facility linked to Sun Lane Leisure,

an arts/ cultural facility and an urban park.’ The plan proposals are not wholly consistent, however, as the local city centre proposals (Volume 2, p.25) make no mention of sports facilities on the relevant site, merely stating that the area is suitable ‘for residential, retail and leisure uses, including restaurants and cafés’. The Civic Society welcomes proposals for additional city centre sports facilities and open-air activity spaces, especially if these can be organised in a way that safeguards the future of the former cinema building. We ask that the Local Plan 2036 is consistent and clear in its support for such proposals.

- The Council might seek to safeguard and, if the demand exists, increase the availability of low-cost property with potential for use by artists and crafts people; and encourage the provision of co-work (mixed use) housing with built-in studio spaces or workshops.
- The Council might consider how best to give regeneration an explicit digital and on-line dimension, with the infrastructure for free, accessible Wi-Fi, fast download speeds and the establishment of a digital drop-in centre for public use.⁹ The experience of lockdown has greatly increased public and business dependence on on-line technology and also revealed disparities between those with good access to on-line technology and those with limited or no access. An increased dependence on technology is likely to remain for the foreseeable future, at least in part and regeneration proposals need to reflect this.

6.5 Finally, the logic of cultural regeneration could be better explained. Sometimes, as discussed in social media, the strategy is criticised as too highbrow and remote from daily life. Certainly, as conceived by the Civic Society, cultural regeneration takes many different forms and includes measures to make the city centre more enjoyable and pleasant – for example through the promotion of popular entertainment and recreational activities. Cultural regeneration is an inclusive strategy and has a strong economic rationale but this message is not always communicated clearly or effectively.

7. Promoting tourism and visitors – conservation, place identity and attractiveness

7.1 The promotion of cultural activities overlaps the pursuit of measures to encourage visitors and tourists – either as a regional destination for events, using the new indoor and outdoor spaces or as a place where visitors might stay whilst travelling to Yorkshire to see other destinations, including those based elsewhere in the district – for example, Nostell Priory, the National Mining Museum, the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and The Hepworth Wakefield gallery. The Hepworth is the closest of the local attractions, but, at the moment, it is most easily accessed from the centre by the free city centre bus service or from elsewhere by car, rather than on foot.

7.2 Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to nominate their favourite places in the city centre, for example ‘favourite street, favourite restaurant, favourite pub’ and collectively these show specific attractions with visitor potential, if they could be linked together. The phrasing of the question discouraged the nomination of specific buildings and of buildings such as the Chantry Chapel and The Hepworth outside the core city centre area. The Cathedral clearly stood out as ‘one of Wakefield’s defining buildings’. Otherwise, the favourite streets comprise Cross Square for its cafés, Tammy Hall square [Crown Court] for its ‘peace and tranquillity’, Wentworth Terrace

for its magnificent trees, domestic architecture and unusual church and Wood Street, for its civic architecture. One response commended the 'quirky atmosphere' in the emerging 'cultural quarter' in Westgate around the Theatre Royal, the Art House, Westgate Studios and its artist population. The Bull Ring generated very variable ratings, a favourite with some 'when the fountain's on' and a source of dislike for others 'too grey and hard'.

- 7.3 The most-commonly cited favourite pub was the Black Rock and mention was also made of the recent growth of restaurants on Northgate. The pubs and restaurants mean that the city centre offers facilities for socialising and hospitality and these are more diverse than a few years ago. The Civic Society has an annual award for the best restaurant visited during the year by our Dining Club. The award winners for the past three years, 2017, 2018 and 2019 (including joint winners) illustrate this growing diversity. The winners comprise Corarima (Abyssinian), Syhiba (Indian), Hokkaido (Japanese) and Create Café (home UK cooking with an emphasis on locally sourced products). We are, of course, aware of the problems that the pandemic restrictions have caused to the hospitality industry and hope that the impact can be mitigated as we emerge from the lockdown situation.
- 7.4 Respondents also noted the existence of serious obstacles in the way of making the city centre attractive and friendly to visitors. In part, the problem is about the low public awareness of Wakefield as a destination. When people arrive, however, they are likely to encounter other problems. The attractive streets nominated as 'favourite places' are separated from one another by other 'scruffy, littered, depressing' streets, by 'unattractive shop fronts with gaudy and poor-quality signage', by 'some very unappealing 1960s and early 70s buildings', by empty, boarded-up shopfronts and by excessive traffic. In addition, anti-social behaviour emerged as a very significant issue in the on-line discussion. Some of those present in the discussion, particularly but not exclusively women, had encountered verbal abuse whilst walking around the city centre. Visitors and residents have to feel safe if the city centre is to become attractive.
- 7.5 Making the centre more attractive to visitors generated a large number of suggestions: better signposting; the creation of continuous, attractive and safe pedestrian routes to bring the centre together, as was in any case recommended in 'Developing the Vision' (2005); the creation, in particular, of a more clearly defined pedestrian route between The Ridings and the Trinity Walk shopping centres; stricter control of advertisements and shop front design, making them more restrained, less gaudy and more in keeping with the surroundings; higher quality street furniture such as benches and planters for trees and shrubs. It was not possible to generate any priorities as to which streets deserve short-term improvement rather than others. Questions were asked about priorities for improvement, but these generated a scatter of suggestions, indicating that no single solution would suffice and that multiple measures would have to be pursued, probably over an extended period of years.
- 7.6 In any case, the management of city centre streets is as important and sometimes more important than physical improvements. To cite one questionnaire response – 'the town centre needs cleaning up, pavements repairing and reinstating'. Urban management commonly falls between different departmental responsibilities and requires a more co-ordinated approach. Policing is another priority. The

management of Trinity Walk and The Ridings shopping centres have proved relatively effective in controlling anti-social behaviour. To tackle anti-social behaviour, an effective and fully staffed CCTV system is seen as essential (we are not aware of how extensive and well monitored the existing system is). Known 'hotspots' should be identified and patrolled by the police.

8. Promoting liveability – creating a green centre, with better connections

- 8.1 Cleaning up the city, better urban management and more effective CCTV will make the city centre more liveable – more pleasant and with a better quality urban realm. Promoting liveability also means the provision of good quality landscaping, of places for outdoor activities and play areas for children – whether the children of residents living in the area or of visitors. The proposed Local Plan 2036 only makes mention of greenery and places for outdoors exercise in relation to a site north east of Kirkgate and makes no mention whatsoever of providing children's play areas. The local authority should find new ways of introducing greenery, pocket parks and open-air activities into more streets within the city centre and its immediate surroundings. The Society's discussion recognised, however, that children's play areas raise security and safeguarding concerns, that they have attracted anti-social behaviour elsewhere in the district and that anti-social behaviour is itself a problem.
- 8.2 For the longer term, there was support for a more radical programme of 'greening', based on the re-wilding plans for the former Broadmarsh Shopping Centre in Nottingham¹⁰ or the opening up of Porters Brook in Sheffield¹¹. Ings Beck is canalised or culverted in Wakefield. Opening up the beck would simultaneously create a pocket park (or a series of pocket parks), enhance biodiversity and provide a water retention space to counter flooding.
- 8.3 Promoting a green centre with connectivity is a restatement of the proposal in 'Developing the Vision' for an 'Emerald Ring' or tree-lined boulevard that encircles the city centre. Respondents were asked whether they had heard of the Emerald Ring. 12 said 'yes' and 6 said 'no'. The sample of respondents are all well informed and interested in planning, urban design and regeneration in Wakefield. If a third of respondents (albeit relatively recent recruits to the Committee) had not heard of the concept, it was likely that very few others in the general public had heard of or understood the concept. Despite these uncertainties, there was general support for the Emerald Ring. In the words of one respondent who had not heard of the concept: 'This means that the city centre traffic is directed outside the city centre. Plus, as many trees as possible is a good thing.'
- 8.4 Having expressed support for the Emerald Ring, there are various concerns:
- First, the Emerald Ring concept needs to be better explained and better publicised. The proposed Local Plan 2036 refers to the Emerald Ring as Wakefield's 'inner ring road'. It is more than that. The local plan and master plan need to talk instead about the need for a 'green boulevard' or 'tree-lined boulevard' around the city centre, complementing and forming the outer boundary of an area where traffic is discouraged.
- Second, tree planting has lagged behind road improvements. For example, the reconstruction of the Kirkgate roundabout has been accompanied by little or no landscaping, just grass (and some of that plastic) with some trees (although some of

these were, unfortunately vandalised shortly after planting and have not yet been replaced). One member suggested that trees might be sponsored by local companies and was sure that local companies would come forward. Another possibility for Kirkgate roundabout might be to create a wildflower meadow as has been undertaken for roadside areas in Nottingham and Rotherham¹².

Third, more direct and controlled crossing points need to be provided to allow safe pedestrian movement across Ings Road and across the complex road junctions that hinder access to The Hepworth gallery. In its original conception, the Emerald Ring extended to where The Hepworth Gallery now stands yet there have been no additional landscaping or additional crossing points in the vicinity of The Hepworth and the River Calder bridge. What crossings that have been provided (between the Chantry Chapel and the gallery) require pedestrians to perform a complex series of manoeuvres – it is little wonder that so many people seem to take their life in their hands and cross against the traffic.

Fourth, the Emerald Ring means the pursuit of measures to reduce traffic flows and speeds within the city centre. There remains uncertainty how and to what extent this is to be done. The Civic Society has in the past called for increased pedestrianisation in Westgate, Northgate and Wood Street. An alternative to full pedestrianisation would be a combination of traffic calming measures (and in some streets further, more extensive traffic calming) and selective pedestrianisation. Traffic calming means detailed road redesign, speed reduction humps, more crossing points and a 20 mph speed limit. Within the city centre, crossing The Springs/Westmorland Street was identified as a specific hindrance to pedestrian connectivity between Trinity Walk and the Ridings retail centres. Although designated mainly as a route for buses and cyclists, it is not uncommon to see a variety of vehicles using the street.

- 8.5 Promoting the city centre as an attraction for visitors will require the provision of car parking. It is likely that many visitors to Wakefield city centre will continue to use cars for the foreseeable future. One proposal mentioned in the questionnaire returns is to develop shoppers' car parking at strategic points around the internal side of the Emerald Ring and long stay parking outside it. Other locations are also possible. Parking areas and the rail and bus stations could in any case be served by the free city centre bus service which should be extended in terms of the area covered, frequency of journey and operating hours.
- 8.6 In the treatment of car parking, the aim should, in general, be to avoid extensive car parking in the inner urban core and to promote Wakefield's place identity through the selective redevelopment of existing parking areas to the north and south of the city centre with the consequent recovery of the former street and building patterns. While the proposed Local Plan 2036 will be supplemented by design guidance, the policy statements on the city centre should be much clearer on the redevelopment of city centre car parks to recover the historic building pattern.
- 9. Increasing the number of residents – more city centre and inner-city housing**
- 9.1 The development of city centre housing has been a major trend since about 2000 in the UK, though mostly in London and the largest regional centres where jobs have also grown. In Leeds and Manchester, for example, numerous high-rise blocks have been completed and the local housing market has been transformed. The pandemic

has altered housing demand in favour of houses with gardens and also houses that are sufficiently large to accommodate home working. The shift towards larger houses with gardens may be temporary. However, it is likely to reduce the private development of city centre flats in the short-term, with implications for Wakefield and elsewhere.

- 9.2 Wakefield's city centre housing market is, in any case, on a different and much smaller scale than that in Leeds. Although a number of apartment blocks have been built in recent years, the tallest blocks are Chantry Waters at the Waterfront (9/10 storeys) and The Pinnacle on Ings Road (six storeys). Other proposals for medium to high-rise blocks that have been put forward appear to have stalled. Instead, we have seen new housing and low-rise apartment blocks – such as the three-storey housing and the apartments at Merchant Gate and another scheme of two-storey family houses currently under construction to the north side of Westgate End at its junction with Alverthorpe Road.
- 9.3 In addition, city centre housing has been created through the conversion of offices and retail premises. For conversion schemes, the local authority has a duty to ensure that proposals meet the relevant floorspace standards, have natural light and in the case of conversion to multiple occupation, meet additional requirements as to whether they meet health and safety risk assessments and conform to design and internal amenity standards.
- 9.4 While the Civic Society welcomes the growth of an inner-city resident population, which will create demand for local businesses, the existing housing stock within the city centre and inner city (the Inset Map area) varies greatly in its quality. More information needs to be published and, if necessary, collected about the standards, condition of the housing stock and the needs of current and potential residents. Once these needs are identified, Wakefield Council may then consider how best to satisfy those needs and support residents.
- 9.5 The proposed Local Plan 2036 (Vol. 2) has identified at least 11 'special policy area' sites of various sizes within the 'Inset Map' area. In the case of the policy area between the Kirkgate roundabout and Kirkgate Station, Wakefield Council is currently working with Wakefield District Housing (WDH) to provide more affordable housing¹³. The Civic Society welcomes these efforts. Otherwise, the scale, number and diversity of these different projects means that it is undesirable for either the Civic Society or the local authority to generalise about their likely demographic characteristics – for example, whether designed for young people, older people or families with children. With one exception, it is also undesirable to offer detailed criteria about their design. The exception is that further high-rise housing is unnecessary and that adequate densities can and should be achieved through low-rise houses and flats (up to five storeys). Some of the sites are also in Conservation Areas and design will have to conform to the criteria specified in the conservation area appraisal documentation. It is also likely that redevelopment will take many years to complete and that design standards and the property market will change over time. Mixed use as applied to these policy areas might involve housing and either retail, workshops, training, educational and leisure facilities or some combination of all these.

- 9.6 The scale and likely long period of completion also means that the planning and design of these special policy areas should look to the future and aspire to the creation of a series of sustainable, zero-carbon neighbourhoods. While there is no universal definition of a sustainable neighbourhood, it is possible to raise levels of sustainability compared to recent practice and to demonstrate sustainability according to relevant technical and design criteria. It would be wonderful if Wakefield Council could develop and offer a UK model of a sustainable neighbourhood, for example along the Waterfront corridor. There are very few examples where a model sustainable neighbourhood has been created from an existing, mostly industrial area.
- 9.7 Proposing a properly sustainable neighbourhood is, to an extent, a hypothetical and speculative proposal as it would require the use of additional funding. There are limits to what can be asked of private developers. However, the development of an environmentally sustainable model neighbourhood would greatly help in transforming the image of the city. Given the size and number of the special policy areas and the existence of competing greenfield housing sites elsewhere, the ability to obtain additional funds for a model project may, in any case, be the only way to generate a name and market for the proposed mixed-use schemes in the immediate future.
- 9.8 Apart from sustainability, connectivity and access are also crucial themes in the design and development of the proposed mixed use special policy areas. The proposed schemes should therefore be designed to take advantage of pedestrian links to Kirkgate and Westgate railway stations (with, if necessary, the creation of new pedestrian links at Kirkgate), to contain green spaces and small parks and provide access to activity areas.

10. The role of the Civic Society

- 10.1 The final question was as follows: What in your view could Wakefield Civic Society do differently/more of to bring about improvements to the city centre?
- 10.2 All the answers are subject to a recognition that the Civic Society operates alongside other voluntary groups in Wakefield and West Yorkshire, such as the Wakefield Historical Society, CPRE West Yorkshire and groups concerned with social welfare, the protection and improvement of the environment and the protection of local amenities. Resource constraints are also important. In the words of one respondent:
 'It boils down to capacity – how much do we want to do compared with how much we, as a committee, are prepared to do? We already do a great deal – and some societies envy us – but others do just as much and sometimes even more. We could, of course, do more if we employed staff (or freelancers) but we would need to establish funding streams to cover the costs.'
- 10.3 Many of the comments were about the continuation of existing activities in promoting conservation, heritage protection and heritage education and about finding ways of making these activities more effective. For example, the Civic Society is already contributing to the regeneration of Westgate by putting together a series of short films about the area and its buildings¹⁴. As regeneration proceeds under the Westgate Heritage Action Zone initiative, the Civic Society will work with Wakefield Historical Society and others to provide other material, including a new book on the history and development of the area. One suggestion is for 'more story telling about

the people who lived in the buildings so people connect to the different spaces and they become meaningful to them'. The Civic Society already makes a connection between historic people and buildings through the installation of blue plaques, guided walks and publications. Other methods might include local exhibitions and presentations in community centres so that local people exchange 'memories of the changes which have taken place'. Such presentations are already made, but more would be desirable.

- 10.4 Otherwise, the role of the Civic Society, as conceived in the questionnaire responses, is mostly about planning and urban design – for example, 'more engagement with the Council on developing ideas and projects for updating the city centre plan'; 'more involvement with developers and council at pre-planning stage, backed by legislation making this a legal requirement'; having 'a voice in the strategic planning of the master plan', articulating 'a clear vision of how we want the city centre to develop, based on good practice elsewhere'. This paper is itself an example of the Civic Society developing and articulating a vision for the future.
- 10.5 In both the heritage and planning role, the increased use by the Society of on-line video and of social media was commended in the responses as a means of reaching more people, especially as it might reach more young people. It was acknowledged that the Society needs more young people to get involved and engage them in what the future of the city's buildings means for them and their own future. Civic Societies tend to be seen as organisations for older, retired people. Wakefield Civic Society has in recent years attracted many younger people, including people in their 20s to 40s and some of these have, in fact, joined the Executive Committee. There is, however, still more that could be done.

11. Conclusions

- 11.1 Regeneration and planning policies in a city centre such as that in Wakefield have to combine continuity and change. The existing built environment comprises a huge fixed investment that is extremely expensive and sometimes impossible to replace. In addition, the older built environment is worthy of conservation for its historic value and as a means of protecting and enhancing the identity and sense of place of the city centre. Continuity in the built environment means in turn that older planning and urban design studies remain relevant such as that undertaken in Wakefield by Koetter Kim Associates.
- 11.2 At the same time, technology, economic production and life-styles are always in flux. The recent decline of Wakefield city centre is paralleled by similar declines elsewhere in the UK and abroad. The pandemic lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 have accelerated a move of retailing away from city centres. However, the decline in city centre retailing in Wakefield and another related decline in the demand for city centre office space was apparent before the pandemic. City centre regeneration is therefore about adaptation to changing economic conditions and life-styles. However, it is also about adaptation to new policy agendas, for example those concerned with the environment, public health and the promotion of outdoors activities in the aftermath of the pandemic.
- 11.3 City centre regeneration must of necessity involve various public, private and voluntary sector organisations and interests and it must necessarily seek to co-

ordinate proposals and interests or at least prevent different proposals from interfering with each other or having undesirable effects. As economic conditions, life-styles and policy priorities continue to change, the Civic Society will continue to comment on plans and proposals with the intention of making Wakefield and its city centre more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive.

12 List of web pages and references

- 1 <https://www.wakefield.gov.uk/regeneration/major-projects/wakefield-towns-fund>
- 2 <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/farrells-wins-wakefield-city-centre-masterplan-contest>
- 3 Wakefield District (2020) Local Plan 2036 Publication Draft Plan Volume 1: Development
- 4 Wakefield MDC (2005) Developing the Vision: Summary Report
- 5 'The Future of Cities' 'How to make cities more livable after Covid 19 Financial Times Special Report, 23/11.2020
- 6 <https://creativewakefield.net/>
- 7 <https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/heritage-action-zones/wakefield/>
- 8 <https://tileyard.co.uk/stories/tileyard-north-coming-soon/>
- 9 <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-12-03/debates/4F252B08-F4A8-4909-B6B6-6097CA0D9027/DigitalInfrastructureConnectivityAndAccessibility>
- 10 <https://tileyard.co.uk/stories/tileyard-north-coming-soon/>
- 11 <https://dcr.t.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/3.-Porter-Brook-Pocket-Park-compressed.pdf>
- 12 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-48772448>
- 13 <https://twitter.com/MyWakefield/status/1340993679117459457>
- 14 <https://vimeo.com/wakefieldcivicsocietyhaz>

Table 1: Agreement on Policy Measures

“Various measures are currently being applied to improve town and city centres in the UK and elsewhere. Please indicate below with an ‘X’ if you agree with the application of all or any of the measures to Wakefield city centre, as identified below”.

	Completely agree	Generally agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Generally disagree	Completely disagree
(a) Increase the employment population	9	6	3		
(b) Increase the number of residents	7	4	3	4	
(c) Manage a decline in the number of retail premises	7	5	4	2	
(d) Promote tourism and visitors	14	3	1		
(e) Promote cultural activities, education and learning	15	1	2		
(f) Create a green, walkable and cyclable centre	11	5	1	1	
(g) Traffic calming and shared spaces	11	5	1	1	
(h) Create better connections with surrounding areas	11	3	4		
(i) Promoting the use of nearby parks and waterways	12	4	2		