

River Tyne North Bank

Strategic Framework and Masterplan

Community and Stakeholder Engagement
February & March 2009

Summary Overview



Report by

Kevin
Murray
Associates

July 2009

Summary Overview

The development of a masterplan to guide the co-ordination of proposals for future development around the River Tyne North Bank and Wallsend Town Centre, in Newcastle was undertaken in tandem with a progressive learning sequence, whereby local residents, organisational stakeholders and other interested parties, could contribute to the process. This approach was advocated by the North Bank of the Tyne Board, (which is a partnership bringing together North Tyneside Council, Newcastle City Council, One NorthEast and Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The approach was deemed to fit – and follow from - other consultative processes, and also to exemplify good practice in formulating proposals before submitting applications.

Kevin Murray Associates were engaged to facilitate the process alongside the design team, which is led by GVA Grimley, effectively as a semi-detached independent adviser to the Board, acting as facilitator to a series of events. This is their report, of the events which set out the details of each stage of the process.

Background and Purpose

A series of earlier proposals for Wallsend Town Centre had been prepared in 2005, in the form of a regeneration strategy which looked to enhance:

- (i) Home - improving the quality of life for residents in the area
- (ii) Work - planning investment in the area and along the riverside and
- (iii) Play - the provision of leisure and play facilities in the Wallsend area

This led to the preparation of an Area Action Plan (AAP) for Wallsend Town Centre in 2007, which underwent issues and options stage consultation in February 2008. The findings of this study (the River Tyne North Bank Strategic Framework and Masterplan) will inform the AAP before it proceeds to preferred options stage and further consultation.

A fresh approach to the study area was embarked upon in 2008, which aimed to

- Develop proposals which are rooted more strongly in a wider context, including investment in education, employment, infrastructure, new buildings, new homes and the environment
- Engage residents and other stakeholders in the process in a creative manner
- Build new relationships, dialogue, aspirations and some consensus around the regeneration of the area

The approach adopted by Kevin Murray Associates was one of engaging key parties in a **progressive learning sequence** – whereby participants worked through aspects of the masterplan process in tandem with the design team – inputting to and influencing their work.

The key stages were:

- Jan 2009 - networking with key community representatives, groups and stakeholders to input issues and themes to consultants and advise on consultation process and events
- Feb 2009 - input issues, constraints, opportunities and ideas
- Mar 2009 - review emerging approaches and options in March 2009

Engagement Methods

To enable the participation in these various stages of the process

- letters were sent to known community representatives and stakeholder parties – using a database that grew with the process
- emails were sent to those with email addresses – again growing with the process
- posters were disseminated to the local area in advance of each stage
- information communicated to the whole borough via the Council's 'Up Close' magazine

The events were planned and held

- during the afternoon and in evenings (as advised by community representatives) within each of the neighbourhoods – to enable attendance
- in daytime, for officer and organisational stakeholders, again to optimise attendance

Generally a discussion workshop approach was adopted – to enable close scrutiny of plans, photos, ideas, options etc. This was accompanied by plenary discussions. The full details – with attendance and photos – are provided in the following event report.

A site visit and workshops with children and young people also featured as part of the shared appreciation of the area.

Stage 1: January and February 2009

Following on from several networking meetings with community representatives and council officers, a series of workshops, with stakeholders, agencies, businesses and members of the community, were held between 18th-20th February at a number of different locations to explain the process, share initial analysis, draw out issues and aspirations, scenario planning and vision setting, to be fed into the masterplan design process. Key issues raised included the lack of public access to the waterfront; a lack of employment and training, a poor town centre, inefficient public transport, poor quality of living as a result of 'dirty industries' located too close to residential areas. Ideas for improvements and development were creative and forward-looking and were incorporated into the masterplan.

STAGE 1 – KEY HEADLINE ISSUES

Willington Quay

- Willington Quay welcomes change
- It's used as a dumping ground for undesirables, both industry and people
- Lack of community facilities - such as health
- Capacity of Tyne Tunnel to take additional traffic is questionable
- Provision of regional facilities e.g. Tunnel - at expense of quality of life of local people
- Fear of rat-running

Stakeholder and Agency

- Opportunity for riverside access
- Celebrate cultural heritage & tourism
- Site/area is large, fragmented, neglected
- Environmental quality issues - contamination
- Ownership disparate - land assembly challenging
- Improved transport links – connectivity

East Howdon

- Develop a maritime 'ideas' village – skills cluster
- Improve public transport – bus routes & frequency
- Housing - private/absentee landlords
- Address smell from sewage works
- Improve quality of life of residents
-

Wallsend Community

- Access to employment and training – apprenticeships, 'Centre of Excellence'
- Access to quality business space – new business
- Improve Metro and Bus stations
- Improve parking in centre
- Cycle and pedestrian routes – safer, brighter
- Youth facilities/activities
- Access to waterfront – cafes, restaurants, water related leisure activities, walks
- Heritage – preserve Wallsend's identity
- Signage, publicity, image - very important
- Re-use of Town Hall
- Maritime Museum on riverfront
- Expand Segedunum – hotel, etc
- Redevelop Wallsend Town Centre – high quality shopping environment
- Pedestrianised and family friendly facilities
- Maintain passing traffic to reasonable levels
- Improvements to housing necessary

Stage 2: March 2009

From 17th to 19th March another series of workshops were held to explore different emerging design approaches and decision areas in more depth. This involved

- a stakeholder and agency session in Wallsend Memorial Hall
- an open evening Wallsend Community session in Wallsend Memorial Hall
- an open afternoon East Howdon Community session at the East Howdon Community Centre
- an open evening Willington Quay Community session at St Pauls Church
- a session with students at Burnside Community College
- an after school session with members of the Wallsend Boys and Girls Club

During these sessions the team explained and illustrated all 13 key opportunities for the riverfront, Wallsend Town Centre, East Howdon and Willington Quay and the differing levels of intervention that lay within each of the opportunities. The team highlighted some of the implications and trade-offs involved. These were explored by attendees and feedback was provided on all the opportunities, and additional suggestions made. There was a lot of support for a number of the ideas, such as creating a sustainable town centre, reconnecting the town centre to the waterfront, making the most of the Swan Hunter site and encouraging the development of an accessible town centre and public transport network. There was however some disappointment that there were not more radical solutions for Willington Quay and East Howdon, which took the neighbourhoods and residents away from the surrounding 'dirty' industries.

STAGE 2 – KEY HEADLINE ISSUES

North Bank Industrial corridor

- 1 Clearly identify **strategic roles** and lead uses/activities along waterfront – and rationale (concern of planners)
- 2 Deal with the **dirty industries**/noxious & bad neighbours – by policy **and** firm enforcement – otherwise all else is futile
- 3 Promote **clustering of dirty industries** (waste water treatment and recycling plant) – away from residential areas and communities – buffering is not enough
- 4 Only industries that really **need the water** for their businesses should be on the waterfront
- 5 Maintain **maritime links & skills** but with a modern twist on waterfront – e.g. offer location for Maritime Planning Agency
- 6 New industries/companies to **recruit from local people** where possible

Housing and community

- 7 Some element of new **residential/mixed use on riverfront**, with access/views – came up several times, even from children
- 8 Housing to **relate to the vernacular** of the area, but not to follow it slavishly
- 9 Preservation of **'The Green'** as a distinctive conservation area – core part of Wallsend identity
- 10 Include a more **radical solution for East Howdon** – move residents to new housing along the river – give them a clear opportunity to improve their health and circumstances. (Many would happily leave now with the right compensation deal)

Movement

- 11 **Strategic routes/roads** to be re-considered – avoid rat-running (more direct link to TT2 – current scheme will further blight areas like Willington Quay)
- 12 **Pedestrianisation or pedestrian-friendly** – be very clear which and where (fear of displacement)
- 13 Adequate/appropriate **parking** – essential for Wallsend TC viability– but also in employment areas

Heritage

- 14 Aspire to create a linkage between **heritage and modernity** – culturally, physically, brand-wise eg Roman fort, mining, shipbuilding
- 15 **Town Hall** – beautiful building, which portrays a sense of history – retain character but be creative with use
- 16 There is potential in **EH as partner/promoter** – for funding. Lottery, etc

Wallsend Town Centre

- 17 **Crossroads** focus – key to creating a sustainable town centre
- 18 Role of **vibrant** town centre – to attract employers, employees, visitors, residents – retail important – but not just about retail
- 19 **Swan Hunter** site is pivotal – at end of historic spine connecting Green, High Street, Segedunum and Tyne riverside access.

Other

- 20 **Maintenance** and management of green links, open spaces – must be improved
- 21 Retain (encourage) strong **sense of community** and identity – in all areas
- 22 **Signing and public realm** improvements – especially for heritage and footpath/cycle corridors
- 23 **Reputation/branding/image** of the area to be dealt with – strategic process must **transform image**
- 24 **Aspiration for quality development** – eg **attractive glass buildings** with views out to river along North Bank
- 25 **Deliverability** and clear cost/funding and agency responsibility – there is much skepticism – need confidence some things will happen. If nothing does – things will spiral downwards

Information from all of these sessions was fed into the design process.

Stage 3: September 2009

It is proposed that a Strategic Framework Plan Consultation Event should be held in September when the emerging preferred framework would be presented. Details of when and where these events will be held will be made available when agreed with the Board.

Headline Summary

1. The engagement process in masterplanning the River Tyne North Bank has been intensive, progressive and quite demanding on all parties.
2. The process itself has been generally welcomed and often strongly supported – though not everyone could make all meetings.
3. The process has genuinely informed the design and prospective outcomes in several areas and themes – which would have been materially different or absent without such engagement.
4. There are different levels of support and concern – including
 - broad support for the process and emerging masterplan outcome
 - broad support for the process, but uncommitted until more specific detail emerges on buildings and spaces
 - opposition to the outcomes, mainly on grounds of a loss of heritage and preservation of a conservation area ('The Green')
5. Key aspects to consider in moving forward are
 - the precise policy status of the different areas of land
 - the status, if any, of the masterplan components, in guiding/controlling future development
 - what changes, design evolution might still be applied to the masterplan or its successor documents
 - what the phasing plan is – and which components may be developed first – and any implications for intermediate and later phases
6. The process has engaged and informed many people and bodies about the potential future role and opportunities of the area. Many are behind positive change. However, not all are fully supportive of all the detail and may not become so.
7. There may be scope in the future to get a stronger perspective from outside the area – about the important potential this holds for the wider city.
8. This process does not affect the statutory rights of any party within the formal planning process, once any application(s) is (are) lodged.