

## The future of city centre south

Following on from the South Bank meeting on 28 January, the City Council convened back-to-back workshops on 20 April. The first one was on place management, public realm and animation, and the second on marketing, communications and engagement. The 30 participants were encouraged to come up with priorities for short-term improvements to the appeal of the area.

It was interesting to hear that people who live and work there have not taken to the name 'South Bank' with its attempt to draw parallels with the Thames-side area of that name. They prefer to say 'city centre south' to link the area to the adjacent old city centre. Now that the Council has acknowledged the logic of widening the area much beyond what might be termed waterfront, this argument gains strength. Within the 200 hectares, the old terms Holbeck, Hunslet and specific site names are favoured. The 'Urban Village' tag for the northern part of Holbeck, always questionable, should be dropped.

At the micro-level, cleansing by the City Council has been stepped up already. There was a suggestion that as part of a more interactive interface with the Council, residents, visitors and businesses should be able to report elements that need attention, praise positive efforts from whatever source and make suggestions.

Temporary/meanwhile site uses can help to draw attention to areas in transition. With the World's Biggest Disco Ball event on 1 July (on the site between Black Bull Street and Crown Point Road) Laura Wellington of Duke Studios aims to attract 6000 people. Some of the temporary installations for that occasion will no doubt live on and be adapted. Might road closures instigated for this create a precedent? Perhaps we'll have **closed roads every 1<sup>st</sup> of the month: "Pedestrians First"?**

Another element of enhanced safety for people moving through the area will be improved illumination. Hunslet Stray is an early focus for better lighting to encourage more students of the three new colleges and the Academy School to use this route from Leeds Bridge to Hunslet Road. Combining lighting and artwork here and elsewhere will yield double dividends. Bryony from the Tetley drew attention to highly relevant 'provocations' about public art, including the notion that it doesn't have to be permanent. Large-scale works will continue for many years, including in connection with HS2's arrival, so public art can be used to screen sites. All this will add towards Leeds' bid to be European Capital of Culture 2023.

And thinking of the long term, Victoria Walker of CEG urged inclusion of a visionary statement to precede the site-by-site information on the new website devoted to the area. We await the Arup/Gehl framework of course, but the generally-welcomed principles that were aired at the January meeting at the Tetley could be included on the website immediately.

It would help both the short-term appeal of the area and the long-term coherence of development if there were some immediate cooperation amongst the landowners/developers. Might a 'proto-Business Improvement District' be the way to encourage upfront investment in the bits between the sites? A way of having a pot of money to devote to vital infrastructure that could be deducted from eventual CIL payments, perhaps.

It is encouraging to have dialogue with the Council in this way and regeneration officer Lee Arnell is keen for those who have an interest in the area to participate in the conversation. The next workshop will be on 11 May.

**Rachael Unsworth – for May 2016 Civic Trust Newsletter**