

Public Realm Strategy Interim Planning Statement prepared by Gillespies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The first point to make is that the strategy is not costed or prioritised.

It is also clear that the report has been written by a number of people and 'stitched together'.

Important comments such as the creation of a viewing area alongside the Chapel on the Bridge are included as 'throwaway' comments in the most unlikely of places.

There is no clear overview of exactly what work is proposed and also because of the way the report is written there are dangers that it could be misinterpreted. Two people could reach entirely different conclusions upon whether most existing seating - defined as tired and outdated - and the heritage style street signs - defined as fussy and dated - are to be replaced. This equally applies to the street lighting and paving.

The report has no paragraph numbering so cross referencing is difficult.

The following is therefore my best attempt to bring clarity to 145 pages of A3 text and illustrations.

2. TOWN CHARTER

The strategy is written in the context of the 'Town Charter', goal eight of which states that:

We want the best in architecture, urban design and public spaces for Rotherham and will no longer accept the mediocre or the banal.

The strategy brief refers to the need for the Public Realm Strategy to *bring about transformational change in the image and identity of Rotherham by realising the distinctiveness and value of existing environmental assets, creating a sense of place and prosperous identity.....*

3. BOUNDARY

The strategy boundary extends as far as the St Ann's site in the north, Guest & Chrimes site and Mansfield Road in the south, Doncaster Gate / Wharncliffe St junction in the east, and the railway line in the west.

4. DEVELOPMENT MATRIX

The Section on current town centre policy and development includes a development matrix listing all potential developments. Whilst not strictly relevant to the response the Society needs to make on the public realm strategy it is clear that we must keep a watchful eye on the following matters:

- The matrix suggests that the Express Parks development company is involved with the Council in new development on Crinoline House, the Civic Area, Drummond Street car park, and the outdoor covered market. This company is also referred to in relation to Forge Island, Bailey House, the Mecca Bingo car park, the Bus Interchange, Eric Manns Building, and Guest and Chrimes.

It is to say the least unusual for a Council to 'put its eggs all in one basket in this way.

- It is also surprising that the matrix highlights the future use of the Town Hall as being under consideration.

The plan also identifies a large block of property on Doncaster Gate, centred on the Civic Theatre, as being 'under consideration'.

Perhaps clarification on these matters should be sought separately from the Council.

5. CONSULTANTS ANALYSIS

The consultants note that although the majority of medieval streets have been widened and new streets created, the central area of the Town Centre retains a medieval, organic character. They identify five major public spaces:

- Effingham Square.
- The Market Square.
- All Saints Square.
- All Saints Yard.
- . Town Hall Square.

n.b. Walker Place is consistently overlooked in the Strategy - presumably due to future redevelopment intentions.

In the SWOT analysis the consultant's state*there is a lack of green space and routes into the Town Centre (minimal opportunities for people to relax, and enjoy - lunchtime places).*

Lack of shaded areas and canopies, particularly in All Saints Square.

The Town Centre generally turns its back on the River Don and there is little acknowledgement of its importance in the existing townscape.

Access to the riverside is seen to be poor, and it is proposed that the Chapel on the Bridge and the Weir should be emphasised by public realm treatment. The 'deck of cards' public space proposed off Market Street should become a major new destination together with a destination point promoted as part of the Guest and Chrimes development.

Surfacing:

In general the public realm is disjointed and confusing with too many different materials used.

These materials are generally dated, over complicated in places, and in poor condition detracting from the quality of the buildings. In some locations as many as six materials are used together.

The reuse of old historic materials such as asyorkstone and granite setts as seen in parts of the historic core is highly appropriate, attractive and adds a richness to the streetscape.

Street Furniture:

....only a few bespoke elements evident, such as the ornate railings in Effingham Square and All Saints Square, and bespoke lighting columns in All Saints Square. Through the use of similar materials such as black painted steel, wooden slatted seats and a traditional 'Victoriana' style, a generally consistent palette of street furniture has been created. However, in places this palette is dated and tired, lacking in quality and distinctiveness (especially in relation to heritage areas).

Much is made in the accompanying illustrations of the raised seating areas (Effingham Street) and the planting areas (Bridgegate) in obstructing pedestrian desire lines.

In the later design guidelines section the seating and planters in Frederick Street are identified as 'tired and out dated'.

Signage, Lighting and Public Art:

.... the lighting and signage is predominantly traditional 'Victoriana' in style providing a relatively cohesive appearance, however the condition is poor in some locations.

In the later design guidelines section comment is made on the information signs erected in Rotherham Town Centre in the last ten years - *the gold lettering and heritage style looks fussy and dated.*

Architectural and feature lighting is lacking within the Town Centre.....The Minster should be reinforced as the central focus by lighting.

The number of public art installations should be expanded.

Public art adds richness to a space, giving areas their own distinct identity and provides ideal opportunities to encourage public involvement within the public realm. More public art would enhance Rotherham 's public realm, adding interest to streets and spaces that provide ownership and civic pride.

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY STRONGLY SUPPORTS THE RECOMMENDATION THAT THE NUMBER OF PUBLIC ART INSTALLATIONS SHOULD BE EXPANDED.

A photo caption notes that the All Saints Square video screen *enlivens space, however is poorly integrated and dominates space.*

Trees and Planting:

As Rotherham Town Centre lacks quality green space there is a case to reinforce this (the Minster Yard) as a green destination perhaps with planting displays as the main attraction.

Another pocket of green space is the planting buffer adjacent to Effingham Square. This planting is not only successful in how it screens the noise of the busy road, but also exhibits a good variety of planting that adds interest.

Street trees are of vital importance.....in addition to adding a fledgling green structure to the Town Centre they help define the function of spaces.

There are a wide variety of planters in the Town Centre however some obstruct pedestrian movement, and are in poor condition. The large planters, unlike street trees located in grilles, obscure important views and therefore legibility is decreased.

Those on Bridgegate are particularly cited as obscuring views of the Minster. Its function as a link space to All Saints Square is described as cluttered and confused.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS

From the consultation process held in September 2007 the following are worthy of note:

People were asked what features they would like to see as part of the public realm. Prompts were provided and water features were by far the most popular; public art was thought to be sadly lacking and came second in the 'wish list'. More grassed areas and comfortable seats came third, whilst improving safety within the Town Centre came fourth.

People were asked whether there were any events in Rotherham's history or local people and communities that should be celebrated. A good response suggested the celebration of steelworkers, miners, ethnic groups, Rotherham's cannon making history and design of the screw tap.

7. PUBLIC REALM VISION

The Vision has four overarching aspirations:

- A cohesive public realm palette that responds to the Town Centre's distinctiveness.
- The creation of continuous public access and destination points along the River Don corridor to reclaim the riverside.

The creation of a Green Framework to deliver high quality green spaces and structures.

The creation of the Rotherham Lighting Experience to promote the Town Centre as a destination.

VISION 1 - A COHESIVE PUBLIC REALM PALETTE

....the first aspiration is to create a single, **identifiable Rotherham Town Centre Public Realm Palette**. The proposed design focuses on a simple, subtle floor scape of buffs, greys and Rotherham Red inspired pinks drawing from proven success **and Rotherhamness**.

The strategy proposes a suite of three quality levels (Standard, High and Premium).

Standard quality streets, spaces and gateways:

Is practical yet delivers a benchmark in quality. This quality level is based on successful recent improvements to the Town Centre in order to create continuity.

- Buff concrete paving slabs for the majority of paved areas.
- Buff Yorkstone Aggregate Conservation Kerbs.
- Pink / grey mix concrete paving setts.
- Bitmac roadways with paving setts to define key pedestrian crossings. Standard furniture and lighting. Building mounted lights could be used where appropriate in Standard Quality areas.
- Greening should be an integral component of the streetscape where appropriate. Wellgate, Ship Hill, Snail Hill, and Douglas Street are defined as standard quality.

High quality streets, spaces and gateways :

This quality level is inspired by the recent improvements in All Saints Square.

- Deep grey / ochre Yorkstone paving slabs for majority of paved areas to create a simple elegant floorscape. Grey Granite kerb.
- Natural stone paving setts for paving accents (Grey / buff Yorkstone or Rotherham Red sandstone).

- Heavy Traffic carriageways should receive Bitmac (with granite or slag aggregate).

Granite Paving Setts (Rotherham Red/Grey mix) should be used to upgrade light traffic carriageways, pedestrian crossing and on-street parking bays.

Standard Palette of furniture and lighting to maintain continuity. *Building mounted lights and accent lights such as floor lights should be integrated where appropriate.*

- Incorporate art and features.

High quality areas should incorporate a greater variety of features including raised planters and more innovative solutions such as green walls. Public spaces should include a high quality focal point and a variety of seating opportunities (formal and informal).

The majority of streets and spaces are defined as high quality.

In the later Zones of Influence Section further details are given in relation to the 'Retail Core' which helps to clarify matters:

It includes a vision of *shelter and canopies to enhance the shopping experience.*

Opportunities should be explored along the main retail streets and pedestrianised routes (such as Effingham Street and Frederick Street). An illustration of canopies extending out from Cascades and College Walk is given for Frederick Street but not for Effingham Street.

- **Bridgegate:** the report seems to propose the removal of the existing large tree planted beds and the street lighting, and replacement with smaller planters on the east (Coop Bank) side of the street and new lighting reminiscent of standard street lighting.

- Upper Millgate and Market Street: Create a tree lined character. Clearly define movement and stopping places and reduce clutter. Retain existing Yorkstone on Upper Millgate and replace remaining area with natural stone setts. Replace paving on Market Street with Yorkstone slabs.

- Church Street: Retain existing Yorkstone slabs and replace concrete cobbles with natural stone setts.

High Street:.....requires a drastic approach to transform its current decline and poor image:

- *Bold high impact design - an arty, vibrant, quirky place.*
- *Arts and food focus with independent shops.*
- *Proposed Yorkstone paving...*
- *... a landmark sculpture / spire.*
- *Contemporary scheme focussing on lighting, sculptural features, paving with a twist, vibrant shop frontages and cafe spill out space.*

WHAT IS PAVING WITH A TWIST?

The Crofts and Town Hall: A distinct, vibrant urban quarter to be celebrated - a 'branded' destination in its own right.

- *A unique branded suite of furnishings such as signage, shop fronts, information boards, banners.*
- *A festival or event associated with the Crofts.*
- *Its quirky streets, alleys and architecture lends itself to introducing more independent shops and cafe culture.*
- *Transforming negative alleys and links into positive experiences and places for public art.*

No changes to floorscape are referred to, but an 'inspiration image' highlighted by the consultants showing buildings repainted in bright colours is totally inappropriate.

- Howard Street Market Square Enhancement: *The dated water feature and mobile catering vans overpower the space, creating a cluttered area which acts as a barrier to movement.* Oddly the consultants solution to this 'clutter' is to propose a huge 'landmark' canopy covering the entire Market Square and seven trees in colourful moveable containers sited on the pedestrianised roadway.

Westgate: *Should be defined as a distinct quarter established as an accessible piece of Town Centre. The route along Westgate should announce arrival in the Town Centre.* No details given - reference being made to the Design Code which is already adopted by the Council.

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY WOULD BE CONCERNED AT ANY INTENTION TO UNDERTAKE MAJOR CHANGES TO THE EXISTING PEDESTRIANISED STREETS DUE TO THE QUESTIONABLE ADDED VALUE AND POTENTIAL DISRUPTION CAUSED. SELECTIVE ENHANCEMENT IS FAVOURED.

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY SUPPORTS THE ADOPTION OF THE NEW QUALITY LEVELS TO THOSE STREETS AFFECTED BY MAJOR REDEVELOPMENT WORKS.

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY SUPPORTS THE PROVISION OF CANOPIES IN APPROPRIATE LOCATIONS AND CONSIDERS THAT AS A FIRST PRIORITY THE COUNCIL SHOULD REVISIT THE PROPOSAL IT APPROVED IN 1988 TO

ERECT A GLAZED CANOPY ALONG THE EFFINGHAM STREET SHOPS FRONTAGE.

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY IS NOT CONVINCED BY THE PROPOSALS FOR A LARGE CANOPY COVERING THE MARKET SQUARE AND SUGGESTS INSTEAD THAT A PUBLIC ART INSTALLATION BE CONSIDERED.

Premium quality streets, spaces and gateways:

A showcase for Rotherham intended for a select few streets and spaces. (National / International profile). This quality level proposes a step change in terms of both investment and design.

Same approach /palette as High Quality Streets, Spaces and Gateways, however additional investment should deliver:

Increased site specific detailing (such as the introduction of additional materials into the public realm).

Bespoke furniture and lighting.

*Landmark art and features. **

**three examples are given which are far from convincing.*

On Premium Quality Streets lighting should be a major feature of the public realm and be bespoke and innovative throughout. Building mounted lights and accent lights such as floor lights should be integrated where appropriate.

The design of premium quality areas should encourage pedestrian dominant environments and where appropriate introduce new surface materials such as recycled glass or bold paving bands.

Public Spaces should provide a landmark focal point (such as canopies, structures, lighting, public art, water feature) and a variety of seating opportunities (formal and informal).

The premium quality streets are defined as Market Street, and Domine Lane, and premium quality spaces All Saints Square, the Minster Yard, the 'deck of cards' by the riverside, Chantry Bridge, outside the RCAT Clifton building, and sites on Forge Island.

In a later section Market Street and a short length of Main Street is identified as'

Rotherham's Flagship Pedestrian Link linking Guest and Chrimes to the Town Centre'.

The link is intended to fulfil a 'civic 'function and character linking the new Civic Centre planned for Guest and Chrimes to the Minster.

Although the consultants talk of creating a grand promenade no details are given other than references to a bespoke lighting feature or/and the introduction of a distinctive red granite paving band (as a variation to the high/premium quality palette).

More questions than answers are raised in reconciling the Vision with the practical needs for vehicular access in the Market Street / Domine Lane area.

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY BELIEVE THE PROPOSALS FOR THE FLAGSHIP PEDESTRIAN LINK TO BE ILL CONSIDERED RELATIVE BOTH TO THE SERVICING AND TRAFFIC CIRCULATION NEEDS OF THE AREA AND TO THE APPEARANCE AND FUNCTIONALITY OF THE MAIN STREET BRIDGE.

Transport Gateways:

The Consultants propose that the underpasses, alleyways and pedestrian bridges providing arrival routes to the Town Centre should be illuminated imaginatively, include

public art, and be well signed to reduce uncertainty. Works are also proposed to the car parks, railway station, bus station and roundabouts.

Bus Station Frederick street entrance:

Transform a vehicular dominant space into a positive pedestrian gateway leading into the Retail Core. Explore the opportunity for high profile public art to mark the junction. Remove highway clutter and pedestrian barriers, whilst safeguarding the functionality of bus routes....

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY BELIEVE THE PROPOSALS FOR THIS JUNCTION TO BE UNWORKABLE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MAJOR SERVICING NEEDS OF THE BUS STATION AND THE CASCADES CENTRE / BRIDGE STREET SHOPS.

Create an understated sensitive setting for Our Lady's Chapel.... the design should introduce a seating area/viewing deck adjacent to the chapel overlooking the river incorporating interpretive signage. At night the chapel should receive a complementary lighting approach to All Saints Minster.

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY REMAIN TO BE CONVINCED THAT THE CREATION OF A VIEWING DECK IS COMPATIBLE WITH CREATING AN UNDERSTATED SENSITIVE SETTING FOR THE CHAPEL.

VISION 2 - RECLAIM THE RIVERSIDE

Rotherham must reclaim and celebrate the River Don. *The planned major redevelopment of sites adjacent to the waterfront including Guest and Chrimes, Westgate, and Forge Island, creates a once in a lifetime opportunity.*

The strategy aims to provide:

- Continuous public access along the riverside.
- Attractive links to and from the riverside.
- A series of river icons and destinations along the corridor. Emphasise existing icons such as the Weir and Our Lady's Chapel and create a number of new public spaces that interact with the river.
- A public art attraction transforming the potentially negative flood defence walls into a creative canvas subject to agreement from the Environment Agency.

Intriguingly, or perhaps confusingly, the analysis plan of the riverside defines the Police HQ and Courthouse complex as a 'future area of change' in common with all the major potential redevelopment sites in the vicinity.

Proposed New Riverside Walks:

- East bank of the River Don from Grafton Bridge to the Inner Bypass (rear of Effingham Street shops).
- On the Bridge Inn / Trades Club riverbank.
- Behind the bus station.
- Along the east bank of the River Don from the Riverside Precinct to the Inner Bypass at Bow Bridge.

Overprinted on parts of the routes is 'limited opportunity to deliver Riverwalk'.

Most of the riverside links would adopt the High Quality surfacing palette. The exceptions being the Tesco footpath alongside the River Don which would be Premium Quality, and the

links by the Bridge Inn/ Trades Club and to the rear of the Effingham Street shops which would be Standard Quality.

Later in the report it is suggested that the bus station walkway may be a cantilevered walkway and that the Bridge Inn/Trades Club is *likely to be redeveloped in the future following the relocation of RMBC offices to Guest and Chrimes*.

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY IS CONCERNED AT THE LINKAGE DRAWN BETWEEN THE REDEVELOPMENT OF RMBC OFFICE SITES AND THE FUTURE OF THE NELLIE DENES/TRADES CLUB SITE. THE SOCIETY WOULD OPPOSE DEMOLITION OF NELLIE DENES IN CONNECTION WITH THE PROVISION OF A RIVERSIDE WALK.

A number of 'river destinations' are suggested at Forge Island, off Market Street, behind the Royal Mail Sorting Office and on the Guest and Chrimes site.

Forge Island:

The 'Zones of Influence' section of the report provides more detail on the plans as follows. The proposal is for a contemporary place focussed on culture and the arts with a tight, dense new townscape and urban form. With small scale, legible streets, links and yards - a people place. Traffic free (service access only). A high quality public space and a continuous waterfront promenade.

A nationally recognised place and this should be highlighted with a showcase lighting installation that wraps around the entire waterfront edge.

A new river icon is proposed... in order to mark the prominent corner of Forge Island. Forge Island has a rich history and the foil owing provides inspiration for the new landmark such as:

- *Reinstatement of a water wheel.*
- *Sculpture inspired by the Samuel Walker forge that created large numbers of cannons.*

*

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY SUPPORTS THE CONCEPT OF A 'RIVER ICON' AT FORGE ISLAND BUT BELIEVES REFERENCES TO A WATER WHEEL AND CANNON MAKING TO BE HISTORICALLY INACCURATE.

A new bridge is proposed to replace the existing Tesco footbridge. It is difficult to accurately interpret but the plans seem to suggest the removal of the Tesco road bridge when and if Forge Island is redeveloped.

The 'Deck of Cards', Market Street:

The Westgate Demonstrator Project which is currently underway proposes a leisure/commercial destination adjacent to the Weir featuring a flagship waterside public space 'the deck of cards'.

Proposals include an active riverside with bars and restaurants with linear riverside walk linking the 'deck of cards' public space and a public space on the southern end of Westgate. This latter mentioned space is not clear on the plans and may relate to the southern end of the Demonstrator Project and a proposed 'river destination' sited to the rear of the Royal Mail sorting office.(n.b. this would not be classed as green space or a pocket park).

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY BELIEVES THAT THE 'DECK OF CARDS' PUBLIC SPACE WOULD BE A HISTORICALLY APPROPRIATE LOCATION FOR A PUBLIC

ART INSTALLATION BASED UPON EDWARD CHRIMES' INVENTION OF THE 'SCREW DOWN TAP'.

Guest and Chrimes:

No great detail given because of the pending redevelopment proposals but:

Guest and Chrimes should be defined and incorporated as a new piece of Town Centre.

A number of public spaces creating riverside destinations.

The riverside promenade proposals should engage with and echo the design guide for the Rotherham town centre River Corridor.

There is an opportunity to enhance and create a green character through tree planting adjacent to the river.

RESPONSE- THE SOCIETY IS CONCERNED THAT THE CONSULTANTS HAVE AVOIDED ANY REFERENCE TO THE GUEST & CHRIMES LISTED BUILDING WHICH WITH APPROPRIATE PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS AND REDEVELOPMENT OF ADJOINING LAND WOULD BE COMPARABLE TO MANY OF THEIR 'INSPIRATIONAL IMAGES'.

A new bridge is proposed linking Guest and Chrimes and the old Sheffield Road swimming baths site.

The River Wall:

The river wall currently dominates the river environment as it passes through the Town Centre. Its required improvement as part of the RMBC Flood Alleviation Scheme provides an opportunity to enhance the river wall treatment.

A major design competition is proposed to tackle the river wall, exploring two scenarios: *An understated approach... creating the opportunity for 'big bang' art installations at premium locations such as Forge Island. A bold wall coping with ornamental railing ...to create unity throughout.* This might include Rotherham Red cladding to the river wall and inset lighting.

- The entire river wall as a continuous high impact public art installation throughout the Town Centre. A landmark attraction to Rotherham.

This might include text, poetry, a story, a fairy tale concept or an art wall along its length. A Water Wheel Generator at the Weir that powers features along the river; Moving Light, Reflection; A Whimsical Sculpture - the 'River Don monster'; An historical sculpture *inspired by Forge Island cannon making history (???)*; Floating Sculptures; Jets, water walls powered by the water wheel.

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY SUPPORTS THE GENERAL CONCEPT OF THE RIVER WALL BECOMING A HIGH IMPACT PUBLIC ART INSTALLATION THROUGH ROTHERHAM TOWN CENTRE.

VISION 3 - GREEN FRAMEWORK Green Spaces:

This proposes the introduction of a series of high profile new and upgraded green spaces and a network of small scale green pocket parks and courtyards.

The major green spaces are: Minster Yard:

The proposal is for a soft green space with a magical lighting scheme in the trees is straightforward and contrasts with the narrative in Part 7 which referred to premium quality spaces with landmark focal points such as canopies, public art and water features.

Further clarification is given in the later 'Zones of Influence' section.

Understated public realm with existing paving retained. Durable timber seating. Seating should become a feature in the garden and be incorporated into wide sculptural stone kerbs/walls.

Additional paved space outside the Minster, planting within the lawns, small scale sculptures, facade improvements to surrounding buildings, magical lighting scheme, treatment to adjacent alley links, existing tree canopies lit with fairy lights.

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY SUPPORTS THE EMPHASIS ON AN UNDERSTATED PUBLIC REALM IN THE MINSTER YARD WITH SELECTIVE ADDITIONAL SEATING AND PLANTING DISPLAYS.

Effingham Square:

The architects sketch for a contemporary flexible urban space at Effingham Square is by contrast frankly unintelligible. However, a plan included later in the 'Zones of Influence' section shows the existing road downgraded to pedestrian priority with twenty two trees in moveable red, green and blue coloured containers - some of which are sited in the roadway. Hastings Clock is re-sited into the square. The taxi rank is proposed to be rationalised or relocated and Drummond Street is 'downgraded'.

It would incorporate 'Green Connections' (whimsical, innovative public art features such as green -wails or green cubes that link the network of major green spaces and pocket parks throughout the town).

A pedestrian dominant environment is a key principle, however, the extent of this approach is dependent upon the outcome of future plans for downgrading / humanising Centenary Way.

n.b. The proposed closure of the Phase 1 section of the Inner Bypass was flagged up in the original LDA consultants report but no logical justification was given.

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY CONSIDERS THE PROPOSALS FOR EFFINGHAM SQUARE TO BE UNWORKABLE GIVEN THE SERVICE ACCESS REQUIRED TO THE OLD TOWN HALL AND COLLEGE WALK SHOPS. RATHER THAN 'GREENING', A MAJOR PUBLIC ART INSTALLATION SIMILAR TO THE MEADOWHALL 'STEELMEN' SCULPTURE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED IN THIS VICINITY.

Pocket Parks:

These are proposed at St Ann's Roundabout, RCAT Clifton building, Forge Island and Guest and Chrimes. There is reference to the informality that can be created by existence of small courtyards.

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY IS CONCERNED AT THE GLARING OMISSION OF RED LION YARD FROM THE STRATEGY. THIS IS ONE OF THE POOREST AREAS OF FLOORSCAPE IN THE TOWN CENTRE BUT HAS SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL FOR TRANSFORMATION INTO A UNIQUE URBAN ENVIRONMENT.

Green Connections:

Green connections can become a whimsical, innovative public art feature in Rotherham Town centre. The strategy proposes a design/branding competition to arrive at a

recognisable form for this concept. The 'Green Connections' intent is demonstrated by illustrations using red, green, and blue coloured cubes and green 'living cubes' (in effect brightly painted hanging baskets) to create imaginative green features.....In addition to performing a number of functions such as signage, seating, lighting, and greening, the green connection cubes used repetitively could be an effective visual tool to highlight key pedestrian links within the Town Centre, such as the route from Guest and Chrimes to All Saints Minster.

The areas proposed for Green Connections include the riverside walk, the main pedestrianised streets (apart from Bridgegate), Wharcliffe Hill, Percy Street, Doncaster Gate, Moorgate Street, and the Crofts, and as referred to above the premium quality route from the Minster to Guest and Chrimes.

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY IS NOT CONVINCED BY THE 'GREEN CONNECTIONS' THEME OF RED, BLUE, AND GREEN PLANTING BOXES WHICH IN TIME MAY BE SEEN AS JUST AS 'FUSSY AND DATED' AS THE EXISTING STREET FURNITURE SO ROUNDLY CONDEMNED BY THE CONSULTANTS.

Doncaster Gate / Drummond Street / Wharcliffe Hill area:

In the later 'Zones of Influence' section it is proposed that *Doncaster Gate and Drummond Street should become part of the Clifton Park experience. Drummond Street would benefit from green enclosure to improve the microclimate whilst emphasising the green link.*

Percy Street is proposed as a 'green connection' and a high quality route connecting Clifton Park to the Town Centre which will pass *through a new premium space that celebrates the college bringing it into the Town Centre.*

A living green wall is suggested as an opportunity for the former Britains store, and red, green and blue window planting boxes are proposed for the Royal Building and an improved or redeveloped Classic Cinema on Doncaster Gate.

VISION 4 - ROTHERHAM LIGHTING EXPERIENCE The strategy aims to provide:

- Permanent High Profile installations and places.
- Temporary Locations which are constantly in flux.
- An all year programme of events culminating in a Christmas light extravaganza.
- A showcase for local artists.
- A more environmentally sensitive approach (such as self powered lighting installations and LEDS).

This theme overarches and complements the 'everyday' lighting proposed for the Town Centre which according to the later design guidelines section should introduce 'White light' *as a baseline for all Town Centre lighting following successful schemes in residential areas of Rotherham.*

Creative Lighting is also suggested such as uplighting trees, seats and features, in ground uplights to mark pedestrian routes, illumination of buildings, bold public art features such as projections and interactive features.

Clarification is given in the later 'Zones of Influence' section on the major lighting installations.

Forge Island 'Ribbon of Light' Display:

Forge Island should become a nationally recognised place and this should be highlighted with a showcase lighting installation that wraps around the entire waterfront edge....This 'Ribbon of Light' display should be highly visual, active and become an attraction in its own right. In addition the Island can appear to be floating above the water! Light powered by the River Don could make reference to the rich history of the water wheel that used to be situated there and provide a green sustainable energy source. Moving or changing colours of lights could be affected by the flow of the river to create various moods and ambience. The New Arts Bridge -which has been suggested to replace the existing bridge from Corporation Street to forge Island should also incorporate lighting with opportunity for a seating or viewing platform.....

All Saints Minster:

marks the heart of Rotherham Town Centreits lighting should make a statement and can be the central part of the Rotherham Lighting Experience. The illustration shows the Minster lit theatrically, which may be appropriate during festivals and events, however, a more understated approach would be used at other times. In tandem with immersing the Minster Yard in fairy lights, the heart of the Town Centre can become a magical experience in the evenings.

RESPONSE - THE SOCIETY SUPPORTS THE PROPOSED ROTHERHAM LIGHTING EXPERIENCE AND THE PRIORITY GIVEN TO THE MINSTER. THE SOUTHERN GATEWAY TO THE TOWN CENTRE SHOULD BE ENHANCED BY INCLUDING THE RHM TOWN MILL IN THE LIGHTING EXPERIENCE.

8. MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES FROM THE DESIGN GUIDELINES SECTION

Seating and Planters:

As mentioned previously the consultants consider that much of the Town Centre's seating and planters is tired and outdated. They then propose matt black steel and wooden slatted benches for the High Quality Streets - similar to what is already in existence.

Lighting:

One thing to look out for is the implications of the introduction of 'White light' into the Town Centre. The design guidelines suggest that the design of lighting columns should be simple and elegant avoiding fussy detailing. The architects sketch of Bridgegate suggests the replacement of the traditional 'Victoriana' lighting by modern looking streetlamps similar to the ones currently being installed at the Westgate / Ship Hill junction. They comment that the gold lettering and heritage style of the present signs looks fussy and dated and then state that signs should be *designed in keeping with surroundings*. They suggest that the street name signs should be replaced by new ones incorporating a coloured Coat of Arms.

Structures:

Climate has a major impact on the way we experience urban environments and must be considered holistically as part of public realm improvements.....Structures can contribute enormously to street life and activity throughout the year including market stalls, awnings, canopies, cafe umbrellas and bus shelters. Although variety in these elements

enlivens the street scene, consideration should still be given to their cohesiveness with the proposed street furniture style and colour.

....they can become landmark features and the Vision and Framework Sections consider opportunities including the creation of covered shopping streets

n.b. nowhere in my reading of the report did I see explicit reference to covered shopping streets.

Public Art Installations:

Art is a celebration of culture and community and should be an integral part of Rotherham 's public realm. It has many benefits from being a catalyst for or product of urban regeneration and inward investment. It encourages sense of pride and an expression of a place and its heritage.

The following are some of the principles recommended:

A variety of permanent work including sculptures, water and lighting should be commissioned.

A programme of temporary installations focussed on Lighting and Green Connections.

Encourage interpretive and informative site specific art.

Encourage innovation, public interaction and animation through public art.

9. CONCLUSIONS:

The consultants are fairly positive in their visions for the Riverside, Rotherham Lighting Experience and new development sites.

The completeness of the vision is however marred by the absence of certain important items upon which one has to speculate upon future intentions e.g Guest and Chrimes' Listed building, Main Street bridge, Tesco road bridge, and Red Lion Yard.

Additionally, the consultant's case for replacing 'tired, dated and fussy' street furniture is less than convincing. They have quite clearly not reconciled the paradox between the need for a modern trendy image and a heritage image. Neither do they show clarity of thinking in relation to the proposed major greening of the town centre streets as against their own stated desire for the quality of many of the buildings to be highlighted.

Suggested response to the 'Public Realm Strategy Interim Planning Statement' prepared by Gillespies.

The response has to be made on a standard form with one comment per form which allows space for probably 20 -25 words. The following are the responses that I suggest the Civic Society should make.

1. THE SOCIETY STRONGLY SUPPORTS THE RECOMMENDATION THAT THE NUMBER OF PUBLIC ART INSTALLATIONS SHOULD BE EXPANDED.
2. THE SOCIETY WOULD BE CONCERNED AT ANY INTENTION TO UNDERTAKE MAJOR CHANGES TO THE EXISTING PEDESTRIANISED STREETS DUE TO THE QUESTIONABLE ADDED VALUE AND POTENTIAL DISRUPTION CAUSED. SELECTIVE ENHANCEMENT IS FAVOURED.
3. THE SOCIETY SUPPORTS THE ADOPTION OF THE NEW QUALITY LEVELS TO THOSE STREETS AFFECTED BY MAJOR REDEVELOPMENT WORKS.
4. THE SOCIETY SUPPORTS THE PROVISION OF CANOPIES IN APPROPRIATE LOCATIONS AND CONSIDERS THAT AS A FIRST PRIORITY THE COUNCIL SHOULD REVISIT THE PROPOSAL IT APPROVED IN 1988 TO ERECT A GLAZED CANOPY ALONG THE EFFINGHAM STREET SHOPS FRONTAGE.
5. THE SOCIETY IS NOT CONVINCED BY THE PROPOSALS FOR A LARGE CANOPY COVERING THE MARKET SQUARE AND SUGGESTS INSTEAD THAT A PUBLIC ART INSTALLATION BE CONSIDERED.
6. THE SOCIETY BELIEVE THE PROPOSALS FOR THE FLAGSHIP PEDESTRIAN LINK TO BE ILL CONSIDERED RELATIVE BOTH TO THE SERVICING AND TRAFFIC CIRCULATION NEEDS OF THE AREA AND TO THE APPEARANCE AND FUNCTIONALITY OF THE MAIN STREET BRIDGE.
7. THE SOCIETY BELIEVE THE PROPOSALS FOR THIS JUNCTION TO BE UNWORKABLE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MAJOR SERVICING NEEDS OF THE BUS STATION AND THE CASCADES CENTRE / BRIDGE STREET SHOPS.
8. THE SOCIETY REMAIN TO BE CONVINCED THAT THE CREATION OF A VIEWING DECK IS COMPATIBLE WITH CREATING AN UNDERSTATED SENSITIVE SETTING FOR THE CHAPEL.
9. THE SOCIETY IS CONCERNED AT THE LINKAGE DRAWN BETWEEN THE REDEVELOPMENT OF RMBC OFFICE SITES AND THE FUTURE OF THE NELLIE DENES/TRADES CLUB SITE. THE SOCIETY WOULD OPPOSE DEMOLITION OF NELLIE DENES IN CONNECTION WITH THE PROVISION OF A RIVERSIDE WALK.
10. THE SOCIETY SUPPORTS THE CONCEPT OF A 'RIVER ICON' AT FORGE ISLAND BUT BELIEVES REFERENCES TO A WATER WHEEL AND CANNON MAKING TO BE HISTORICALLY INACCURATE.
11. THE SOCIETY BELIEVES THAT THE 'DECK OF CARDS' PUBLIC SPACE WOULD BE A HISTORICALLY APPROPRIATE LOCATION FOR A

PUBLIC ART INSTALLATION BASED UPON EDWARD CHRIMES' INVENTION OF THE 'SCREW DOWN TAP'.

12. THE SOCIETY IS CONCERNED THAT THE CONSULTANTS HAVE AVOIDED ANY REFERENCE TO THE GUEST & CHRIMES LISTED BUILDING WHICH WITH APPROPRIATE PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS AND REDEVELOPMENT OF ADJOINING LAND WOULD BE COMPARABLE TO MANY OF THEIR 'INSPIRATIONAL IMAGES'.
13. THE SOCIETY SUPPORTS THE GENERAL CONCEPT OF THE RIVER WALL BECOMING A HIGH IMPACT PUBLIC ART INSTALLATION THROUGH ROTHERHAM TOWN CENTRE.
14. THE SOCIETY SUPPORTS THE EMPHASIS ON AN UNDERSTATED PUBLIC REALM IN THE MINSTER YARD WITH SELECTIVE ADDITIONAL SEATING AND PLANTING DISPLAYS.
15. THE SOCIETY CONSIDERS THE PROPOSALS FOR EFFINGHAM SQUARE TO BE UNWORKABLE GIVEN THE SERVICE ACCESS REQUIRED TO THE OLD. TOWN HALL AND COLLEGE WALK SHOPS. RATHER THAN 'GREENING', A MAJOR PUBLIC ART INSTALLATION SIMILAR TO THE MEADOWHALL 'STEELMEN' SCULPTURE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED IN THIS VICINITY.
16. THE SOCIETY IS CONCERNED AT THE GLARING OMISSION OF RED LION YARD FROM THE STRATEGY. THIS IS ONE OF THE POOREST AREAS OF FLOORSCAPE IN THE TOWN CENTRE BUT HAS SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL FOR TRANSFORMATION INTO A UNIQUE URBAN ENVIRONMENT.
17. THE SOCIETY IS NOT CONVINCED BY THE 'GREEN CONNECTIONS' THEME OF RED, BLUE, AND GREEN PLANTING BOXES WHICH IN TIME MAY BE SEEN AS JUST AS 'FUSSY AND DATED' AS THE EXISTING STREET FURNITURE SO ROUNDLY CONDEMNED BY THE CONSULTANTS.
18. THE SOCIETY SUPPORTS THE PROPOSED ROTHERHAM LIGHTING EXPERIENCE AND THE PRIORITY GIVEN TO THE MINSTER. THE SOUTHERN GATEWAY TO THE TOWN CENTRE SHOULD BE ENHANCED BY INCLUDING THE RHM TOWN MILL IN THE LIGHTING EXPERIENCE.

Ian Hawkrige.
2nd May 2008.