

The big cranes have come and gone but what happens next?



(Adrian Halls, Centre)

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The first phase of a master plan to transform Derby is complete but the changing economy has forced a review of the second phase. At the Big Talk, a debate organised by Bakewells Solicitors, Marketing Derby and the Derby Telegraph, some of our most influential business people tell Robin Johnson what needs to change.

JOHN FORKIN (JF): Just over five years ago, the master plan for the city was launched by Derby City Council and Derby Cityscape. The council recognised Derby was behind where it needed to be. It was always going to take 10 to 15 years to change it. The plan aimed to attract Â£2billion of investment and create around 14,000 jobs. The cranes have come in and phase one has been completed. Now we need to look at phase two. So is the current plan right? What changes need to happen to get it started? Richard, I'd like to start off with you. The council is carrying out a review of the next phase. Why?

RICHARD WILLIAMS (RW): The political and economic situation has changed. There is a need for the city council to engage more with partners, who can play their part in making sure Derby hits the ground running when things start to lift again.

Let's take infrastructure and intervention. We are close to finishing the missing link in the inner ring road. When completed it will be marvellous. Business journeys will be quicker.

In terms of intervention, one example is the Castleward Urban Village, where we are poised to give approval for the preferred developer. Another example is the railway station. We supported the Railway Station Partnership, which was put together by John [Forkin] and Richard Brown from Eurostar, which did a great job of working with Network Rail to improve the station.

We are also supporting moves to strengthen the links between education and business to create a workforce that is fit for purpose.

We have established a Â£10million regeneration fund to invest in the city and help developers make a start on sites. We have had a fantastic response to this and have received details of 19 submissions, from the very small up to projects with 100,000 sq ft of floor space. In March, the cabinet will meet to discuss recommendations on the first three. These will be substantial, totalling around 150,000 to 200,000 sq ft of floor space.

There is also the Â£50 million leisure strategy to create two large leisure hubs, incorporating an Olympic-size swimming pool, multi-purpose arena and velodrome.

We are engaging with the private sector more than ever. The private sector is taking a lead through the Derby Renaissance Board, made up of key figures from the city council and some of the city's top employers.

There's also the formation of the Local Enterprise Partnership, made up of council leaders, education and business representatives from both Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. It will replace East Midlands Development Agency, and shape the strategy. The information will be fed to the Derby Renaissance Board.

JF: Liz, as well as being a business leader, you have had involvement in Derby Cityscape and you sit on the Derby Renaissance Board. From a business perspective, where does Derby need to go?

LIZ FOTHERGILL (LF): I see Derby as a work in progress. I feel privileged to be involved in the Renaissance Board. We have a cohort of stakeholders the like of which has never been seen before and you can tell that there's a real passion to make a difference. Everyone on the board has the same agenda. The stakeholders are itching for a task to deliver. There is an endless wish-list of projects seeking funding from the Regional Growth Fund. One job for the board will be to prioritise and promote them.

STEVE HALL (SH): My concern about phase two is visibility. The first phase of the master plan involved cranes on the skyline. People could see what was happening and bought into it because it presented a powerful image. I think people are confused about what the next phase will be about. It will take more to convince them. If they know that there is a clear direction then it will increase confidence. People need to know there is a plan and it needs to be communicated.

MARTIN JINKS (MJ): Confidence is a key thing. But just look at what has been achieved in the last five years. It's absolutely wonderful. So how do we take that forward and continue the upward cycle? Investors are no longer queuing up with large chunks of money. There are lots of little things we can do, which don't cost a lot but keep confidence up. One is to smarten up some of these undeveloped sites in the city. I remember when we turned the "Hole in the Ground" in the city centre into the Sir Peter Hilton Gardens. Let's keep these festivals and events coming.

JF: The residential part of the plan has been curtailed because of the market place. But there is potential with Castleward. Is this still something we should do or should we give up?

CHRIS NEVE (CN): We should never give up. The sites are there, although there may be some reshaping to do.

There are a few concerns about the master plan. The most pressing is what's been dubbed the "Blue Corridor", which is holding up a lot of development. We need to engage with the Environment Agency to deal with this.

We are a big supporter of the Castleward project but our concern in terms of the residential side is that the density is not right. They are high density and we are not sure that there is the demand for high-density housing.

My other concern is the impact on the Cathedral Quarter as the Castleward project could cause another shift of the city centre.

KEVIN MODIRI (KM): I live at City Point, on the other side of Pride Park. It's a good place to live but the major problem is the lack of family housing.

On the subject of the Cathedral Quarter, I don't think the impact on this area was factored into phase one of the master plan. I'd like to see more schemes to increase footfall in this area, like free parking – simple schemes that increase footfall and confidence and encourage more businesses to relocate there.

DAVID SMITH (DS): Castleward could become Derby's equivalent of Brindley Place, in Birmingham. It is probably one of the most significant sites in Derby. It is close to the bus and train station. It is also close to retailers. Castleward could turn out to be a 15 to 20-year scheme. The market will decide the pace of the development. But I believe Castleward is too close to the city centre to be a housing estate.

RW: Castleward is a residential-led scheme. The area is not suitable for further commercial development. The former DRI site may be.

On the Cathedral Quarter issue, I agree entirely and we have been making improvements, such as the setting up of a business improvement district and upgrading shop frontages. My main concern is that bit in between the Cathedral Quarter and Westfield – the Cornmarket and the bottom end of St Peter's Street. This really needs attention and in June or July a vote will take place among the businesses about it becoming the city's second business improvement district.

JF: One of the things which big investors coming to Derby look out for is the number of people in suits on the streets.

They say, I see your numbers in terms of sales, but I don't see it on the streets. More office locations in the centre would unblock that.

An issue raised in the master plan five years ago was that no new offices had been built in the city centre for more than 20 years. Now we have a million sq ft of office space with planning consent ready to be built. But the lack of funding has meant these have not been built yet.

DS: Five, six or seven years ago a lot of these offices would've been built speculatively. Some major cities did get them built and now they have quite large voids because the occupiers did not materialise. Today, speculative funding is not available. Occupier-led finance will be available though. Twenty years ago we faced a similar situation. These things go in cycles. So the office locations are still relevant.

KM: The planned office developments are in the right locations. On Pride Park the major gripe is that you cannot get into town on your lunch break. If there were offices in the city centre then I think you would see a lot more suits on the streets.

JF: The Holiday Inn was part of the original master plan. The number of bed spaces created in Derby is more than 550 in the last two years. Alan, what are your impressions?

ALAN NORTHERN (AN): We have got to a stage where although the hotel is busy in the middle of the week, it is still a challenge to attract the leisure traveller at the weekend.

JF: What would you like to see?

AN: More events. Festivals like Derby Fest© are great for the city. Hopefully, we will see Donington Park's revival continue. We are doing well in the middle of the week, thanks to the corporate market, but we cannot rely totally on that.

JF: Adrian, what do you think the future is?

ADRIAN HALLS (AH): I see a lot of new buildings and that is really good but you have to get new money from outside of the city. Derby still does not have the right profile. Some people I talk to still regard Derby as a second-class city.

MJ: I think we've got to hold our nerve. We've achieved a lot in a short space of time. We know Derby needs more exciting events like Fest©. We know we need more suits on the ground. Derby has the sites and permissions. It's about the marketing. Our city's profile has grown a lot in

the last five to 10 years. Derby is not alone in holding its breath. We've got to keep doing the good things.

AH: But you need to keep pushing Derby through marketing.

RW: I do object to Derby being referred to as second-class. We might be second-tier but not second-class.

CN: In relation to the number of suits on the streets, there are thousands of people in suits on Pride Park. But a lot of these don't move from their desk all day. There needs to be something like a shuttle bus that people can hop on and hop off so they can go to the city centre at lunchtime.

JF: So the impression I'm getting from this debate is we need to carry on carrying on? Are there any things that aren't in the master plan that need to be developed?

MJ: The master plan is still as relevant today as it was five years ago. If we had those office blocks and they were full this city would be flying.

SH: My concern is how we continue the momentum. People need to see the progress that is being made. We need to know which schemes we put a ring round and say 'That's deliverable'.

DS: I think it involves a realignment of expectations. In the past five years the city attracted Â£1billion. This was disproportionate to any other city. We've got to adjust to the speed the economy is at now.

JF: I'd like to talk about two topics that haven't come up yet. The first is the river. In the master plan it was hailed as one of Derby's greatest potential assets. After years of blocking it off with developments, there are now plans to open it up with developments to the Council House, Full Street and the Silk Mill. I hear what Chris says about the blue corridor and it does make me a little scared when he mentions the Environment Agency's proposals.

The other topic is Becket-well. This area has got worse not better.

KM: Going back to the example of Brindley Place. That was built around the canal system. Something very similar could be done with the river. It's an asset and we should make the most of it.

RW: When the Council House is refurbished we will be putting in glass atriums which make the most of the river. Wilson Bowden, which owns the Full Street development, is one of the 19 schemes that will be considered for

regeneration money, so if that gets approval then we can start demolishing what's there already.

JF: So, if I could draw this to a close. The aim of the original master plan was to create a vibrant city centre. It was a route map to where we'd like to be. But the economic environment has now changed. Phase two will focus on making sure Derby is better able to deal with the upturn.

The master plan now has broader objectives. Does that mean we lose focus? I take Steve's point about the visibility of phase two. I also take David's point about the fact that this is now a very long-term game.

Pride Park took 15 years to get where it is now. No one knew which bits would be developed first. In fact, many predicted that the Roundhouse would be the first development on Pride Park. It turned out to be one of the last.

We need to see Castleward in that context. It will not all be done by Christmas. However, there are smaller, more deliverable hits we can do to keep confidence going. This could be a Pride Park shuttle bus or more events like Derby Fest. The key thing is that we can't keep riding the clutch.

In six weeks the inner ring road link will be finished. There is the issue of profile and perception of the city.

We at Marketing Derby are working hard to challenge those perceptions. As a city we are developing a steady narrative and we will keep pushing the Derby brand.

It takes time to change perceptions. I always look back at the day Westfield opened in 2007.

People were saying, it doesn't feel like Derby. They said the same about Quad, the Roundhouse and Cathedral Green. This was the city catching up. We now need to take the next step.

We must keep the focus and we must communicate what we're doing so people can see the progress that is being made.

Above, debating the big issues affecting our city. Left, the panel (back row) Alan Northern, general manager of the Holiday Inn at Derby Riverlights; Adrian Halls, partner at Ashgates Corporate Services; David Smith, director at Strata Real Estate Consulting; Richard Williams, director of regeneration at Derby City Council; Kevin Modiri, head of litigation and employment law

at Bakewells Solicitors; (front) Liz Fothergill, managing director at Pennine Healthcare; Steve Hall, editor of the Derby Telegraph; Chris Neve, joint managing director of the Radleigh Group; Martin Jinks, senior partner at Bakewells Solicitors; John Forkin, managing director of Marketing Derby, a public/private sector organisation promoting Derby as a place to invest.