



# URBAN PANEL REVIEW PAPER (UP) Hereford

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# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 It is just over ten years since the Urban Panel last visited Hereford. Then, the City was about to embark upon what was hoped would be one of the most significant regeneration projects ever seen in Hereford's thirteen-hundred year history – the redevelopment of an area roughly equivalent to the size of the original medieval City just to the north of its City Walls. A decade on, the Panel returned. The purpose of their visit this time was not to see whether or not their deliberations had made any difference to what had actually happened on the ground in that part of Hereford (interesting as it would undoubtedly be). Instead, it was to consider a proposal which, if realised, could have an even greater and more transformational impact - the prospect of Hereford becoming a 'University City'. How does a compact historic City of the character and importance of a place like Hereford begin to accommodate such a major development? What mechanisms are necessary to ensure that this exciting project will be realised? And what else needs to happen in order for Hereford to become a successful University City?
- 1.2 The Urban Panel were invited to Hereford, primarily, to consider how the City might best accommodate this new academic institution, to examine what sort of framework might need to be in place to assist its delivery, and what might need to happen in Hereford, itself, to ensure that the potential wider benefits are realised. They were also asked, as a secondary issue, to review what has happened in the Edgar Street Grid area since their last visit.
- 1.3 The Panel's Briefing Pack posed a large number of questions for its Members to consider in their two-day visit. However, although this Report touches on most of the areas for which their advice was sought, in the main, Members have concentrated their thoughts on those aspects which deal with the delivery of the University.

## 2 Executive Summary

- 2.1 In the course of two days of presentations, its walking tour around the City Centre and in the discussions that its Members had with the guests over dinner, the Panel were reminded, again, just what a fascinating historic city Hereford is and of the sheer quality of the buildings and townscape of its historic core. Herefordshire Council are to be congratulated on their positive approach to the management of the city's historic environment, and on the quality and design of the public realm improvements that they have undertaken. The Panel were impressed with the drive and enthusiasm of the authority's Members, Chief Executive and Officers to deliver conservation-led regeneration across the City and are to be commended on the way that they have successfully managed to integrate modern developments into some of the most sensitive areas within the city's historic core. The Old Market development has provided an attractive, well-designed addition to the City and the way in which it has been connected with the heart of historic core is first class. It is clearly having a considerable beneficial impact upon the retail economy and prosperity of the area.
- 2.2 However, it was evident that Hereford is not without its share of problems. Their walk showed the Panel just how fractured much of the townscape around the City Walls had become, the large numbers of vacant or underused buildings within parts of its historic core, and the continuing problems that traffic still causes around the City. Depressed land values and the economic downturn has meant that many elements of the Masterplan for the Edgar Street Grid area remain unrealised and the sense of arrival at the Station is just as poor as it ever was. Although unemployment is low, the Panel had been told that the County of Herefordshire has a low-skill, low-wage economy with a large percentage of people in part-time work. As a result, many of its young people leave the County for education or jobs elsewhere.
- 2.3 The University (being developed by the charity NMiTE) offers enormous potential to address many of Hereford's troubles. The Panel were much taken with the prospect of such a radical rethinking of the way in which further education has traditionally been delivered in this country. They were particularly excited by the equally innovative prospect that, rather than building a new, free-standing campus like most other new Universities, the city, itself will become the campus. As a result, this University is one which will be firmly embedded within the fabric and communities of the City. However, this is a challenging project to have ready to accept its first intake of students in just two years' time. It is imperative, therefore, that NMiTE appoint a suitably-experienced team as soon as is possible capable of delivering to this demanding timetable.

2.4 There is more to creating a successful University City than simply building a new University. There has to be in place an appropriate framework which will co-ordinate the delivery of all the various elements necessary to create a thriving University City. This is especially so for a settlement whose new University is intended to be delivered through incremental change across, potentially, the whole of its City Centre. The production of a City-wide Masterplan by Herefordshire Council is perhaps the most important component in helping to realise the full potential of this new academic institution.

### **3 The Panel Visit: The Walking tour**

3.1 The excellent and hugely-informative walk around the City Centre, ably led by the Council's Principal Conservation Officer, Matthew Knight, enabled the Panel to begin to understand the diverse character of this fine Cathedral City. It showed them how Hereford had dealt with some of the challenges it had had to face since their last visit and to appreciate what difficulties it might need to overcome if Hereford is to develop into a successful University City. It also helped the Panel to explore what opportunities this new educational facility might provide. Although not the principal reason for their return, it also allowed Members to see whether or not any of the recommendations they made following their last visit were actually realised.

3.2 St Peter's Square/St Owen Street/Gaol Street - The Panel's tour began from St Peter's Square, the large triangular space in front of the impressive Greek-revival Shire Hall. In many ways, this was a very good place to begin considering what physical changes might result from Hereford becoming a University City. Here is a civic space entirely surrounded by Listed Buildings (including one of the City's principal landmarks - the medieval Church of St Peter), at the end of what Pevsner described as "the most consistent Georgian Street in Hereford". However, it is a disappointing, highway-dominated area with a rather tired public realm marred by bus shelters and guard-rails. Karen Usher, from NMiTE, had raised the prospect that future University accommodation in its vicinity might enable St Peter's Square to become one of the key focal points in the City Centre and, once again, to provide an appropriate civic space for the buildings which surround it. The Panel sincerely hoped that her vision would eventually be realised.

- 3.3 Bath Street/Blue School Street/Newmarket Street - Within its City walls, Hereford has a remarkably well-preserved townscape grain. However, around those walls, themselves, the Panel were able to see the extent to which this historic grain has, in many places, all but disappeared. Instead, this has been replaced by large-floorplate retail developments, rear service yards or, in numerous locations around the inner-circumference of the walls, swathes of surface car parking.
- 3.4 Notwithstanding the fact that Herefordshire is a very car-dependent rural County, the Panel were surprised at just how much surface car parking there actually appeared to be across the City Centre. Moreover, these car parks were not simply restricted to the periphery of its historic core (as one might have expected) but were also dotted around innumerable backland sites throughout the heart of the City itself. Members considered that this surfeit of surface car parking afforded enormous opportunities for future University development and, in turn, that the new University buildings could begin to knit back together again the rather fractured townscape character of many areas on the edge of Hereford's medieval core.
- 3.5 However, the Panel acknowledged that the redevelopment of many of these brownfield areas may not be entirely straightforward. In a City with such rich archaeological deposits, concerns regarding the costs of dealing with potential remains may, if not actually deter potential developers, nevertheless, could certainly lead them to seek a reduction in design-quality in order to pay for any necessary archaeological mitigation. The Panel felt that many of these sites can and should be developed in ways which accommodate the archaeological resource and still produce excellent design (for more on how this may be achieved, see 5.33 to 5.35 below). Multiple private ownership of some of the car parking sites might, locally, also be seen as an inhibiting factor against finding more appropriate uses.

3.6 If any were needed, their tour reminded the Panel, once again, what a thoroughly unpleasant experience it is as a pedestrian walking the route of the City Walls and the degree of severance which this extremely-busy inner ring road still causes. However, Members were optimistic that, with the construction of the new City Link Road, it will not be too long before the routes between the historic core and the northern parts of the City provide an environment which pedestrians and cyclists might actually enjoy using. It was extremely pleasing for those Members of the Panel who visited in 2007 to see that the type of approach that they had advocated to connect the Old Market development to the centre of the City had been adopted. As had been hoped, this had helped to create an attractive, pedestrian-friendly route from Widemarsh Street to this new retail quarter. Although pedestrians still had to cross what is still, in effect, a dual carriageway, the lack of guard-rails, materials which unite the footpaths and carriageways, and widely-spaced traffic lights whose phasing gives plenty of time for those crossing has created an environment in which the pedestrian is given priority for once.

3.7 The Panel was also hopeful that the down-grading of this route might also lead to an improvement in the presentation of the City Walls. What was particularly notable during their walk was just how little presence these remains have. Indeed, Members considered that people visiting this part of Hereford could be forgiven for failing to recognise that they were actually walking around the edge of a medieval walled city. For large sections of their circumference, the Walls are extremely fragmentary, several sections sit rather forlornly on incidental areas of open space and, in a few areas, and they have even been incorporated into buildings.

3.8 Much of the remaining built form on the edge of the City Centre is unremarkable. The replacement of those buildings which make little contribution to the streetscape of this area (such as Hereford Police Station) with University-related developments could help to raise the townscape quality of this part of Hereford - particularly if those replacement buildings are of the architectural quality of some of the recent additions seen elsewhere in the City. The Panel also hoped that the University might be able to bring back into use some of the underused floorspace of those properties which do make a positive contribution to the streetscape (such as the modernist Franklin Barnes Garden Centre Building with its large concrete-framed windows and stylised flower sculpture).

3.9 The Edgar Street Grid area – A decade ago, the Panel’s main focus was the City’s plans for the regeneration of the 40 or so hectares to the north of the City Centre. Two of the key elements of the Masterplan for that area - the Old Market development and the City Link Road - have been delivered or are nearing completion. However, with the depressed land values and a completely different economic landscape, the Panel were not entirely surprised to see that large parts of this area seemed little changed from the last time they visited. Although there are pockets of coherent urban form in this part of the City (particularly along Widemarsh Street and Edgar Street), the impression is still one of an area of isolated groups of development scattered amongst large expanses of surface car parking. There had been high hopes that the Edgar Street Grid Masterplan would deliver a much-needed improvement in the setting of the delightful Coningsby Hospital and Blackfriar’s Priory. However, the mid-seventeenth Century almshouses are still dwarfed by the vast Wickes Building opposite and the remains of the medieval Dominican friary seem still as lost and forgotten as they ever were.

3.10 Other than the new retail quarter, the most significant change in this part of the City is the City Link Road. Whilst accepting that it is still under construction, nevertheless, it would not be an understatement to say that Members were somewhat alarmed at what appears to be being built. Whilst fully-supportive of the huge environmental benefits that this new road offers for Blue School Street, Newmarket Street and inter-connectivity between the City Centre the Edgar Street Grid area, nevertheless, the Panel were concerned that this looks to be a very over-engineered solution. As a result, what appears to be being created is a road which will provide a rather unpleasant pedestrian environment. Their arrival by train, earlier that morning, had already raised concerns amongst Panel Members about the poor sense of arrival at Hereford Station. What seems to be emerging as part of the City Link Road did little to reassure them that a visitor’s first impressions of the city would be a great deal better.

3.11 The historic core - After the somewhat fragmented townscape character of the traffic-dominated northern edges of the City, its historic core could not have been more of a contrast (although the Panel's route past the concrete-block-paved City bus station and the early eighties Tesco, with its over-scaled roofs and dormers, was hardly the most auspicious introduction). Here the Panel were able to see for themselves the high-degree of legibility which its medieval street plan still has in the morphology of the City Centre today and how remarkably well-preserved much of its historic townscape grain remains. What was also apparent was that there were surprisingly few streets where buildings from one particular architectural period predominated. As a result, with a few notable exceptions, most streets exhibited a fascinating juxtaposition of buildings from differing periods, architectural styles and building materials. However, Members had been warned not to judge Hereford's buildings simply by their external appearance since many earlier properties had been re-fronted over the years and, as a consequence, what may appear to be a Georgian brick building can often contain encased timber frames from an earlier period.

3.12 Nick Webster, the Council's Economic Development Manager, had explained to the Panel that improving the quality of the public realm was one of the principal areas in which the Council was investing in order to help sustain the City's economic growth. At Widemarsh Street, Members were able to see some of the exemplary works which the authority has already undertaken in the historic core. It was clearly evident that these had helped to create an attractive inviting thoroughfare linking the City Centre with the new retail quarter and, as a result, assisted in creating a lively, bustling retail street with what appeared to be very high-occupancy rates.

3.13 The wide expanse of High Town, once the centre of the medieval market and still a busy commercial area, is a notable contrast to the more compact streets around it. Although the majority of buildings surrounding this space date from the nineteenth century, High Town again exhibits the mix of properties from the 18th century through to the twentieth century that are found across much of the rest of the commercial area. Framed, at either end, by the spires of All Saints and St Peters and with the box-framed Old House as its focal point (the sole survivor of a seventeenth Century timber-framed island which once occupied this site), the largest space in the heart of the Conservation Area is despoiled by its somewhat shabby public realm (the next phase of the Council's streetscape improvements) and the fire-damaged remains of the building opposite Old House (although, the Panel were delighted to learn, work is currently commencing for its refurbishment into shops and apartments).

3.14 During their 2007 visit, Members expressed some worries about what impact retail-led regeneration of the Edgar Street Grid may have upon Hereford's existing retail centre. Whilst the structural changes that have taken place in retailing nationally will, undoubtedly, have affected the City's retail economy, nevertheless, the north-westerly shift in the main retail focus of Hereford as a result of the Old Market development appears to have had a marked impact upon the more peripheral retail streets in the City Centre. For much of the length of Commercial Street and the western half of Eign Gate, for example, the Panel noted the large number of retail units to let, the amount of under-used upper floorspace and the prevalence of properties in marginal commercial use. If the new University is to be integrated into the fabric of the City itself, there appeared to be a large resource of readily-available buildings and floorspace right in the heart of Hereford which it might utilise (at least in the short term). In turn, the University provides a huge opportunity to bring back into use some of the many empty or underused buildings and to inject some much-needed vitality into these secondary retail areas.

3.15 The tour around the City enabled the Panel to appreciate the diverse character of its historic core and just how dramatically its townscape can change from one street to another. From the relatively narrow High Street/Eign Gate, the impressively-wide, thoroughfare of Broad Street with its buildings of a far more monumental scale could not have been more of a contrast. Immediately to the east and parallel with Broad Street, the pedestrianized Church Street which leads to the Cathedral, on the other hand, is a compact, very narrow shopping street, of late-Georgian buildings on narrow plot widths. To its south, the bustle of Church Street is replaced by the relative tranquility of Castle Street. Here the Panel were able to see the 1993 adaptation for the Cathedral School with its large curved-lead porch and roof which appeared as an example of one best heritage-led development schemes in the country in English Heritage's 2006 publication *Shared Interest*.

3.16 In the past, Hereford has had a deserved reputation for high-quality contextual design. The conclusion of the tour enabled the Panel to see examples of more-recent developments in what were, undoubtedly, two of the most sensitive areas within its historic core. The first, Sir William Whitfield's pared-down Neo-Tudor Mappa Mundi Centre, winner of the Royal Fine Art Commission Building of the Year Award in 1997. Twenty years on, this building has become an established element within the Cathedral Close, and integrates extremely effectively with the extraordinarily important buildings around it. A short stroll to Wye Bridge, the Panel viewed Left Bank Village a development on an equally-sensitive site affecting what is probably one of the defining views of the City - the south elevation of the cathedral seen across the River Wye. Here local architectural practice Jamieson Associates bold flat-roofed restaurant complex which, with its terraced form and recessive colours, has delivered a building which has retained views of the Cathedral, protected the established skyline of Hereford and added to the legacy of good contextual architecture of the City.

## **4 The Panel Visit: Exploring the Challenges**

4.1 Karen Usher, one of the Project Co-Founders of New Model in Technology Engineering (NMITe), the charity behind the proposed University, presented the Panel with a very well-argued and convincing case for the development of a University in Hereford. Herefordshire is facing a number of problems. Every year approximately 1,200 -1,800 of its young people aged 16-24 leave the County for education, better jobs or better wages elsewhere, The result is a skewed population profile with far more people aged over 55 and a large gap in the 16-20 age group compared to the national profile. In addition, although unemployment in the County is low, it is a low-skill, low-wage economy with a large percentage of people in part-time work.

- 4.2 After two years of research, their team had come to the conclusion that one solution to the problems facing Herefordshire may lie in the development of a new specialist University in the County's principal settlement, Hereford. The Panel were told that the Institute of Public Policy Research had produced a Report examining the future of education within the UK. This indicated that there was likely to be a rise in the importance of smaller, specialist Universities. At the same time, there was considerable evidence to suggest that engineering in this country is facing a crisis. Although the country produces some 60,000 engineering graduates a year, this is still 40,000 less than is needed. Even if the existing educational establishments were able to meet this shortfall, research has found that many graduates come from overseas and return to their own countries to work after graduating. Engineering needs more diversity – only 9% of the UK engineering workforce is female (the lowest in Europe). More worryingly, according to engineering employers, 62% of engineering graduates do not have the right skill sets for today's workplace
- 4.3 It was Karen Usher's view that Herefordshire seemed well-placed to capitalise upon this situation. It is one of only two Counties in England which does not have a university, it already has a large number of successful engineering companies, and its principal settlement, Hereford, lies at the western end of a very significant dumbbell in the communications world – SAS and GCHQ. Moreover, discussions with the communities of the County showed that there was clearly huge support for a University (provided it was of high quality and reflected the things Hereford cares about).
- 4.4 NMiTE proposes to create a new engineering-only University. When fully up-and-running, it is estimated that it could bring in, potentially, some £120m into the County's economy. However, it was felt that it had to be big enough to transform the Herefordshire economy, transform teaching of engineering in the UK, and change the diversity of the UK's engineering talent pool.

- 4.5 If the idea of a single-subject University might be something of a rarity in the UK, what it was actually hoped to create would be radically-different to anything that had been seen before. David Sheppard, the other Project Co-founder of NMiTE, provided the Panel with an intriguing overview of an engineering University like no other – it would not require students to have to have an A-level in maths or physics; its curriculum would be taught, not by lectures, but by project-based learning dealing with real-world problems; it would have “mentors” rather than “lecturers”; and there would be no exams. The course will be delivered using an accelerated format that will award a Master’s Degree in just three, 46-week, years. The Panel were told that this University will create a different type of engineer – the inter-disciplinary humanist engineer. Karen Usher told the Panel that this new approach had generated considerable interest not only from sixth form students but also had provoked a lot of expressions of interest from engineering academics from other Universities.
- 4.6 Members were equally excited by the prospect that, unlike most other new Universities, the one in Hereford will not be an isolated campus development somewhere on the edge of the City. Instead, all of its buildings will be embedded in the City itself within ten minutes’ walk of High Town. This University would be one which is integrated into the City and, as a result, can also provide spaces which local communities can use. Doug Reid, Digital & infrastructure Officer at NMiTE, considered this to be the boldest and most radical start-up in higher education anywhere in the world.
- 4.7 The University will be developed incrementally starting with 350 students and 18 staff (in autumn 2019) and rising to a figure of 5,000 students and 540 staff by 2035. When finished, the University will consist of 46,000m<sup>2</sup> learning and administration space. Student accommodation will be provided by third parties in 15, 350-bed Colleges (totalling 145,000m<sup>2</sup>). This will be delivered by a mixture of new build on brownfield sites and refurbishment of existing properties within the City Centre.
- 4.8 The Panel were impressed with the level of financial support that the University had already managed to secure. To date, NMiTE has raised £1.2m from Herefordshire Council and the local community, £8m from Marches LEP, and expect the Department for Further Education to announce a further £15m shortly<sup>1</sup>. Although this still leaves the University needing to find some £25m itself, David Sheppard informed them that it already has raised a fifth of that figure.

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<sup>1</sup> Since the Panel’s visit, it has been announced that this £15m has been secured

- 4.9 The Team Leader of Strategic Planning at Herefordshire Council, Kevin Singleton, provided Members with a synopsis of the planning framework within which this University will be delivered. Members were told that the Herefordshire Core Strategy, which was adopted in 2015, set out a requirement for some 6,500 houses to be delivered within the Plan's principal settlement, Hereford, over the next 15 years. Although the vast majority of that total would be provided within three urban extensions, there was still an expectation that approximately 800 new dwellings would be created within the City Centre itself. One of the main proposals for Hereford is the construction of a by-pass to the west of the City to relieve traffic congestion and address air quality issues within the heart of the settlement. A key policy of the Core Strategy is the regeneration of the City centre, which includes support for a new University.
- 4.10 The Core Strategy Inspector considered that there was a need for a specific Plan to provide a framework for the future of Hereford. That document, the Hereford Area Plan, finished a consultation on Issues and Options in Spring and the authority are preparing the Preferred Options for consultation next year. The Plan is seen by the Council as being a key document in the delivery of the University and the Council is working with NMiTE to develop a joint evidence base and the necessary spatial policies to assist in the delivery of this project.
- 4.11 Herefordshire Council's Economic Development Manager, Nick Webster, presented the Panel with an introduction to the Council's Economic Strategy. They were informed that the authority's approach is to invest in those areas which are most likely to deliver the growth of the City. These include infrastructure, higher education, addressing the skills gap and in building new "assets" that will support indigenous business growth and attract inward investment. Examples of its investment in the infrastructure of the City have included the Hereford Livestock Market (now the third most-used cattle market in country), refurbishment of the public realm in the City Centre, the City Link Road, the Hereford by-pass (which is currently investigating route alignment) and in improving Broadband access across the County. Its investment in new assets has included the £6.5m Shell Store Incubation Centre (which will support over 450 jobs, 55 businesses and will include space for a Design and Application Centre for NMiTE), and £9m investment by the University of Wolverhampton in the Cyber Security Centre of Excellence (which will provide space for up to 20 business tenants, create 185 jobs, and provide an anchor for a wider 1.2 hectare cyber campus).

4.12 The Economic Strategy sets out a 15-year Vision aimed at creating opportunity and encouraging investment. This will give clear direction of travel, set out clear aspirations, give investors' confidence, and provide a framework to bring projects together. Its key investment opportunities are identified as the University, the Riverside Quarter (where the aim is enhance access and sporting use of the river and provide spaces for small-scale concerts and events), the Business Quarter (where it is intended to provide high-quality City Centre office space) and the regeneration of the area behind Green Dragon Hotel on Berrington Street (where it is proposed to create modern City Centre living alongside niche retailing and employment units).

## **5 Panel Analysis**

5.1 Introduction - It is always interesting for the Panel to return to a City they had visited several years before and see not only how time has treated it in the intervening period but, perhaps more interestingly, what difference, if any, their last visit actually made. A visit to Hereford is always a pleasure. A delightful, compact historic City with a stunningly, well-preserved medieval street pattern and, if that was not enough, one of the finest cathedral closes in the country.

5.2 It was reassuring to find that Hereford is not only, clearly, just as delightful today as it was a decade ago but, in many areas, is actually in far better shape. The Old Market development is clearly having a considerable beneficial impact upon the retail economy and the Panel were delighted to see that the measures which have been taken to reduce the severance caused by Newmarket Street (a road which, actually, seems to be just as busy as it ever was) had adopted an approach along the lines which they had advocated. The public realm works that Herefordshire Council have undertaken along Widemarsh Street, itself, to connect the new retail area to the heart of the City Centre are exemplary and have obviously helped to deliver the high-occupancy rates of the retail units along that thoroughfare. The proposed extension of these public realm works to High Town are warmly welcomed and, if they are of the quality that has been used elsewhere, will bring much-needed improvement to the townscape quality and vitality of this hugely-important part of the City. Indeed the Panel considered that these works cannot come too soon.

- 5.3 Unfortunately, some other aspects have not turned out quite as well as Members had hoped. The new City Link Road (which is currently under construction) whilst, undoubtedly, an essential element in being able to address north-south connectivity between the City Centre and the Edgar Street Grid, has not resulted in the “boulevard” that had originally been promised. Equally disappointing was to find at that the high-quality public realm which had been promised in front of City’s rather splendid railway station had not materialised.
- 5.4 The Panel’s visit this time comes at the advent of an extremely exciting moment in the City’s history - the prospect of Hereford becoming a University City. This is not only a unique opportunity (and one which could be transformational for both the City and the wider County of Herefordshire) but also a great challenge.
- 5.5 The University - The Panel were extremely impressed with the sheer drive and enthusiasm shown by the University’s Co-Founders, Karen Usher and David Sheppard, and its Chief Digital & Infrastructure Officer, Doug Reid. They were very excited by the prospect of an approach to further education which, if realised, would create a University like no other in this country - and one which could seriously challenge traditional approaches to further education on these shores. They also admired how receptive the University appeared to be to new ideas.
- 5.6 Members were particularly enthused by the prospect that the City, itself, becomes the campus. It is evident that, spatially (just as in its admissions systems and in the way in which it teaches), this University will be very different from any other. In the past, the establishment of a new University would be likely to result in huge changes to the towns and Cities in which they were being set up. They invariably took a long time to develop, often caused major disruption and, especially in single-campus developments, had a large footprint. Hereford’s new University, on the other hand, is a much more interesting (although no less challenging) approach in that it will deliver small, organic change across the City. The Panel felt that this alternative model offered huge benefits. It could, for example, allow the communities of Hereford to be much more engaged. It offers considerable opportunity for greater experimentation with different ideas and approaches. For the townscape of the City, the redevelopment of some of the numerous areas of surface car parking may help to repair the eroded historic grain of the edges of the City, and it could also bring back into use some the City’s vacant buildings and underused floorspace. Indeed, the Panel felt that there was a pioneering aspect about this whole project which the students who are likely to want to become its first cohorts could find particularly attractive.

- 5.7 They were also impressed with the companies and businesses with which the University has already entered into agreements and particularly welcomed the links being forged with smaller local companies across the County.
- 5.8 The case for the UK's first engineering-only University is very well made and articulated in both NMiTE's Paper (provided in the Briefing Pack) and in the presentations the Panel were given from its Co-Founders. The great ideas about the shape of the academic product the University is going to provide and how it might be financed seem to have been largely resolved. However, the Panel were extremely concerned that, at the moment, there appeared to be little certainty about precisely what the implications of the new University might be, spatially, for this very important historic City. Unfortunately, this fundamental consideration was something which remained largely unaddressed in both the NMiTE Paper and in the presentations.
- 5.9 NMiTE now needs to start thinking about the practicalities of how this University manifests itself on the ground. In particular, it needs to decide who it might need to appoint to finish this process and to drive the delivery of the necessary floorspace that is going to be required for its first intake of students in Autumn 2019. The planning system in this country is not noted for its speed. Applications, unfortunately, often raise issues and considerations which were entirely unexpected. Consequently, the sooner the University begins this process, the more likely it will be that there will be the necessary facilities up and running in just twenty-four months' time for its first undergraduates. The Panel recommended that NMiTE look at the guidance provided by CABE on procurement that is set out in '[Creating Excellent Buildings](http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/creating-excellent-buildings.pdf).'<sup>2</sup> Although this is now, admittedly, a number of years old, nevertheless, it sets out some of the considerations that would need to be taken into account when embarking on the delivery of a project such as this.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110118110750/http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/creating-excellent-buildings.pdf>

5.10 The Panel felt that it is important that the buildings and spaces of the new academic institution (particularly one that is spread across an entire City Centre) are clearly identifiable as “the University”. A convincing spatial vision is now needed to explore how the various University components will relate not just to each other but how they will interact with the City as a whole. Consequently, as part of this process, NMiTE also need to start thinking about what architectural language the University might use for its new facilities. How does the University, for example, make people aware which of its spaces are for the use of the whole community of Hereford and which are for the University only? It also needs to decide to how the new City campus will both create and affect existing movement patterns of people and traffic.

5.11 Whilst the Panel could appreciate the practicalities of using the private sector to provide the necessary student accommodation, Members were keen to point out that the design of some of the more recent examples of such buildings they had seen elsewhere across the country have been very poor - designs which the Panel earnestly hoped would fall well-short of the high quality that NMiTE and the Council would (and should) demand. They urged the University and Herefordshire Council to consider the production of a joint Design Code setting out their aspirations for the design quality that any new student accommodation would be expected to achieve. A good example would be that produced for the North Cambridge extension.

5.12 The new Hereford University will be developing inter-disciplinary Humanist Engineers, students who will learn by tackling real-world problems. How fantastic it would be if one of the problems that the first intake of students were asked to tackle is the challenge of how their own academic institution might grow and develop in Hereford in the future.

5.13 The Panel fully supported NMiTE's intention of firmly embedding this new University within the community of Hereford and of creating something which is not only, physically, a part of the fabric of the City, but is one where its students, as part of the curriculum, are actively required to interact and help local people. Members commended NMiTE on the work they had already undertaken to engage the communities of Hereford and wholeheartedly endorsed NMiTE's intention to begin further engagement with local people. However, even a University which develops incrementally through small, organic change will result in a considerable transformation to the character of the place in which it develops and way that place functions. Consequently, the Panel considered that there is still a considerable amount of further community-development work that needs to be undertaken (and in quite a short time) to help people understand what the University is likely to mean for them. This additional engagement will not, necessarily, slow things down (if it is done well) and, indeed, it may actually help to speed things up. The use of existing networks may encourage people to become more actively engaged in helping to deliver this project.

5.14 Panel Members considered that there were two organisations within Hereford with whom the University ought to be liaising. The first is the Defence Infrastructure Organisation. The MOD is currently undertaking a review their land requirements in and around the City. Some of these sites may provide opportunities for the development of elements of the University campus. The second is the Cathedral. During the Panel's visit to the Cathedral, the Dean expressed his strong desire to work with the University regarding the pastoral needs of the new community that will be coming into the City, and their possible need for greater support given a 46-week year rather than the more usual 28-30 week year.

5.15 Integrating the new University into Hereford - The need for a City-wide Masterplan - There is more to creating a successful University City than simply building a new University. Earlier this year, the Urban Panel visited Sunderland. Sunderland was a salutary example of how difficult it can be to realise the wider economic and social benefits of such an establishment if some of the components necessary to produce a flourishing University City are missing. Consequently, the Panel considered it essential that there is an over-arching framework in place which will ensure that all the elements necessary to create a successful University City are actually going to be delivered. This is especially so for a City whose new University is intended to be delivered through incremental change across, potentially, the whole of its City Centre.

5.16 The Panel had been told that, on the recommendations of the Core Strategy Inspector, Herefordshire Council are preparing an Area Plan for the City. Useful as that DPD might be, Members felt that it was almost certainly not the most appropriate vehicle to ensure the delivery of all the necessary building blocks of a successful University City – particularly given the relatively short time-scale in which this new educational establishment intends to open and the level of detail that is likely to be required to ensure that the City is ready for it. Instead, it was the Panel’s firm belief that what is needed is a City-wide Masterplan.

5.17 However, such a Masterplan needs to address far more than simply the delivery of a new educational facility. Because of the close interrelationship between all the various elements needed to ensure that Hereford, as a place, develops into a thriving University City, this Masterplan would need to address all aspects of place-making. It would need, for example, to encompass such things as the sense of arrival in the City, traffic management, Green Infrastructure, and design quality. As a strategy, it needs to set out an integrated long-term strategic vision for Hereford including its relationship to its rural hinterland that, at the same time, is sufficiently flexible to adapt to change and seize unforeseen opportunities should they arise.

5.18 A Masterplan for a whole City would, almost inevitably, have to be underpinned by a number of separate pieces of work including such things as a movement strategy, parking strategy, Green Infrastructure strategy, a strategy for dealing with the management of the archaeology of the City, a views analysis, building heights strategy and a design strategy. Whilst these may all be discrete areas of work, they are all necessary component parts to create a holistic framework to deliver a successful, sustainable future for Hereford. When finished, this Masterplan could form a Supplementary Planning Document that is tied into the Policy framework of the emerging Hereford Area Plan.

5.19 Given that the Council, on their own admission, do not have the resources in-house to do this work, there is no getting away from the fact that the production of a City-wide Masterplan is going to cost money. The Panel fully accepts that such additional expenditure may be very difficult to find in this period of increasing austerity for local authorities and the huge demands that are currently placed upon their increasingly limited budgets. However, the University is a one-off opportunity for Hereford. As Alistair Neill, Herefordshire Council's Chief Executive, acknowledged, the momentum created by the University can take the City (and Herefordshire) to a different place and the economic competitiveness of the County depends upon the success of this project. In this respect, the Panel considered that if Herefordshire Council does not invest now in the successful delivery of this project, if it does not ensure that the necessary elements are in place to make Hereford a leading University City, then the people of Hereford are likely to get functionality not excellence. A successful University City is not simply a good academic institution - it demands an equally good host City around it. And this is only likely to be achieved through an overarching strategy which looks at the whole of the City and the inter-relationship of the various components which make it function - a City-wide Masterplan. Therefore, the Panel urged Herefordshire Council either, to go back to the LEP for additional resources, or to consider using some of the revenues generated from the sale of their farm holdings to deliver this Masterplan – a key building block for a thriving University City.

5.20 In some ways, the development of a City-wide Masterplan would, in itself, be something of a ground-breaking piece of work. Panel Members could think of few other places that have undertaken such a significant piece of work in recent times. On that basis, given the uniqueness of the University itself, this would seem a wholly-appropriate thing to produce.

5.21 The quality of place - The City is a fabulous brand and a wonderful asset. It will, no doubt, be one of the reasons that persuade potential students (and, perhaps, more so their parents) to come to Hereford to study engineering. Consequently, all of Hereford needs to make itself a place that is likely to be seen by those considering studying here as an attractive and exciting place - and somewhere where they will want to spend a considerable amount of their next three years living. The quality of the environment, therefore, is of critical importance. However, from the Panel's tour, it is evident that certain aspects of what is currently on offer falls short of what those future students might expect.

5.22 First impressions are very important in determining people's perceptions about a place. The sense of arrival at Hereford Station is quite awful. A decade ago, when the Panel last visited, there were plans under consideration to create a new high-quality public space in front of this rather attractive mid-nineteenth Century railway building. However, nothing has happened. Just what impression the large expanses of car parking, the uninspiring buildings opposite, and the prospect of crossing a busy inner-relief road might have upon people's perceptions of Hereford one can but imagine. The Panel fully accepts that this new road is absolutely necessary to reduce the severance caused by the A438 between the historic core of the settlement and the Edgar Street Grid. However, lessons should be learned from the success of the works undertaken at Newmarket Street/Blue School Street and Members earnestly hoped that Herefordshire Council would strive to create an environment between the railway station and the City Centre through which pedestrians will pass with ease and pleasure.

5.23 As part of the reconsideration of pedestrian movement through Edgar Street Grid, further thought must be given to how the creation of an attractive footpath route between the station and the City Centre might also facilitate enhancement of the setting of its two most important heritage assets - Coningsby Hospital and Blackfriars' Priory. The potential to include these largely-ignored heritage assets as part of a new pedestrian route to the centre of Hereford should not be ignored.

5.24 Coupled with the need to improve the sense of arrival is a requirement to address legibility. At present, for those arriving by train, it is not immediately obvious how they actually get to the City Centre.

5.25 During the tour, the Panel were struck by the high-quality design of some of the recent additions to the townscape of the City Centre and were heartened by the fact that many of the best examples were buildings by Hereford-based architectural practices. It is evident that both Officers and Members have, in the past, sought to secure good modern architecture which adds to the rich legacy of buildings across the City. However, the Panel were worried that pressure to ensure delivery by Autumn 2019 of all the buildings that the University is going to require for its first students may lead to a diminution in the architectural quality in the City. This is especially the case if the developments are coming forward from national, private sector, student accommodation providers with their, typically, fairly standard models. In this regard, the Panel were concerned that the Council currently has no access to the expertise offered by an independent Design Review Panel. The existing Design Review Panel *Midlands Architecture and the Designed Environment (MADE)* which is based in Birmingham may be prepared to assist by providing an offshoot in Hereford. Given the rate at which the University is going to need to start developing its proposals, the quicker this happens the better.

5.26 Making the most of the City's existing assets - Within the line of its City Walls, Hereford has, what is reputed to be, the best-preserved medieval street pattern of any City in England. However, the Walls themselves, which have played such an important role in the development and form of the City, appear to be almost forgotten. Although a City Walls Management Plan has been produced, none of its proposals have actually been implemented.

5.27 The downgrading of the A438 would seem to offer a real opportunity to improve the extremely-poor setting of many parts of the northern section of the Wall (although it was far from clear whether or not this forms part of the overall design proposals for this thoroughfare once the bulk of the traffic is removed). However, even if it is, the Panel still considered that there is a need for the City to consider how the presentation of the whole length of the Walls might be improved. Whilst it is fully accepted that it may take several years before the whole of the structure has the setting that an asset of this importance ought to command, taking a long-term view of what you want to achieve and doing things bit-by-bit, as the opportunity arises, can deliver results – as the creation of a riverside walk along the Thames demonstrated (which took many years to be fully realised).

5.28 One of the defining views of Hereford is of the southern elevation of the Cathedral seen across the spectacular River Wye. However, much like its Walls, the river seems to be something the City almost ignores. Access to the riverside is extremely limited and there are few premises with river frontages. As with the City Walls, the River is another unrealised asset of which the City should make much more. The Panel were fully-supportive of the intentions of the Herefordshire Council's Economic Vision to make better use of the River Wye as an attraction for visitors and for leisure activities for local people. However, it is imperative that the areas where interventions are going to be needed to make this happen are part of the City-wide Masterplan.

5.29 Addressing urban blight and vacant buildings - Whilst the medieval core of Hereford is a wonderfully engaging place, like so many of the historic places the Panel had visited over the years, its City Centre has a ragged urban edge and there are numerous gap sites across many parts of its historic core. Several of the properties on the periphery of its main retail core lie empty or occupied by marginal uses and there is wide evidence of the underuse of its upper floors. The proposed new University, therefore, offers enormous potential to start stitching back together some of the gaps in the urban fabric and in bringing back into productive use some of Hereford's vacant buildings. However, the University is not going to be the only use competing for space within the heart of the City. The Panel had been informed that, even with the proposed large urban extensions, it is still expected that some 800 or so dwellings will need to be delivered within the City Centre. Whether or not there is sufficient capacity within the historic core to accommodate not just the University but also this housing and all the other activities which make a City Centre function is unclear. Consequently, the Panel considered that there was a need for an Urban Capacity Study to better understand the ability of this important historic City Centre and its existing infrastructure to take further growth. A study of this nature would of necessity consider important views and desirable height limitations as part of its remit.

5.30 Movement and car parking - Whilst the redevelopment of the existing surface car parks are likely to bring huge townscape benefits to many areas around the edge of the historic core, the Panel felt that this ought to be informed by a wider strategic review of car parking provision around the City Centre. Such a review should examine not only whether there would likely to be any impacts, locally, resulting from the loss of a car park, but also where the best locations might be for any replacement car parking provision and what potential such car parking might have to reduce vehicle-penetration into the historic core of Hereford.

5.31 The reduction in the numbers of vehicles driving around the edge of the medieval city as a result of the City Link Road will undoubtedly bring considerable environmental benefits. However, the Panel was unclear about what will actually happen to the existing roads which will be benefitting from this decrease in traffic. The highway strategy should not just be about reducing vehicle numbers on a particular stretch of road - it also needs to set out what happens to those stretches of road and the areas around them once the amount of traffic has decreased. The reduction in vehicles along Blue School Street and Newmarket Street provides an opportunity not just for the improvement of the setting of the City Walls (as has been set out already), but offers the possibility of creating a new landscaped footpath and cycle route around the edge of the historic core.

5.32 Whilst the Panel accepted that this is a very car-dependent area, nevertheless, they felt that there was an urgent need for a long-term transport strategy looking at how Herefordshire Council might affect modal change and encourage people to use modes other than the private car to access the facilities in Hereford.

5.33 De-risking archaeological sites - The redevelopment of any surface car park within the historic core is likely to have archaeological implications (and costs). In their discussions during their visit, Members got the clear impression that there was a perception around Hereford that, simply because the historic core is an 'Area of Archaeological Importance', archaeology is likely to be a problem. In order to encourage these sites to be brought forward for development (and deliver the benefits to the townscape of the City), the Panel considered that there was a need to "de-risk" them. Herefordshire Council should commission work which will provide potential developers with a clearer picture of the likely archaeological sensitivity of all the key sites on which they would like to encourage development together with how that archaeology might need to be addressed in the development process. Such an approach could save prospective developers money by helping to ensure that no major archaeological discoveries are made during construction works - which can result in delay or necessitate redesign and would be likely to cost far more than the archaeological work involved in de-risking these sites. One approach which might be used could be an Extensive Urban Survey<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> These documents are desk based studies of the surviving archaeological resources. They include assessments of below ground archaeological remains, standing buildings and the historic plan form of the town.

5.34 Notwithstanding this, the Panel were keen to point out that, although dealing with the archaeology may add to the costs of a development, nevertheless, such archaeological evaluations offer an opportunity to engage local people in the place where they live and to learn more about the history and development of this incredible historic City.

5.35 Panel members felt that the combination of the need for development on many of these sites to accommodate NMiTE's requirements, as well as some of the 800 houses sought in the Local Plan meant that the issues raised above must be addressed. Most of the sites in question can be developed in whole or in part. The management of the archaeology can be successfully achieved both by the engagement of the community in investigation and in the design and achievement of new development.

## **6 Conclusions**

6.1 If the Urban Panel were to return to Hereford, again, in another decade's time, what they would find? All being well, a place that is well on the way to becoming one of this country's most prosperous University Cities. It would have a University offering not only a radically-different approach to further education to any other academic institution in this country, but would be just as radical spatially, with its campus firmly embedded within the fabric and community of the City. The University would have delivered high-quality new buildings which have helped to stitch together the townscape and brought back into use many of the empty properties and much of the underused floorspace in its historic core. Its student population will have increased the vitality of the City Centre. Above all, it will have transformed the economic fortunes of the County. The City's high quality environment will have been a key element in attracting students to study in Hereford.

6.2 However, for all this to happen, there needs to be an appropriate framework in place to ensure that all the fundamental building blocks which will be necessary to create a successful University City will actually be there. This is especially so for a City whose new University is intended to be delivered through incremental change across, potentially, the whole of its City Centre.

6.3 Hereford University will be unlike any other that has been seen before on these shores. Herefordshire Council and NMiTE clearly realise that they are about to embark upon something that is truly exceptional and that this ground-breaking project is taking place in a quite exceptional historic City. As a result, it demands an exceptional solution to ensure not only that it happens, but that it happens in a way which best benefits Hereford and its communities.

## 7 Recommendations

### The University

- **NMiTE is strongly advised to appoint a team as soon as they can, who will devise a high-quality spatial and physical delivery strategy for the new institution, to provide for the necessary administration buildings, teaching facilities, laboratories, workshops and sporting facilities along with necessary student housing** – Even with a willing local planning authority, ensuring that the necessary teaching, administration and other student facilities will be ready by 2019 is a formidable challenge. Therefore, it is imperative that there is a suitably-experienced team in place, capable of delivering this demanding project. The procurement mechanism, incorporating a qualitative competitive element, is crucial.
- **NMiTE is encouraged to develop a clearly-identifiable architectural language to articulate which buildings and spaces across the City are ‘Hereford University’** – This University will not be one built on a clearly-identifiable campus. Instead, its administration buildings, teaching facilities and other accommodation will be spread across the City. It would greatly help unite the various buildings and spaces and promote the image of this new academic institution if they were clearly identifiable as being “Hereford University” (whilst responding to their individual context).
- **NMiTE and Herefordshire Council are urged to produce a jointly-agreed Design Code for new student accommodation** – It is envisaged that the private sector will provide the necessary student accommodation for the University. A Design Code would help to ensure that any new halls of residence achieve the quality of design to which the University and Council aspire.
- **It is recommended that NMiTE undertake further community engagement in Hereford** – NMiTE are to be commended on the amount of work they have already undertaken to engage the communities of Hereford. However, even a University which develops incrementally is likely to result in a considerable transformation to the character of the place in which it develops and way in which that place functions. Consequently, further community-development work would help the communities of Hereford to better understand what the University is likely to mean for them.

- **One of the projects which the first intake of students might be asked to tackle is how their own academic institution could grow and develop** - The new Hereford University will be developing inter-disciplinary Humanist Engineers, students who will learn by tackling real-world problems. It would be wholly appropriate if the first intake of students were asked to explore how their own academic institution might grow and develop in Hereford in the future.

#### Herefordshire Council

- **There is a demonstrable need for a City-wide Masterplan and Herefordshire Council** - It essential that there is an over-arching framework in place which will help to ensure that all the elements that are necessary to create a successful University City will be delivered. It is suggested that this City-wide Masterplan is underpinned by:-
  - A movement strategy
  - A parking strategy
  - A Green Infrastructure strategy
  - A strategy for dealing with the management of the archaeology of the City
  - A views analysis
  - A building heights strategy
  - A design strategy
  - An urban capacity study
- **Herefordshire Council is encouraged to explore how it might access independent Design Review advice** – The need to ensure that there is sufficient University accommodation ready to accept students by Autumn 2019 may lead to pressure for Herefordshire Council to accept buildings of a poorer design quality. The Council should explore how it might access the expertise offered by an independent Design Review Panel.
- **It is suggested that Herefordshire Council undertake a strategic review of car parking provision in the City** – The identification of which surface car parks around the City might offer the best potential for future development needs to be informed by a strategic review of car parking provision across the City Centre. This would include:-
  - An examination of any local economic impacts of the loss of a car park
  - Identification of the most appropriate locations for any replacement car parking provision, and
  - The potential of future car parking to reduce vehicle-penetration into the historic core of Hereford.
- **Herefordshire Council are encouraged to undertake a study which will “de-risk” archaeological sites** - Given the long history of the City,

the redevelopment of the numerous surface car parks will almost inevitably have archaeological implications (and costs). In order to encourage these sites to be brought forward for development, potential developers need to be provided with a clearer picture of their likely archaeological sensitivity and how any archaeology on those sites might need to be addressed.

- **Herefordshire Council is strongly advised to consider how the sense of arrival at Hereford Station might be improved** - The sense of arrival at Hereford Station is very poor. Consequently:-
  - As part of the investment in the public realm, priority should be given to the creation of a high-quality public space in front of the station.
  - Following the principles adopted between Old Market and Widemarsh Street, consideration should be given to how a more pleasant pedestrian route might be developed from the station to the City Centre.
  - The legibility of the City Centre for those arriving at the Station needs to be improved.
- **Herefordshire Council should consider how the City Walls might be better presented** - The City's Walls are an extremely important element of the story of Hereford and ought to command a far better setting than they have at present. Therefore, it is suggested that:-
  - The recommendations of the *City Walls Management Plan* are implemented.
  - A strategy is developed which will set out a long-term vision of how the setting and presentation of each section of the City Walls might be improved
  - The down-grading of the A438 should include proposals for how the sections of City Wall alongside that route will be enhanced.
- **It is recommended that Herefordshire Council develop a strategy which sets out what will happen to the roads around the City Walls once the City Link Road is completed** - The reduction in vehicles along Blue School Street and Newmarket Street provides an opportunity not just for the improvement of the setting of the City Walls but offers the possibility of the creation of a new landscaped footpath and cycle route around the edge of the historic core.
- **The transport strategy should explore how it might reduce the number of car journeys in and around the City Centre** - Whilst Herefordshire might be a very car-dependent area, nevertheless, there is an urgent need for the long-term transport strategy to consider how Herefordshire Council might affect modal change and encourage people to use modes other than the private car to access the facilities in the City.
- **Consideration needs to be given to how the setting of Coningsby Hospital and Blackfriar's Priory might be improved** - The Panel

hope that the strategy for the Edgar Street Grid area will include measures which will improve the setting of this Scheduled Monument

Historic England's Urban Panel provides expertise to help local authorities, development agencies and others to engage in major regeneration of historic towns and cities. The Members who attended the visit to Hereford on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> October 2017 were:

**Charles Wilson - Chair**

**Nigel Baker**

**Joyce Bridges CBE**

**Sophia De Sousa**

**Joanna Gibbons**

**Michael Hayes CBE**

**Julian Hill**

**John Lord**

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