

Bradford Property Forum – Meeting Report – 16 November 2011



A more positive mood is emanating from Bradford, despite continuing national and international economic uncertainty. That was the message from today's speakers at Bradford Property Forum.

The revised planning application for the Broadway shopping centre, the successful bid for monies from the Government's Regional Growth Fund (RGF) and the proactive steps being taken to counter the fear of crime in the city were all noted in a busy agenda at the Midland Hotel.

No dates but confidence displayed

While developer Westfield would still not be drawn on either a commencement date for construction or how many retailers were signed up to the scheme, the overall mood remains better than 12 months ago when last discussed. A scheme that is approximately 10% smaller than the original will still deliver 2,500 new jobs, contain more than half a million square feet of retail space and provide parking for 1,300.

Westfield's Duncan Bower and Neil Maclure said the revisions make the centre more market-responsive, admitting that the original mixed use application (for retail, office and residential) was constrained by the recession three years ago. Much more information was presented to the audience than last year, including details on shop-front heights (7.2 metres, to allowing viewing of upper levels), and the need to keep large parts of the centre open in the evening to help support the evening economy.

Retail displacement threat

BPF members had previously voiced concerns about the effect of Westfield on the rest of the city centre, and there was a hint of an admission that displacement of existing retailers, as happened with the Derby Westfield scheme, is sometimes inevitable. The platform agreed that a strategic plan for the whole city is needed, and this was touched on by the Council's regeneration director, Barra Mac Ruairi.

Barra claimed that Westfield and the Kirkgate Centre can co-exist, catering to different markets with retail growth and expansion inbetween the two sites. The successful RGF bid (£17m) now allows for a "growth zone in a growth city", with the various pieces of the jigsaw being put in place.

Making Bradford competitive

Questions from the floor included appeals for ensuring the Bradford scheme could compete with neighbouring areas such as Halifax, Huddersfield and Leeds on issues such as parking prices and rental values. Westfield said that, in order to help get the scheme constructed, local people needed to be confident, positive and constructive to help change external perceptions.

Fighting crime and changing perceptions

BPF chair Paul Mackie presented the key findings of the survey of young people conducted in the summer (three versions of a report on this can be found elsewhere on the BPF website – [see here](#)). Police inspector Kevin Pickles highlighted two examples of countering local anti-social behaviour – dedicated officers clearing the city of street drinkers, beggars and general 'public menace'. Crime figures in several areas, including assault and drunkenness were falling, while developments like youth activity centre Culture Fusion (also described as a 'community hub') and a mini-police station in City Hall were also positive developments.

Contact: BPF – 01274 230057; info@bradfordpropertyforum.co.uk