

## Meeting Report – 15 September 2011

### Increasing city centre footfall – how can it be done?

Civic leaders in Bradford have the opportunity to build a city that does not yet exist – that was one of the key points made at the recent meeting of Bradford Property Forum.

The question of how to bring in more footfall to the city was addressed at the second September meeting of the Forum (a joint event with Leeds had taken place on the 6<sup>th</sup>). A panel of five (including chairman John Bywater of Caddicks) meant a proliferation of views were expressed on the topic, which was not confined purely to retail. There were positive steps being taken, said some, with caution being advised by others.

The city's leaders were urged to avoid trying to competing directly with neighbouring towns and cities and ensure that local needs are being met first. Joe Swindells of Hammerson pointed out that, while cities the size of Leeds and Manchester may be able to attract 'outsiders' from beyond their natural boundaries, others like Bradford and Wakefield would not. Wakefield had benefitted from that realisation, said Joe, and so should Bradford.

While this message may sit uncomfortably for the more ambitious reader, Knight Frank's Alex Munro said that the city was taking steps to restore civic pride, using Sheffield as a model. The South Yorkshire city, previously thought of as a basket case, was now held up as a great example of successful regeneration. Office occupiers in Bradford would be as important as shops, added Alex.

All the panellists, prompted by Dean Loughran of the National Media Museum, agreed that the long overdue creation of the awaited shopping centre was not, on its own, the answer to local regeneration: the city's leisure and culture offer would be as important. Ensuring the city's distinct "historic fabric" was used for a different purpose was also a key question for the future – it would enable us to "go our own way" and realise the opportunity in the first sentence of this report. This was the view of Barra Mac Ruairi, Bradford Council's strategic director for regeneration.

John Bywater said that many had been surprised by the success of Westfield's Stratford store, an area of high deprivation – although it was agreed that conditions were different in London.

In the end, the debate boiled down to creating a new city while maintaining some of the great architecture that would complement such a scenario. Ambition, tempered with realism. The functions of a city are many, with civic, commercial and cultural aspects noted by the panel. Culture needs to provide profile and image, commercial to support business growth and investment and civic to facilitate public activities.

#### **Thanks to all the panellists for taking part:**

John Bywater, Caddicks  
Barra Mac Ruairi, Bradford Council  
Dean Loughran, National Media Museum  
Alex Munro, Knight Frank  
Joe Swindells, Hammersons