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## Meeting report - High Street Forum

Virgin Money Lounge, Fargate

10.00am to 11.30am, Tuesday, 12 September 2023

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Standing call to action: Forum members are asked to amplify the message, raise the profile of the forum within your own networks and be an ambassador for the group to help attract, recruit and retain participants.

This month we were delighted to welcome 36 attendees to our September High Street Forum from businesses including: M&S, Metrobank, Yorkshire Building Society, The Nottingham, Orchard Square, Hamilton Communications, Sheffield Cathedral, Subway, Birds Opticians, Mama's & Leonies, Taylor Taylor Hairdressing, Savills Barbershop, James Hadley Jewellers, New River, Barclays Bank, Virgin Money, Sheffield Walking Tours, South Yorkshire Police, Sheffield Property Association and Sheffield City Council officers.

Managed by Sheffield BID and chaired by BID Director Lee Appleton (New River's Centre Manager for The Moor), these meet ups are held monthly.

## Discussion points covered in the meeting 12.09.23

### Actions from the previous meeting

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The process for evidencing ASB has been shared with the business community. Jim Dee, Community Safety Officer at Sheffield City Council, shared a brief consultation survey following his update to the group last month. Jim's contact details have also been shared with businesses.

### Meet the Leader / Q&A – Cllr Tom Hunt, Sheffield City Council

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In his opening remarks Tom emphasised that the city centre is a top priority. Everyone has an opinion. Everyone has a view. There is recognition that the city centre is improving and that it's good to see a number of developments moving through to completion. Many of hoardings are now coming down around Heart of the City II. A positive narrative is so important.

Tom was keen to hear from the group what Sheffield City Council needs to be doing to help city centre businesses.

Tom was also keen to get the thoughts of the group on the potential development of the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) whilst accepting there is a need to balance the concerns about vulnerable people and getting them the support they need.

Tom added that he understood that criminal behaviour and ASB activity can be a barrier and may put more people off from visiting the city centre.

Tom closed his opening address by concluding that a vibrant and strong city centre is not just about the buildings. It's about the people.

We then moved into a Q&A session with questions from the floor.

**What is your personal view on introducing a PSPO?**

“Personally, I’m in favour, but relevant committees will make the decision. They are currently gathering evidence and keen to ensure that the business voice continues to be heard during this process.”

Tom added that he knows that powers granted through the introduction of a PSPO would support South Yorkshire Police in their operations.

**The former John Lewis building. What’s the latest?**

“Urban Splash (the Park Hill developer) was appointed as the preferred bidder at the end of June. Negotiations have now commenced.”

Sean McClean, Director of Regeneration and Development at Sheffield City Council, added that the aim is to be back at committee with the final deal for ratification in December 2023. The planning application should be Spring 2024. Very much working on something that is complementary to the city centre. And, hopefully, some meanwhile use on the ground floor of the building.

Important to acknowledge that there were six strong competitive bids with the majority not having an existing presence in the city centre. Conversations are ongoing with the other – non-successful – developers. It’s fair to say that the John Lewis project has got people interested in the area and the opportunity of opening up Barkers Pool to more people.

In terms of Urban Splash, they have been at Park Hill for over a decade now and that is really coming to fruition. They are very keen to engage widely on their plans.

**Is there any news around discussions with other traders to invest in the city centre following the recent arrival of Sostrene Grene?**

“With regards to Heart of the City II, leases are being agreed and announcements are expected to be made in the Autumn. The Cambridge Street Collective should be completed and fit out ready for opening in early 2024. The Council is talking to businesses of a level similar to Sostrene Grene that are not currently operating in the city centre. Hopefully there will be some early announcements over the next few weeks. Interest has increased significantly. Commercially sensitive conversations are ongoing with high quality brands which will help to raise the overall quality of the offer in the city centre.”

**On Fargate, there has been and will continue to be a lot of disruption. How is the Council working with Sisk and what pressure is being put on the delivery of this work?**

*There have been some issues around communications. It was noted that M&S have a good, open dialogue, but that this may not have been consistent with other traders on Fargate.*

“It’s inevitable there is a degree of disruption, and we are working closely with the contractor (Sisk). Also, we appreciate there is a need to improve the communications and not just with local businesses, but also with members of the public.”

*It was noted that Amber Hendy (Sisk) will be basing herself at Virgin Money for a day a week over the next few weeks, so will be on-hand for contact. Sean (McClean) is also happy to take any direct*

*comments. Finally, a dedicated meeting for Fargate businesses is arranged for 19 September chaired by Sheffield BID to bring relevant parties together.*

**Is there any chance of reducing some of the construction works in the run up to Christmas?**

“Making the area more inviting over the festive period is certainly an area where we can see what we can do to help.”

**Chapel Walk. What’s happening down there?** *There have been issues around rough sleeping and ASB recently.*

“There are plans in place to improve Chapel Walk through the Future High Street project (including a public art installation and new lighting) and to better link-up Tudor Square and Fargate via Chapel Walk.”

**There is an issue around drug use and litter/detritus around Castlegate. Access from the hotels to businesses at Castlegate is poor and feedback from attendees to recent national swimming events at Ponds Forge is that they haven’t felt safe in the immediate area.**

“If one area of the city centre is a problem, then that’s a problem for the whole/wider city centre. For some parts of the city population, there is a view that either ‘the city centre is dead’ and/or the ‘city centre is not safe’. There was a recent week of action including graffiti removal and a strong police presence and these will continue.”

*Businesses commented on the negative press coverage and that people are being put off by some of the individuals who are spending their time in the city centre. Forum chair Lee added that it was important that we let the PSPO process work through and continue to contribute to that process.*

Tom added that Castlegate is another important area for development. “Sheffield City Council recently endorsed the Local Plan for how and where it is going to have new development from 2024-2039. 36k new homes and 43k new jobs will be created over the next 15 years. 20k of these new homes will be in the city centre. More people working here, living here (including around Moorfoot and close to the station) will help with the animation of these spaces and having more people around for longer. All these new residents will be future customers.” Tom is confident that the Local Plan will be endorsed at a government level and that it will be in place next year.

**Do you walk around the city centre, if so what do you see/think?**

“I travel in from Uppertorpe to the city centre. I am in the city centre, and I do walk around it. I want the city centre to be as good as we all want it to be. We are on the cusp of something that is genuinely changing for the better and this will help to change some of those ingrained perceptions of old. I too am frustrated by graffiti. I am frustrated by some of the access issues.”

**What is your view on access to the city centre?**

“I use a range of modes, the tram, I walk and drive. We need to ensure there is choice. We need to massively improve our public transport and we’re working with the Mayor (SYMCA) to bring buses back under public control. Changed road layouts we know have confused people and there is an appreciation on the issues around signage and car parking access.”

Comments from businesses were made about the lack of information and the absence of up-to-date information. Feedback from customers is that it's more difficult to get into the centre and it's problematic to get around particularly for older customers.

Several businesses raised issues around Surrey Street which are severely impacting the independent businesses in that area. The policy for Surrey Street – access and parking (the impact of disabled bays and electric cars) – needs to be looked at. The Sheffield Connect bus is also no longer able to access Surrey Street which has just added to the negative impacts on these businesses and their customers.

“We do want to encourage people to park in appropriate car parks and use other forms of travel where we can. We can't have this conversation as fully as we would like without improving our public transport system.”

Tom closed the session by thanking everyone, saying he'd be very happy to come back to a future meeting.

### **Presentation from Kada Research and the Sheffield Property Association (SPA)**

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Tim Bottrill introduced the SPA, a member-led network which brings together local property professionals committed to improving Sheffield's built environment for the benefit of all.

Today's presentation focused on a research study that SPA has commissioned through Kada, about the impact that working from home is having on the city centre. This research has not yet been released to members of the SPA as yet.

Whilst the report is close to being finalised, Kada Research continue to welcome any feedback. This can be sent to Pat Coupar at Kada Research ([pat@kadaresearch.co.uk](mailto:pat@kadaresearch.co.uk)).

#### Highlights:

- UK homeworking is still on the up, substantial and permanent.
- Daily office occupancy – now around 35%.
- Hardest hit are those areas that have a large professional services sector.
- Sheffield fourth highest increase in remote working of core cities.
- Forecasts in the research report (*with input from Sheffield Hallam University researchers*)
  - 2 days away from the office – an estimated loss of £16.2m to the city centre economy.
  - 3 days away from the office – an estimated loss of £32.4m to the city centre economy.
- Most firms are flexible on 2/3 days home working arrangements but are looking at pull factors to get people back into the office more.
- Businesses do not believe the office is dead but agree office facilities must improve.
- Attractions to the city centre are key, including a full events calendar.
- Many want the ASB issue sorted quickly.
- Status-quo becomes the easy option of staying in-situ until they have greater understanding of employee needs.
- Sheffield's office vacancy rate up 2% to 18%.
- A mixed-use centre, developments welcomed but appreciation that significant gaps remain.
- Everyone wanting change to happen faster.
- Many large employers have under 25% occupancy.

- 25-34 demographic is key to future growth.
- Flexible office hours – people like flexibility.
- Build a calendar of social events within the company.
- Important that we tell more people about the ‘City’ part of The Outdoor City.

SPA will share a summary of final report over the coming weeks.

### **Business health check**

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Footfall at The Moor has slipped – but still up 20% year-on-year – and this has been put down to recent weather challenges. M&S is experiencing a down-turn year-on-year. It was noted by several businesses the positive impact of last year’s Women’s Euro 2022 which they haven’t had the benefit of this year. Footfall is down at Orchard Square but spend is up for a number of its traders.

### **Any other business**

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A point was raised about the proposed development of the former Royal Bank of Scotland on Church Street. There is a proposal to relocate some existing services to the new site, opposite the Cathedral.

These services are important, but there are concerns about the effect on an area that is already blighted by adverse homeless and associated activity.

There is an ongoing consultation around GP services and the potential for amalgamating services into part of this site.

The consultation can be found here: <http://www.bit.ly/sheffieldcityhealthcentre>

### **Dates for the diary**

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- The next High Street Forum will be October– confirmation of the date/venue and formal invitations will be issued shortly.