

# URBAN PANEL – Review Paper

## Birmingham (Curzon HS2 area)

Visit: 18/19 April 2016

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### 1. Introduction

1.1. Birmingham has evolved from a thriving, small medieval town to a powerhouse of the Industrial Revolution and on to its current status as a diverse and vibrant city which has continually sought to reinvent itself. The apparent tendency to embrace change for change's sake has sometimes been to the detriment of the city's historic environment and a juxtaposition of different architectural styles and land uses are evident today.

1.2. The importance of the railway in the history of industrial Birmingham is still to be seen in the existence of two railway lines connecting the city with London, and other parts of the country. The mainline railway arrived in the 1830s initially terminating at Curzon Street (subsequently moving to New Street which remains a key transport hub). The railway line connecting Birmingham and London via the Chilterns includes stations at Moor Street and Snow Hill. Now a third mainline railway connection is due to arrive in the form of High Speed Two (HS2) which will include a very large new station in the vicinity of the Grade I listed Curzon Street Station, a longstanding entry on the Heritage at Risk Register.

1.3. Birmingham City Council's Curzon HS2 Masterplan focuses on the proposed HS2 railway as a unique opportunity to transform areas of the city centre and integrate the development of key regeneration sites. Covering 140 hectares around the Eastside and Digbeth areas, and the eastern fringe of the city centre, the Masterplan is one of a suite of 'visioning' documents produced by the Council – under the umbrella of the Big City Plan. Although the Masterplan was subject to public consultation in 2014, the drawings and graphic representations are considered by the Council to be illustrative only. In conjunction with HS2 Ltd, the Council plan to hold an international design competition to find the architect for the proposed Birmingham Curzon Station.

1.4. The Urban Panel visited at the invitation of Curzon Urban Regeneration Company in order to inform the development of the HS2 Station and the regeneration of Digbeth (comprising the Digbeth, Deritend & Bordesley High Streets Conservation Area). There are significant challenges to be addressed in ensuring the regeneration associated with HS2 and the new station flow on to other parts of the city and whilst

not compromising the historic environment. These include the presence of a Grade I listed Building at Risk being at the centre of the masterplan area and the need for new development to enhance, rather than stymie, connectivity between different parts of the city.

## 2. Executive Summary and Recommendations

2.1. During their two day visit, comprising site visits, presentations, an extensive walking tour and meetings, the Panel enjoyed Digbeth as a unique place with a district character. The nature of Digbeth had changed little since the Panel's previous visit in 2000, which is itself an indication of the stability in the type of building uses in the area. The use of buildings by small to medium sized creative and artisan enterprises was noted, as was the presence of urban art (including graffiti), as an important element of Digbeth and the Panel felt strongly that continuity of use would enhance and protect the area's distinct character. The Panel was impressed with the level of commitment to finding a conservation led approach by Curzon Urban Regeneration Company, and the conservation team and Heritage Champion from Birmingham City Council.

2.2. Aside from plans for an international architecture competition, the Panel felt that Birmingham City Council had not articulated a strong vision for the area immediately adjacent to the proposed HS2 station, or for Digbeth. There was also concern at an apparent approach where the market would lead regeneration and design, rather than these stemming from appropriate planning policy and a requirement high quality public realm. The Panel felt that in publishing an illustrative masterplan, with images that have been widely reproduced in local and national media, the Council runs the risk of disenfranchising the local community who will not engage with a process if they believe it is effectively closed to their input.

### Summary Recommendations

- An interim use for Curzon Street Station should be found.
- Plans for the Birmingham Curzon HS2 Station must incorporate the Curzon Street Station building and other listed heritage assets in the vicinity, as well as allowing for connectivity between different parts of the city.
- The Curzon HS2 Masterplan should be strengthened and a programme of stakeholder engagement carried out to inform the process.
- The character of the Curzon/Digbeth area should be safeguarded through positive

planning policy, and not left vulnerable to market-led development.

- Historic England and Birmingham City Council should work together closely to find sustainable uses for heritage assets (including conservation areas).
- Birmingham City Council/Curzon URC should develop a plan for high quality public realm in order to stimulate regeneration in the adjacent areas.

### 3. The Panel Visit: Walking tour

#### 3.1. Curzon Street Station, The Woodman and Eastside

3.1.1. An opportunity to visit the normally closed Grade I listed Curzon Street Station building gave the Panel an opportunity to view the internal space and layout, and the level of deterioration. The world's first mainline railway passenger terminus, and the public offices for the London Birmingham Railway, the 1838 building contained a refreshment area, and is an early example of a purpose built office building. A hotel was constructed adjacent to the remaining building in 1841, as part of the frontage development, so the overall appearance was never symmetrical. The hotel was demolished in the 1970s. Views from the stairwell over to The Woodman Public House and the wider city emphasised the need to maintain and improve connections with existing development as well as any new buildings. The two-storey Woodman has a dual frontage retaining its original corner entrance and is a strong feature within the rather barren street scene - a consequence of previous demolitions and wide, low rise, and uniform public realm works including a new park.

3.1.2. From outside the Curzon Street Station building, the view east is over the former terminus area, and to the north is Millennium Point - built on the former goods yard area and incorporating Thinktank Museum. Adjacent are Birmingham City University (BCU) buildings all of significant size and modern contemporary appearance. The Panel noted that the Millennium Point area and Curzon Street Station are set at a higher level than the proposed site for the HS2 station and line, and that land to the west heading towards the Bullring also rises. The proposed HS2 railway line comes in on a viaduct higher than the existing canal viaduct to the east, requiring the roof of the locally listed Eagle & Tun Public House be removed and the Grade II Fox and Grapes Public House to be demolished.

3.1.3. The Panel felt strongly that Curzon Street Station building's lack of on-going use was a particular problem which would only be exacerbated once it became

'locked up' at the centre of the HS2 building site. It was considered the challenges presented by, for example, the building's staircase having a lower rail level than that required under current Building Regulations could be resolved which, along with the provision of a lift, would make an interim use viable. An interim use would certainly be desirable and the Panel also believed that a scheme involving integration of the existing building with the new HS2 station offered an opportunity restore some of the historic context.

3.1.4. The Panel expressed concerns about the permeability of a new station building as long platforms – and therefore a significant new building - will be required. The short walk to Thinktank Museum highlighted concerns at the possibility of cutting parts of the city off from each other.

### 3.2. Digbeth, Deritend and Bordesley High Streets Conservation Area

3.2.1. The Eagle & Tun Public House will be affected by the proposed HS2 viaduct requiring the removal of the building's roof and chimneys. There is twentieth century cultural significance due to the building's strong association with Birmingham based band UB40. The premises were closed for eight years before it was reopened in 2016 due to the increasing number of students using the area. Retention of the main building under the HS2 viaduct would ensure that the existing frontage would be kept in the streetscape, although the Panel was clear that permeability within the area would also need to be retained, or enhanced, in order for the existing use to remain viable.

3.2.2. The Birmingham Gun Barrel Proof House – listed Grade II\* and one of only two in the UK and fourteen in the world - is situated to the immediate south of the wider Curzon Street Station site, and set at a lower level to the railway line that runs into New Street. These purpose built premises have a cannon testing chamber and the firm wishes to remain at its premises, which derives part of its historic significance from the continuity of use since construction. Any plans for the area will need to consider noise issues and possible tensions between creative uses, residential development, a major train line and gunpowder.

3.2.3. The canal side unlisted Typhoo Wharf has a mix of buildings along with a canal side location and is the site of a major development by Birmingham City University, which has secured £14million in Government funding, as a new location for its Arts Faculty incorporating some small/medium enterprises and a cultural hub. The STEAMhouse project has also secured £500,000 in from the Creative Growth Fund overseen by Arts Council England. It is likely that residential development and student accommodation would be required. The

Panel noted this has the potential for both positive and negative impacts on the Digbeth area – which has little existing residential accommodation.

- 3.2.4. Ringway Engineering Service Co Nos 106-110 Fazeley Street and No.122 Fazeley Street are a pair of Grade II Listed Victorian two-storey low scale former dwellings with a strong frontage running parallel to the canal to the rear. They are good examples of residential scale and form in Digbeth which intersperse larger scale commercial buildings.
- 3.2.5. The unlisted Fellows, Morton and Clayton Ltd warehouse building backing onto the canal, and facing onto Fazeley Street, has a bull nose at the canal end pointing to the fact that a filled in area to the west would at some point have been part of the canal and used as a turning circle. This is one of the larger buildings along the canal.
- 3.2.6. The red brick canal side Grade II listed Banana Warehouse is subject to current repair works by the owner. On the opposite side of the canal, surfacing improvement and other public realm works have been undertaken to provide a pleasant active route along the waterway. There is little informal surveillance here and crudely styled graffiti on static objects suggest that increased use might help address anti-social behaviour. The change in land level was noted by the Panel and the issues of permeability and cross city connection are relevant.
- 3.2.7. The unlisted aqueduct over the River Rea and Canal Bridge on Great Barr Street has benefited from canal path surfacing and landscaping works and the route is used for walking, jogging and cycling. The canal crossing itself forms part of the character of the area. The Panel believed the issues of land levels, and lack of informal surveillance in the immediate area, are pertinent here.
- 3.2.8. The Grade II listed Public Conveniences on the corner of Liverpool and Great Barr Streets are located in a quiet pedestrian part of Digbeth. Birmingham City Council is unclear about the future of this original decorative cast-iron set of gentlemen's conveniences.
- 3.2.9. Unlisted Fazeley Street Studios are a mixed use development (incorporating a former chapel and Sunday School room) consisting of function/conference rooms, popular café, open plan offices, television studios and a landscaped central courtyard. This is a vibrant and active development which has firmly established itself as a venue in Birmingham – it is frequently used by Historic England for HELM seminars. Panel members had the opportunity to view and experience the internal layout of the main entrance hall and some of the

adjoining rooms.

- 3.2.10. The Arch, Floodgate Street is an unlisted two-storey former brass foundry converted into offices by The Bond Company (which has acquired a number of Victorian buildings in Digbeth, successfully renovating them for commercial enterprises and social activities). The Panel believed that increased footfall and gentrification – as a consequence of the HS2 development – could have positive or negative impacts on the business.
- 3.2.11. The unlisted Custard Factory is another site where a variety of buildings have been renovated and reused for mainly arts related commercial uses. The 15 acre site is owned by the Gray family, owners of Fazeley Street Studios, who have proved willing and capable of investing in sites that sustainably reuse historic buildings. Birmingham City Council has a good working relationship with the Grays and the Panel were supportive of this collaborative approach. The Panel was very interested in the uses within the main building and the flow through the building as a result of multiple access/egress points.
- 3.2.12. The walk from the canal to the Custard Factory highlighted a change from crude graffiti along the canal to very skilled graffiti, arguably street art, and acknowledged public art. Graffiti is a predominant characteristic of this part of Digbeth, and a ‘City of Colour’ festival takes place in the area every summer engaging with younger groups and encouraging them to express themselves through art. The mixture of businesses existing in side streets is a likely indicator of the age and diversity of those using the area - juice bars and ice cream & soda parlours are providing places to socialise away from the High Street pubs. The Panel agreed that the graffiti on the walls showcased the cultural diversity which defines the area, and is in itself extremely interesting and reasonably rare in a British context. A similar example of this kind of artistic expression can be found in Rio de Janeiro - Brazilian graffiti art is considered to be a significant part of a global urban art movement.
- 3.2.13. The High Street running through Digbeth and Deritend, featuring Devonshire Works (Grade II); The Old Crown (Grade II\*); 224-225 Digbeth High Street (Grade II); Digbeth Institute (Grade II); and, Digbeth Campus (Grade II\*) showcases larger historic buildings with finer decorative terracotta detailing than the industrial buildings the Panel had seen closer to the canal. The High Street would have been the place to showcase affluence and make a statement. The increase in scale of building, through height and mass, provided a context as to the potential mix of the area that could be supported by a properly

detailed masterplan for Digbeth/Deritend.

3.2.14. The tour ended at the canal side unlisted building The Bond, Fazeley Street. Originally a gas works, then an ice manufactory and then a bonded warehouse it was renovated by The Bond Company (which also developed The Arch on Floodgate Street) and provides social and commercial space, including office facilities, and meeting rooms for external hire.

#### 4. Panel Visit – Exploring the Challenges

##### 4.1. The Curzon HS2 Masterplan

4.1.1. Andrew Fuller (Principal Conservation Officer, Birmingham City Council) gave an overview of the Council's vision and the published Curzon HS2 Masterplan for the area (comprising around a fifth of the city centre including part of the Digbeth, Deritend & Bordesley High Streets Conservation Area). He emphasised that all Birmingham City Council's masterplans are "visioning" documents as part of the wider Big City Plan, intended for use as a tool to engage with people rather than to determine parameters for development. He stated that Masterplan gives an indication of where the Council's strategy has come from, what it is aiming for, and how it would links with other areas of regeneration within the city.

4.1.2. A map of the 1900s sets the scene for the Masterplan and highlights the railway lines and canal system with a wharf in the centre. The New Street line is set on a viaduct and the Moor Street line runs to the south east on a higher viaduct - these form a triangle of railway layers. At street level, the railways are above and the canals below, with the River Rea sited below the canal. A key challenge is how to make the most of these complex levels in terms of connection and use.

4.1.3. Later periods of development have created additional challenges for the Curzon HS2 Masterplan and regeneration area. The Queensway was built in the 1980s and created a 'concrete collar' within the city which restricted growth outside the ring road. The 1990s saw utilisation of the canal network and creation of a retail and leisure destinations such as The Bullring and Brindleyplace. There was a focus on priority pedestrian routes to open up the inner suburbs and development of residential schemes. An aspirational study conducted in 2000 eventually led to the Big City Plan in 2010. The Eastside Masterplan was produced in December 2011 with a view to HS2 coming into city centre, and new development for BCU. However, Birmingham City Council considered the plan was missing a valuable part of the city and potential links, so further work

was undertaken resulting in the Curzon HS2 Masterplan in July 2015.

4.1.4. Birmingham City Council aspires to an iconic HS2 railway station building, and plans to hold an international design competition. It is anticipated that a Station Square would be formed to provide a visual separation from Moor Street Station and that pedestrian connections would be created with the area to the north, with Paternoster Place leading to Digbeth. On that basis, an arrivals area with an interface to the east of the city centre would have retail, business, learning and research to the north (all existing uses at present) and a creative hub to the south in Digbeth. However, existing creative elements of that area are fragile, and should be treated sensitively. Given the size required of any new station building, there will be a significant visual impact on the townscape. Permeability – in order not to allow a new station to cut one section of the city off from another - is achievable, and this will need to be factored into the building's design. The new railway line is likely to lead to growth, along with additional housing, employment and associated amenity space. The Panel felt that possible challenges, apart from the new station itself, may include:

- How BCU's plans for Typhoo Wharf (see above) will fit into the existing Digbeth area, without compromising its character.
- Determining how, if at all, new development can complement the existing nineteenth century red brick buildings on New Canal Street.
- Dealing with the inevitable residential development pressure on Digbeth which may gentrify the area, diminish its existing character and force the creative elements out.
- How to deal with the Duddeston Viaduct - proposals for a 'skypark' seem to have been deferred.
- How best to ensure the proposed Station Square forms an open and active area.
- How to ensure the Midland Metro extension and interchange, which will link the HS2 station with the central business district, will allow pedestrians to move south to Digbeth as they do currently.
- Ensuring Curzon Square has good quality public realm, and through access for pedestrians, as well as fulfilling the need for new space for businesses and offices.



## 4.2. HS2 and the desire for an iconic station building

4.2.1. David Bartlett (Stations Project Director, High Speed Two (HS2) Ltd) and Richard Cowell (Assistant Director for Development, Birmingham City Council) spoke with the Panel about the challenges of ensuring high quality design in the delivery of a major new railway station in Birmingham city centre. HS2's development area is fixed, as can be seen in an outline in the Curzon HS2 Masterplan, and this will form the basis for area of relevance for the international design competition. Areas beyond the red line will have to be funded by Birmingham City Council and other investors. David Bartlett confirmed the brief for the design competition is being discussed with stakeholders, including Birmingham City Council, to confirm the criteria and stated that HS2 has established a Design Review Panel to oversee the brief.

4.2.2. HS2 is aware of the challenge to ensure the new station allows permeability and does not construct barriers between adjacent parts of the city. The brief for the design competition will need to incorporate this.

4.2.3. The Eastside regeneration area has wildly varying aspects, from the challenging to the straightforward - serious thought about how to keep it inviting is required. While there are engineering challenges, and the need to keep within budget, the HS2 team are hoping to be able to do the right thing and ensure 'life underneath the arches' carries on.

4.2.4. The HS2 team acknowledges the project offers the opportunity for the consolidation of old and new railway infrastructure. The Panel was told that the existing Curzon Street Station building is outside the HS2 development area, and is therefore unlikely to be included within the brief for the design competition. HS2 hopes to attract an architect-led design team with experience in world class projects - examples of railway stations which have successfully married the old and the new include Atocha Station in Madrid. HS2 is not seeking a 'house style' for stations but is planning to keep station customer interface infrastructure consistent along the HS2 line, while allowing individual stations' external designs to reflect the sense of place in each location.

4.2.5. The design competition will be a two part process. Initially, a shortlist of four will be chosen by the HS2 team from pre-qualified submissions. The second round will be consideration of four proposals developed by those on the shortlist - this round will be led by Birmingham City Council. The HS2 Hybrid Bill will address

the outline planning permission and be followed by a Section 6 planning submission as an infrastructure project.

4.2.6. An independent design review panel will ensure appropriate scrutiny of plans for a new station is undertaken. The design review panel will include several members of the national HS2 panel – to ensure a joined up approach and avoid conflict between the two panels. The design review panel will meet in public and be minuted. The station design will ultimately be approved through the HS2 Hybrid Bill.

4.2.7. The Panel was told that Birmingham City Council requires assurance on two issues, which are subject to current discussion with HS2. These are: that economic growth and activity will feed into the station design; and that links between Digbeth and the south of the city, and Digbeth and the business/university area to the north are created in order to unlock growth.

## 5. Panel Analysis

5.1. The Urban Panel was invited to Birmingham by the Curzon Urban Regeneration Company which is seeking advice on how, in partnership with Birmingham City Council, to capitalise on the opportunities of HS2 to ensure: the level of infrastructure and nature of development is right; existing viaducts and canals are put to beneficial use; the challenge of having a Grade I listed Curzon Street Station at the centre of the masterplan area is met while securing the building's future; connections with other parts of the city are maintained or enhanced; creative ways to work with the multiple higher education establishments in the area are explored; and regeneration builds on existing projects that have already transformed some surrounding areas.

### 5.2. The new HS2 station and the Curzon Street station building

5.2.1. The Panel discussed the need to safeguard the future of the existing, Grade I listed Curzon Street station building. An ideal scenario would be one that integrated the building into the design of the new HS2 station – not to do so would be a missed opportunity to stitch together the future of the railway with its rich history. It was also felt that finding an interim use for Curzon Street station would lend itself to community engagement – over the HS2 station project itself perhaps – while also serving to arrest the decline of the historic building. The need to give the community an opportunity to engage with the project was discussed – the existing Masterplan may include ‘illustrative only’ images, but there is a risk these will be interpreted as fixed design principles

and might discourage public engagement with the development process.

5.2.2. The Panel was concerned that a significant new station building in the wider Curzon Street area could act as a barrier, separating Millennium Point and Birmingham City University from Digbeth. The Panel discussed how connections might run north/south through the new station building and at various places along the long platform rather than relying on one entrance. There was some discussion as to whether the Curzon Street Station building itself could be integrated into the new station, providing an entrance or point at which foot traffic could pass en route to Digbeth. This led to further discussion about possible internal arrangements and uses within the new station building, and whether these could attract through traffic by non-railway users to ensure wider permeability.

5.2.3. It was noted that the scale of existing structures in the vicinity of the existing Curzon Street Station building were not high, so any new station design would need to acknowledge the different scales of form as well as changes in land levels. At present, different levels are utilised and work well, allowing the environment to flourish and be active - the HS2 station project will need to ensure this is maintained. The Panel identified potential similarities to Kings Cross in London where there have been successful connections through the refurbished railway station to landscape and buildings. Parallels were also drawn with St Pancras in terms of the new station being as much about the permeability of the city as well as the station, particularly in light of the length of platforms. The Panel felt these could be complementary.

5.2.4. The Panel sensed there are “two different Birminghams”. The inner section felt strident and quite severe, while the afternoon tour of Digbeth showed another, fluid side of the city. The new HS2 station will need to bridge these two worlds and it was acknowledged that the building should be iconic and engineering-led but different in architectural expression, to encompass this dual sense of place.

5.2.5. The Panel considered the option of the existing Curzon Street Station being left as an individual entity, with parallels drawn between it and Holburne Museum, Bath where a modern addition serves as a counterpoint to the original Georgian building. Similarities with the German Gymnasium in London, the first purpose built gymnasium in the country now used as a restaurant, were also recognised in a discussion about possible uses. The Panel considered the main problem with the project was likely to be HS2’s limitation to the fixed development area and the proposed station site. The Panel suggested an

alternative would be for HS2 to take sole responsibility for the railway line but for local stations to be co-funded, thus allowing for more flexibility regarding investment.

### 5.3. Partnerships and synergy

5.3.1. Concern was expressed in relation to the Terms of Reference which will determine the parameters for the project. The HS2 team are leading but will have different objectives, for adjacent areas, from other stakeholders and it is unclear how this will be managed. Birmingham City Council and the HS2 team are aligned in their thoughts of achieving a solution, but there appears to be a lack of real synergy between the two. The Panel agreed that the HS2 team requires critical friends to support and advise, and that Historic England could contribute by sitting on the design review panel.

5.3.2. The afternoon visit had shown examples of how owners of buildings such as Fazeley Street Studios and the Custard Factory can be good allies and instrumental links to communities and this was welcomed by the Panel. It was apparent other players are beginning to take an interest in the wider area too, with the Homes & Communities Agency stepping in to work with Birmingham City University at the Banana Warehouse.

### 5.4. Future of the Curzon HS2 Masterplan area and Digbeth

5.4.1. It was felt there was a sense that big changes are afoot in Eastside but not so much in Digbeth itself. Concerns about the possibility of “sanitisation” of the area were raised, particularly a scenario where businesses on low rates and cheap rents, which contribute much to the character of the area, might be displaced if the area developed very quickly.

5.4.2. The Panel considered which businesses were most representative in the area and were advised these would be professional financial services such as HSBC and Deutsche Bank who are moving corporate headquarters to Birmingham; universities through research and development in science and health; digital media and art, along support systems and services for these groups; and strong automobile base. The Panel believed that when HS2 offers a 49 minute train journey between London and Birmingham, it will become comparable with other commuter zones for London workers. Pressure for housing development within the area is likely to be significant and may push the creative sector and artisans located in Digbeth out to the fringes. One solution identified by the Panel would be to limit housing to specific areas to ensure the creative sector

retains sufficient space to grow and evolve in the area. The Panel also discussed the changes in live/work patterns that have flowed from technological improvements and increasing digital connectivity.

5.4.3. It was agreed that sustainable regeneration of the Curzon/Digbeth area should be positively driven by planning policy, and not purely market led. A good model is to be seen in the approach set out by the Birmingham Jewellery Quarter Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAMP), which was adopted as supplementary planning guidance in 2002. Since adoption, the CAMP policies have successfully restrained market pressure for inappropriate residential development in the Jewellery Quarter. There had been the danger that residential conversions would, by displacing existing jewellery manufacturing premises, separate jewellery making from the Quarter and destroy its unique character. The analogies with the prospect of gentrification pushing the creative industries out of Digbeth are obvious.

5.4.4. The proposed Duddeston Viaduct Skypark, mooted in the Curzon HS2 Masterplan, was mentioned as a good route for connections and surveillance over existing canal walkways and the wider area. Similarities between the concept and the successful New York City Highline project were apparent.

## 6. Conclusions

6.1. The Panel recognises and applauds Birmingham City Council's desire to play a key role in the HS2 project, to ensure the aspirations of the Curzon HS2 Area Masterplan are realised.

6.2. It was noted that the Council is prepared to seek investment and invest itself where possible. Notwithstanding this drive for the area by Birmingham City Council, there must be a clear vision for the Curzon HS2 Masterplan area to ensure:

- plans for growth and regeneration include conserving and enhancing the existing Curzon Street Station building and its setting through sustainable use, in order to remove it from the Heritage at Risk Register;
- the new HS2 station and public realm works allow permeability north/south as well as east/west; and,
- the special character and uniqueness of Digbeth, Deritend and Bordesley

Conservation Area is preserved and enhanced.

6.3. The Panel felt it was of particular importance that the creative elements of Digbeth are not pushed out as a consequence of new investment in the area. The character of the area, bolstered by its cultural diversity, as well as its use of the existing built fabric and open spaces, makes it a unique and distinctive quarter of the city. Unfortunately, this is not fully acknowledged within the existing “masterplan”.

## 7. Recommendations (and notes on progress since the Urban Panel’s visit in April 2016)

### 1. **An interim use for Curzon Street Station should be found**

- An interim use, or uses, should be put in place for the existing Curzon Street Station building at the earliest opportunity in order to allow use of the building before and during construction of HS2. This will maintain connections within the area during development phases, while providing a good foundation for permanent use/uses once the new station is complete;
- An obvious option would be to install a HS2/Curzon Masterplan exhibition hub within the building as part of stakeholder engagement;
- Historic England wants to support this process and will gladly offer advice to Birmingham City Council, Curzon Urban Regeneration Company, the Local Enterprise Partnership, HS2, the design review panel and other stakeholders.
- Progress: Historic England has continued to participate in discussions with HS2 Ltd, Birmingham City Council and the Curzon Delivery Board regarding the building, and its use during construction of the HS2 station. The HS2 Ltd Board has agreed in principle to joint funding from Birmingham City Council/LEP for works to bring it into use during this phase. Possibilities include: HS2 using the ground floor as meeting and exhibition space; Birmingham City University using the first floor; Historic England using the top floor as office space, as the AXIS is subject to a planning application that may see the building demolished. HS2 expect the building to be ‘usable’ for these purposes by the end of 2017/beginning of 2018. BCC have contracted a specialist firm to remove graffiti accumulating on the building.

### 2. **Plans for Birmingham’s Curzon HS2 Station must incorporate the Curzon Street Station building and other listed heritage assets in the vicinity, as well as allowing for connectivity between different parts of the city.**

- The design competition brief for the new Birmingham Curzon HS2 Station should stipulate that the existing Curzon Street Station building is embraced and

acknowledged, in order to achieve a comprehensive redevelopment of the site that respects the Grade I listed building and its setting;

- The competition brief should further include a requirement to address the area beyond the HS2 development lines, as a key issue, so the wider picture and terms of reference are fully considered through the selection processes;
- The development of the competition brief needs to involve a wide consultation to ensure all aspects are considered;
- The permeability of the new railway station should be a requirement of the design brief. Ensuring parts of the city are not cut off from each other will help to promote growth. It may be possible to incorporate the existing Curzon Street Station into the design to facilitate foot traffic routes through the Birmingham Curzon station area.
- Progress: Urban Panel and Historic England have offered support and participation of expert staff in the design competition process. The Curzon Street Station building is not currently included in the design brief, although there is reference for the need for the new building to ‘pay respect’ to the old.

### **3. The Curzon HS2 Masterplan should be strengthened, and a programme of stakeholder engagement carried out to inform the process.**

- Birmingham City Council should update the Masterplan, including more detail about the Digbeth, Deritend and Bordesley High Streets Conservation Area, and development plans for the wider area;
- The role of the Curzon Urban Regeneration Company should be defined in the document, as this is not clear at present;
- The ‘illustrative’ images in the Masterplan, which might be misinterpreted, could be replaced. It is not clear what built form is being retained and what is proposed;
- Birmingham City Council and HS2 should take steps to positively engage and inform the community as soon as possible to ensure they are not inadvertently discouraged by indicative illustrations in the Masterplan document. Early engagement work with the local community would be particularly beneficial;
- Improved communication and engagement with Digbeth property owners and users should be part of the creation of the plan, rather than needing to hard sell proposals. This will help safeguard the distinctive and unique character of the area in terms of people and urban grain;

- Greater consideration of how plans for the area will interact with the adjoining Smithfield area should be undertaken.
  - Progress: the Curzon URC has now become the Curzon Delivery Board (CDB) with employees seconded from Birmingham City Council and a budget drawn from borrowings against business rates under Enterprise Zone terms (the Curzon area is within an Enterprise Zone).
- 4. The character of the Curzon/Digbeth area should be safeguarded through positive planning policy, and not left vulnerable to market-led development.**
- Birmingham City Council is strongly advised to produce and adopt a Digbeth/Deritend CAMP as a Supplementary Planning Document.
  - Progress: Birmingham City Council have committed to produce and adopt a CAMP/SPD and would value HE input into this policy framework. HE West Midlands will support BCC however possible. An SPD will help guide the process given Birmingham City Council is limited in its ability to set a good example by its lack of actual land/building ownership in the Digbeth and surrounding area. HE Research Group staff, visited Digbeth in early October and agree that the area merits further research. This would add to recent work carried out on the Curzon St Station building and its immediate environs, which provided the research report referred to on the Urban Panel visit. HE West Midlands will discuss this further with them, emphasising the current opportunity and aiming to gain priority in their project planning.
- 5. Historic England and Birmingham City Council should work together to find sustainable uses for heritage assets (including conservation areas).**
- The HS2 project offers opportunities for the existing Curzon Street Station building and the Warwick Bar Conservation Area to be improved and removed from the Heritage at Risk Register. This could be addressed within an updated Masterplan or, alternatively, a CAMP for the area.
  - Progress: Historic England West Midlands met with BCC's Deputy Leader Cllr Ian Ward (Cabinet Member for Heritage), Cllr Phil Davis (Heritage Champion) and Val Birchall (Assistant Director, Culture and Visitor Economy) in early summer. HE emphasised the importance of incorporating the historic character of the urban environment of Digbeth in planning the future of the area in the context of HS2 and its environs. The importance of the Curzon St Station building, its lack of maintenance, graffiti issues and its place in the future development of the HS2 station were also discussed.
- 6. A plan for high quality public realm is required in order to stimulate**



**regeneration in the adjacent areas.**

- Birmingham City Council and Curzon Urban Regeneration Company should work together on a public realm plan to form part of a refreshed Curzon HS2 Masterplan.
- Progress: Birmingham City Council will commission a partner to deliver public realm delivery and will produce a public realm strategy for Digbeth that sets out appropriate materials and so on. BCC is working with landowners to inform this process. The Kings Cross project is an exemplar of success where a unified vision of public realm excellence has been delivered. Curzon Delivery Board feels there is scope for a Business Improve District 'lite' to engage all relevant parties.

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