



Historic England

URBAN PANEL REVIEW PAPER

Rochdale

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Initial thoughts
3. The southern part of the Heritage Action Zone
4. The town centre and northern part of the Heritage Action Zone
5. Other matters
6. Conclusions and Recommendations

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Drake Street, the Regency thoroughfare which connected the centre of one of Lancashire's most successful textile towns with its railway station, was Rochdale's principal shopping street. It was a street which, for almost 150 years, was the bustling commercial heart of the town with department stores, two Co-operatives (including the Rochdale Pioneers' first bespoke shop), impressive public halls and numerous small shops and businesses.
- 1.2 By the end of the twentieth Century, however, all this had changed. The structural changes in the retail economy, nationally, combined with the northerly shift of the main retail focus of the town due to the opening of not one, but two, large shopping centres had a catastrophic impact upon the vitality and viability of this historic thoroughfare. Today, several of what were Drake Street's most iconic buildings have gone or have been irreparably altered, many other properties lie vacant or, at best, in marginal uses, and a large proportion are in a parlous state of repair. The once bustling street full of people that was shown in photographs of Drake Street from the 1960s is now largely devoid of activity.
- 1.3 Whilst Rochdale town centre, itself, also witnessed a similar downturn in its economic fortunes during the same period, the decline was nowhere near as marked nor the impacts upon its buildings and townscape quite so severe.
- 1.4 In the last decade, however, things have begun to change. As part of a hugely-impressive programme of regeneration initiatives, the central part of the town has seen a remarkable transformation. The reopening of the River Roch and the associated public realm works have created a stunning public space and new focus for Rochdale. The town centre has seen the development of award-winning modern buildings, a new public transport interchange and has witnessed many of its long-empty buildings brought back into use once again. However, despite the new-found confidence at the heart of the town, little of this seems to have permeated into the area immediately to the south of its town centre and Drake Street continues in its long, slow, spiral of decline.
- 1.5 The Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) is the latest of a series of interventions over the years which have tried to address the problems facing the Drake Street area. The Urban Panel visit is one of the first Projects of this latest initiative. Whilst the HAZ is still in its relative infancy, the Urban Panel were invited to provide some thoughts about the shape and content of the HAZ and to advise on how it might best support the physical and cultural regeneration of this area whilst keeping the local community involved and engaged. They were asked, in particular, to consider a number of questions.
 - How might the HAZ empower and engage the various communities of central Rochdale with the regeneration process?

- How might the HAZ help attract sustainable growth that will repurpose and revive Drake Street and boost economic activity in both the HAZ area and the wider town centre?
- How might the HAZ help develop a market for town centre living?
- How might connectivity between the existing residential areas and the town centre be improved so that more people are encouraged to use their town centre?
- What need to be done to improve the sense of arrival at the station?
- How might pedestrian and cyclist experience through and around the town centre be improved?

2 Initial thoughts

- 2.1 On the basis of their, admittedly, all too brief visit to the town, the Urban Panel were struck by how fascinating a place Rochdale is and what an interesting and diverse historic environment it possesses. It was particularly encouraging to come across a town whose Members and Officers seemed so obviously proud of their local heritage - and not simply the town's legacy of historic buildings but also the people who had helped shape the Rochdale of today. They were greatly impressed by the transformational changes which the Council had already undertaken in the town centre, by their drive and commitment to deliver regeneration, and their enviable record of seemingly being able to lever-in funding both to assist the Borough's economic regeneration and the repair and reuse of its heritage assets. The design and execution of the public realm works that the Panel had seen during their walking tour were exemplary and will undoubtedly make an appreciable difference to people's experience and perceptions of the town centre. The emphasis that is being given to promoting high-quality design is to be applauded. The on-going works around the Riverside, the development of the new outdoor and indoor markets, and proposed creation of the new public space around the Town Hall all look likely to further enhance the attractiveness of the town centre to visitors.
- 2.2 However, it is clearly evident that, despite these notable regeneration initiatives and a not-inconsiderable programme of further investment, the long-term economic future of Rochdale town centre is still far from certain. A lot of spend from Rochdale residents does not go to the businesses in its town centre, the communities in and around the town centre are still some of the most deprived in the Country, and previous grant schemes that have been targeted at the area around Drake Street over the years have been unable to comprehensively address either the threats to its historic environment or secure the revitalisation of the wider area.
- 2.3 From their walking tour of Rochdale and their discussions with RBC about its issues, the Panel felt that the HAZ ought to be considered as two separate

areas each of which has its own challenges and, as a result, each of which demands a different approach to try and resolve them. Thus, the southern part of the HAZ (the area centred around Drake Street) is likely to be one whose future lies through community engagement; the northern part of the HAZ, on the other hand (the area around the Town Hall and the northern part of the town centre) is essentially about improving connectivity. The Panel Report, therefore, is broadly structured along these lines.

- 2.4 This was the first time that an Urban Panel visit had been condensed into a single day. As a result, unlike previous visits elsewhere, the Members of the Panel did not have the opportunity to talk to, or engage with, representatives of the wider community of Rochdale particularly those from BME groups (who, they had been informed, make up a considerable proportion of the population to the south of the town centre). Consequently, it was difficult to ascertain to what extent the communities in and around Drake Street had already been engaged in or helped shape the future direction of the HAZ, or whether its direction of travel actually reflects their aspirations. Had the Panel had these discussions, it may well have been the case that the Panel's perceptions of the level of community engagement may have been different.

3 The southern part of the Heritage Action Zone

3.1 Drake Street

- 3.1.1 The walk from the station to the town centre enabled the Panel to appreciate some of the not inconsiderable challenges facing the southern part of the HAZ area. Nick Barton, the Council's Principal Project Manager, had informed the Panel that, in some parts of Drake Street, vacancy rates had reached 40%. What became apparent during their tour, however, was that this figure only tells part of the story. Many of those buildings that are occupied are in, what can only be described as, at best, marginal uses. Although there are, indeed, many historic buildings throughout this area, the vast majority (including some of its most iconic buildings) are in a very poor state of repair, and much of the architectural detailing still evident on the upper floors has been totally lost at street level by unsympathetic alterations and over-dominant, discordant signage. Not surprisingly, there are numerous gap sites and lots of temporary car parks - typical signs of an area in trouble. Other than the cars and trams, Drake Street was largely devoid of activity.
- 3.1.2 So how might one begin to turn this area around? Whilst the Projects identified in the HAZ Delivery Plan are absolutely fine in terms of tackling the physical fabric of the area, on their own, the Panel felt that they were unlikely to address some of the deeper structural problems facing the Drake Street area. Simply repeating, what might be termed, 'traditional' approaches to regeneration (i.e. ones that, in the main, concentrate primarily of the buildings and urban fabric) are, in all probability, unlikely to deliver the economic revival and repurposing of

Drake Street that is hoped for. On the evidence they had heard during their visit, the Panel were convinced that the power to regenerate this area lies with its people, and that the HAZ needs to think about how it might begin to empower the communities that live and work in and around the Drake Street area.

- 3.1.3 Given the crucial role which local communities are likely to play in the success of the HAZ, the Panel were concerned, from what they had heard during their visit, that the Council had not fully appreciated the likely complexity and diversity of this engagement challenge. As has been stated above, this may simply be because of the brevity of their visit and, in that respect, the Panel were disappointed that they had not been able to hear the views of local community representatives. However, the Panel considered that engaging the local community of Drake Street so that they can take ownership of the project was an essential component of the success of the HAZ - and one that, at present, does not figure in any meaningful way within its Delivery Plan. Consequently, the Panel considered that serious thought ought to be given both to the order of the Themes in the HAZ Delivery Plan (and to consider moving what is currently Theme E ('Engagement') to the top of the list) but also including specific engagement initiatives beyond simply to 'create broader awareness of local heritage' (as is its current intention). Indeed, the HAZ needs to include specific measures/Projects setting out exactly how it intends to get local communities engaged early on in the regeneration of Drake Street and, thereby, help drive the much-needed economic regeneration of this area. If you generate momentum of people-based projects, heritage will look after itself. To this end, the Panel strongly recommended not only that the HAZ Delivery Plan be rewritten but, also, that consideration be given to the appointment of a HAZ Project Officer who does not come from a 'typical' heritage-led regeneration background but, rather, somebody who has experience of practical community-engagement projects preferably with communities of similar characteristics to those currently living in this part of Rochdale.
- 3.1.4 The Panel felt that Drake Street provides a fantastic opportunity to test out new ideas and approaches to regeneration and to build upon some of the rich co-operative traditions which underpin so much of the town's history. The regeneration of Drake Street should be something which everybody has the opportunity to take part in, a place which becomes an exemplar for the whole country of co-operative working. Thus, Drake Street becomes a hub of co-operative housing, co-operative businesses and co-operative activities and events. It becomes a place where people can try different things, experiment with new ideas, where creative industries can flourish, and where it is OK to try new things and not be put off by fear of failure (after all, failure is learning). Drake Street should be a place which celebrates and builds upon the cultural identity of the local population (in a similar way that Bradford has done). Drake Street then becomes a place which has a reputation for experiment, a vibrant part of Rochdale which has pop-up uses and activities. This exciting, dynamic project then becomes people's first experience of the town when arriving from the station.

- 3.1.5 For this to work, those considering starting up new businesses or developing small housing schemes or community activities need to be able to get easy access to help and advice. The Panel had heard from Mike Howarth how Rochdale had made it easy for him to start his business activities in the town. The availability of help and assistance to entrepreneurs should become something for which Rochdale is famous. And the place where that is best suited to provide this advice, guidance and assistance, in the Panels' view, is the new Co-operative hub that it due to open in the former Butterworth's Jewellers. But the advice it provides should not be limited to simply new businesses (as is currently proposed). Instead, it should be there to provide advice for anyone who has an idea or project that they wish to pursue and develop in the Drake Street area be it a business, pop-up use, housing scheme or event. To this end, the Panel considered that the amount of funding directed towards the new Co-operative hub needs to be increased substantially so that this building can develop into an effective focus for all the co-operative activities in the Drake Street area - a hub that, itself also utilises the skills and knowledge of the local community (perhaps through volunteers) in the advice and guidance it provides.
- 3.1.6 During the presentations, Gemma Wood, Head of Development and Regeneration at Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH), informed the Panel that there was a long waiting list for housing in the town primarily for smaller dwellings. The on-going reconfiguration, modernisation and redevelopment of RBH's portfolio of properties and sites is likely to deliver a mix of properties which better meets the needs of the local population. However, as Mark Robinson, the Assistant Director of Economy at Rochdale Borough Council (RBC), explained as a result of population and household growth projections for the Borough and the on-going work on the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework, the town is likely to need to identify considerably more land to meet the overall housing needs of the Region than envisaged in its adopted Core Strategy. An indicative plan is under development by the Council and partners which has estimated that around 2,000 residential units could be delivered across various sites within and around the town centre. However, although they have sufficient land supply to meet this new housing requirement across the Borough because of low investor confidence, currently delivering anywhere near this number is likely to be a considerable challenge.
- 3.1.7 The Drake Street area provides a unique opportunity to explore how small community-led locally-driven schemes might help contribute towards the housing needs of the town. It could help answer questions such as 'How do you get higher-density development onto smaller sites?' and 'What does 'good' high-density housing on small sites look like?' Members of the Panel felt that the RTPI, RIBA or the Architecture Schools at the Universities ought to be encouraged to get engaged with local community groups to explore various approaches to place-making through the redevelopment of the smaller sites in the area. Enfield has a Muslim local housing association. Is there a role for the establishment of such an organisation here? Again, the approach to smaller-scale housing provision should be seen as an opportunity to experiment and

learn and to showcase varying approaches. The Panel urged Rochdale Councillors and the HAZ team to visit examples of successful small-scale housing projects elsewhere around the country.

- 3.1.8 One of the things that struck the Panel during the walk around this area was the amount of traffic using the southern end of Drake Street. This made the pedestrian experience of the walk to the town centre even less appealing than it might otherwise have been. Consideration needs to be given to removing cars, entirely, from Drake Street. However, even were the buildings to be brought back into use and the cars removed, the Panel suspected that these measures alone would not necessarily encourage people back into this part of Rochdale. The walk between the town centre and the station is very long and uphill. Although Nick Barton had told the panel that it was originally intended to have a tram stop half way up Drake Street, cost and running time issues meant that additional stop was removed from proposals. The Panel urged the Council to liaise with The Greater Manchester Mayor and Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) to try and get a tram stop mid-way along Drake Street. At present the Panel felt that the tram was more of a by-pass for Drake Street.

3.2 The Station Area

- 3.2.1 Despite the impressive and somewhat unexpected discovery of a Byzantine Church at the gateway to a former Lancashire mill town and, purportedly, the tallest Fire Station drill tower in the country opposite, the sense of arrival at Rochdale and its railway station is poor - a fact acknowledged by both the Council, Network Rail and by the Greater Manchester Mayor, Andy Burnham. Moreover, there are no signs which actually let any visitor know where they to go in order to get to the town centre. Clearly, therefore, there is an urgent need to do something to change the people's first impressions of Rochdale. The Council's intention to improve the appearance of the station building, itself, and to create an attractive, high-quality public realm out of the vast expanse of highway infrastructure, bollards, railings, poles, overhead cables and signage that meets the visitor upon their arrival – and actually providing some directions to the town centre – was wholeheartedly supported by the Panel.
- 3.2.2 From what they had seen of the recent schemes elsewhere in the town centre, the Panel had little doubt that the Council is more than capable of designing and implementing a high-quality public realm in the area outside the station. But simply tackling the station and its immediate environs, on its own, is likely to be insufficient. The improvement to the visitor appearance of the station needs to form part of a larger 'gateway project' connecting the station, via Drake Street, to the town centre. Consequently, the Panel considered that the station area has to form part of, and be included in, any Masterplan for the Central Retail Park to the south.
- 3.2.3 The Panel also had some reservations about the economic sustainability of the Fire Station Museum. If the Rochdale Pioneers Museum, an attraction which has international recognition, only gets around 12,500 visitors per annum, how many people are might be drawn to an attraction based around the Manchester

Fire Service? Even if the public realm works are undertaken around the station, the economic viability of a Fire Station Museum, on its own, is questionable. To succeed financially, it is likely that the upper floors of the building, itself, will have to be put into uses which will generate an income but to encourage people to visit this part of Rochdale, again it has to be planned as part of a bigger scheme for the southern part of the town.

3.3 The Central Retail Park

- 3.3.1 One of the questions that the Panel were asked to consider was to identify which site they thought provided the best potential to drive and encourage further residential development within the town centre - a challenge which very-much reflected that set to the Council by the Mayor last year.
- 3.3.2 The Panel were in no doubt that the key site - and the one which provides the biggest opportunity in the delivery and success of the HAZ - has to be the Central Retail Park. This site is situated at a key location mid-way between the town centre and the station, it offers huge potential to improve pedestrian and cycling connectivity from the station and, as a result, its redevelopment provides more opportunity than any other in the HAZ area not only to kick-start the regeneration of Drake Street but also to substantially improve people's first impression of Rochdale. However, its full potential is only ever likely to be realised if it is considered and planned as part of a single scheme which includes the station area to the south. Therefore, the Panel felt that the extent of this site has to include all the land between the junction of Drake Street/Oldham Road and the station.
- 3.3.3 The Panel felt that this site needed something truly transformational, a development which would help to change people's perceptions about Rochdale. This is the site which can begin to create the missing residential market in the town. To this end, they considered that the Council, in conjunction with the Mayor, should hold a Design Competition with the intention of creating an 'exemplar neighbourhood', and which provides an attractive pedestrian and cycling route from the town centre to the station (and, thereby, avoid the unattractive and heavily-trafficked Maclure Road).
- 3.3.4 The Briefing Pack included a map which illustrated the proposed housing sites in and around the town centre (as identified in the Town Centre Housing Strategy). On this map, a route for a 'Potential new road' is shown along the southern side of the Central Retail Park, a link which would, in effect, complete the encircling ring road around the town centre. Although they were informed by Mark Robinson that this link is not in any programmed highway scheme, if it did go ahead, it would enable the removal of the current dog-leg around the top of Drake Street. The Panel were strongly opposed to any such proposal. A new road in this location could fetter the regeneration of Drake Street and the station, would exacerbate the already disconnected nature of the town centre from its station, and severely worsen people's first impressions of this historic town.

4 The town centre and northern part of the Heritage Action Zone

- 4.1 Despite the excellent public realm improvements to the centre of Rochdale and the award-winning architectural additions to its townscape, it is evident that even with the considerable investment that has taken place, the heart of the town is still facing some challenges. A lot of Rochdale's residents look elsewhere for their retail and leisure needs. The two Shopping Centres appeared far from buoyant and the retail area at the top end of Yorkshire Street gives the impression of being on the decline. Whilst the works already undertaken by RBC to improve the attractiveness of the heart of the town seem to be bearing some fruit in terms of beginning to encourage people to use their town centre once more (and the Riverside development, new indoor and outdoor markets, and improvements around the Town Hall will, hopefully, increase the attractiveness of the town centre still further), nevertheless, in the current retail climate, and with a large proportion of spend from its resident population going elsewhere, the size of the current retail area would appear almost unsustainable.
- 4.2 Of the, not inconsiderable, challenges facing the town centre, perhaps the most challenging is how to improve its connectivity with other parts of the settlement and, in particular, reduce the degree of severance caused by the busy Ring Road. The Panel were able to appreciate, first hand, the real difficulties the road network presents to pedestrian movement between not just the residential areas to the north and east of the town centre and the main retail area but also between the town centre and its two main educational institutions – Hopwood Hall College and Rochdale Sixth Form College. They were also able to see how isolated the town's principal tourist attraction, the Rochdale Pioneers Museum on Toad Lane, is from the remainder of the town centre sandwiched, as it is, between the rear servicing areas and multi-storey car parks of the Rochdale Exchange Shopping Centre and the A58.
- 4.2 Both the Council and the Greater Manchester Mayor recognise the need to improve permeability and connectivity across the town centre. Mark Robinson had told the Panel of proposals to reconfigure the St Mary's Gate junction in order to create an at-grade crossing and the provision of an additional link across the ring road to the Riverside development. RBC are also exploring how some of the £160m Greater Manchester Walking/Cycling Challenge money might be used to address connectivity issues still further. The Panel wholeheartedly welcomed these proposals. As part of this process, they considered that RBC ought to look at how other towns across the country had tackled the issue of severance to see whether or not there were any useful pointers to the type of approach that might be successfully applied in Rochdale. In particular, they need to find places that had managed to successfully completely separate pedestrian and cyclist movement from vehicular movements. In addition, the Panel wondered whether it was worth exploring the possibility of creating a riverside footpath and cycle link alongside the River Roch beneath the A58 to the Sixth Form College.

- 4.3 As part of the improvements to movement across the town, the Panel urged the Council not to forget the Rochdale Pioneers Museum and to consider how this important attraction might be better connected with Yorkshire Street and the Esplanade.

5 Other matters

5.1 The need for a town centre strategy

- 5.1.1 As the Council is aware, on its own, the HAZ is unlikely to be able to turn around the economic fortunes of the Drake Street area. The HAZ has to form part of a co-ordinated strategy for the whole of the town centre, one which provides a framework which will help to facilitate the delivery of the numerous development sites and opportunity areas around the town, which helps to co-ordinate the various funding bids and private and public sector activities across the centre of Rochdale. If these various projects and initiatives are being undertaken in isolation from one another, then potential opportunities could be missed. At the moment this strategic framework is missing. The Town Centre Strategy, which is due to be published imminently will, hopefully be the document that provides this missing framework. But it has to go beyond simply the physical elements of the town centre and also include community engagement.

5.2 Cars

- 5.2.1 From what they had witnessed, the town seemed overwhelmed by traffic. The Panel felt that cars presented an interesting challenge for the town as not only is the Borough semi-rural but, as they had heard, although rail and tram connectivity from Rochdale town centre to Manchester is excellent, public transport links to the town centre itself from elsewhere in Rochdale are poor. However, although the Panel felt that Rochdale was likely to remain a very car-dependent place, nonetheless, as part of the Town Centre Strategy RBC needs to set out how it might begin to encourage people to access the town centre by means other than the private car. The Council should also grasp the opportunity which the Greater Manchester Walking/Cycling Challenge provides to develop a cycle network to and across the town.

5.3 Making Rochdale a place where people will want to live and visit

- 5.3.1 It was evident from what they had seen and heard throughout their visit that, despite all the recent investments and impressive regeneration schemes, Rochdale as a town still faces a considerable problem in terms of its image and in how its town centre is perceived (and not simply from those from outside the town). Mike Howarth had explained how difficult he had found it to explain to people that Rochdale is not the place it was a decade ago and the challenge he had in persuading people to venture into the town centre once more. Mark Robinson outlined the considerable challenges which the town faces in terms of actually delivering the amount of housing that is likely to be needed to satisfy the requirements of the emerging Greater Manchester Spatial Framework not

due to the lack of sites – Rochdale has plenty of potential residential development opportunities – but rather a lack of investor confidence in the town. Moreover, developing a housing market in the town centre - an area where there currently is not one - is a huge hurdle to get over.

- 5.3.2 The recent and future investment in and around the town centre will go a considerable way to begin to change some of these negative perceptions of Rochdale and, from what Paul Ambrose, the town centre Manager, had told the Panel, the creation of a Business Improvement District will also help to boost retail investor confidence. However, making Rochdale a place where people will choose to live and where it is perceived as being able to help them fulfil their life ambitions requires more than just good housing, secure jobs and an attractive environment. It also needs to have in place all the other elements - like a good choice of schools, cultural activities, leisure and recreational provision - that help make a place attractive to future residents. Unfortunately, other than the Sixth Form College and the Hopwood Hall College, the Panel had not had any information about the quality of the educational provision available within the town (increasingly a key influencing factor in choosing where to live) and there was little sense of the cultural offer other than Touchstones, the Rochdale Pioneers Museum and the new cinema which will open as part of the Riverside Scheme. Certainly, the lack of a Cultural Strategy, the Panel felt, was something that needed to be addressed. Although the Town Centre Strategy is nearing publication, there is a fear that these aspects of place-making may be absent.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 6.1 Rochdale is a very interesting historic town that has had to address some significant challenges in the last couple of decades. Whereas some other places might have bemoaned their lot, as one might have expected from a town with a history of self-help and a pioneering spirit, Rochdale has embarked on an impressive program of projects and interventions to try and tackle its problems. The radical proposal to de-culvert the River Roch and the creation of a wonderful public space at the heart of the town has transformed the centre of the town. The new Council Offices and bus interchange have brought the town national acclaim. And there is an on-going programme of future investment within the town centre over the forthcoming years. However, despite these sterling efforts, the economic fortunes of the area to the south of the town centre centred around the historic Regency street to the railway station remain depressed. Many of the historic buildings in this part of Rochdale lie empty, most properties are in urgent need of repair and, what was once the bustling commercial core of the town is largely deserted.
- 6.2 The HAZ is the latest attempt to try and reinvigorate this important street. However, whilst the Delivery Plan contains many projects which seem likely to address the problems facing some of its historic properties, there is a real concern that it will not achieve all that is hoped of it. On the evidence they had heard during their visit, the Panel were convinced that the power to regenerate

the Drake Street area lies with its people and, as a result, that the HAZ needs to think about how it might begin to empower the communities that live and work in and around this part of the town. The Panel felt that Drake Street provides a fantastic opportunity to test out new ideas and approaches to regeneration and to build upon some of the rich co-operative traditions which underpin so much of the town's history. Drake Street could, and indeed, should, become an exemplar, nationally, of community-based co-operative regeneration.

- 6.3 The Panel were in no doubt that the key site - and the one which provides the biggest opportunity in the delivery and success of the HAZ - has to be the Central Retail Park. This site is situated at a key location mid-way between the town centre and the station, it offers huge potential to improve pedestrian and cycling connectivity from the station and, as a result, its redevelopment provides more opportunity than any other both to kick-start the regeneration of Drake Street and substantially improve people's first impressions of Rochdale. However, its full potential is only ever likely to be realised if it is considered and planned as part of a single scheme which includes the station area to the south. To increase the profile of this area and the town, there needs to be a Design Competition for this important site.
- 6.4 Connectivity between and across the town centre is already recognised by the Council and Greater Manchester Mayor as something which they urgently need to address and they are already working on schemes which will, if not resolve this issue, certainly lessen the severity of the connectivity problems. However, the Council could learn much from the experiences of other towns and cities and the Panel urged RBC officers and members to visit those places which had successfully tackled similar problems. As part of this strategy, the Panel urged RBC not to forget the Rochdale Pioneers Museum.
- 6.5 Rochdale has to develop into a town where people will choose to live, a place which is perceived as being somewhere where they might be able fulfil their life's ambitions. This requires not just good housing, secure jobs and an attractive environment, but also all the other elements such as a choice of good schools, cultural activities, leisure and recreational provision that combine to create a place attractive to future residents.

Recommendations

1	<p>The Heritage Action Zone needs to focus more on community engagement - On the evidence they had heard during their visit, the Panel were convinced that the power to regenerate this area lies with its people, and that the HAZ needs to think about how it might begin to empower the communities that live and work in and around the Drake Street area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The order of the Themes in the Delivery Plan should be rearranged. What is currently Theme E (Engagement) should be moved to the top of the list • The HAZ Delivery Plan needs to set out specific measures/Projects that will encourage local communities to become actively engaged in the regeneration of Drake Street • Consideration should be given to the appointment of a HAZ Project Officer who has experience of practical community-engagement projects preferably with communities of similar characteristics to those living in this part of Rochdale
2	<p>Drake Street should become an exemplar of co-operative working - Drake Street should aim to become a hub for co-operative housing, co-operative businesses and co-operative activities and events. It should become a place where people can try different things and experiment with new ideas:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new Co-operative hub should be the place to go for advice for anyone who has an idea or project that they wish to pursue and develop in the Drake Street area be it a business, pop-up use, housing scheme or event. • The new Co-operative hub should seek to utilise the skills and knowledge of the local community (perhaps though actively encouraging volunteers).
3	<p>Small-scale housing developments - The Drake Street area provides a unique opportunity to explore how small community-led locally-driven schemes might help contribute towards the housing needs of the town:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RTPI, RIBA or the architectural Schools at the Universities ought to be encouraged to get engaged with local community groups to explore various approaches to place-making through the redevelopment of the smaller sites in the area. • Rochdale Councillors/HAZ team should visit examples of successful small-scale housing developments elsewhere in the country. • Lessons could be learned from looking at other housing associations such as consideration should be given to the creation of a local community-based housing association perhaps along the lines of the Enfield Muslim Housing Association

4	<p>Increasing the attractiveness of Drake Street to non-car users - the pedestrian experience of the walk to the town centre is made even less appealing than it might otherwise be because of the amount of traffic. Moreover, it is a long-uphill walk to the station from the town centre:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration needs to be given to the removal of all traffic from Drake Street other than trams. • The Council needs to liaise with The Greater Manchester Mayor and TfGM to try and get a tram stop established mid-way along Drake Street.
5	<p>The Station area – The sense of arrival at Rochdale station is poor and the proposed improvements to the public realm are much needed. The improvement to the visitor experience, however, needs to form part of a larger ‘gateway project’ connecting the station, via Drake Street, to the town centre. This would also assist the economic viability of the Fire Station Museum:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Station, the redevelopment sites around it, and the surrounding area needs to be included within the Central Retail Park Masterplan (see below)
6	<p>Central Retail Park – The redevelopment of this area provides more opportunity than any other in the HAZ area both to kick-start the regeneration of Drake Street and substantially improve people’s first impression of Rochdale:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This site has to include all the land between the junction of Drake Street/Oldham Road and the station. • The Council, in conjunction with the Mayor, should hold a Design Competition with the intention of creating an ‘exemplar neighbourhood’, one which facilitates pedestrian and cycling movement through this site from the town centre to the station • The ‘potential new road’ that is shown along the southern side of the Central Retail Park if created would be damaging for the regeneration of the Drake Street/Station area and the Council should take the brave decision not to develop this road scheme should be deleted.
7	<p>Connectivity to the town centre - Both the Council and the Mayor recognise the need to improve permeability and connectivity across the town centre. The Panel wholeheartedly welcomed the emerging proposals. As part of this process:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RBC could look at how other towns across the country had tackled the issue of severance to see whether or not there were any useful pointers to the type of approach that might be successfully applied in Rochdale. • Consideration should be given to the possibility of creating a riverside footpath and cycle link alongside the Roch beneath the A58 to the Sixth

	<p>Form College.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any strategy to reduce severance has to consider how the Rochdale Pioneers Museum might be better connected with Yorkshire Street and the Esplanade.
8	<p>The need for a Town Centre Strategy - The HAZ has to form part of a co-ordinated strategy for the whole of the town centre, one which provides a framework which will help to facilitate the delivery of the numerous development sites and opportunity areas around the town, which helps to co-ordinate the various funding bids, and which helps to connect all the other private and public sector activity across the centre of Rochdale. The emerging Town Centre Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has to go beyond simply the physical elements of the town centre and must include community engagement. Needs to provide a strategy for people might be encouraged to use the town centre by means other than the private car. Needs to cover all the other elements (like a good choice of schools, cultural activities, leisure and recreational provision) that need to be in place in order to make Rochdale a place attractive to future residents.
9	<p>The need for a Cultural Strategy – The cultural offer is increasing recognised as being a key component in the attractiveness of towns and cities to potential future residents:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RBC needs to produce a Cultural Strategy

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 Rochdale on 13th June, 2018 were:

Mr Peter Buchan

Ms Sophia de Sousa

Mr Michael Hayes

Mr John Lord