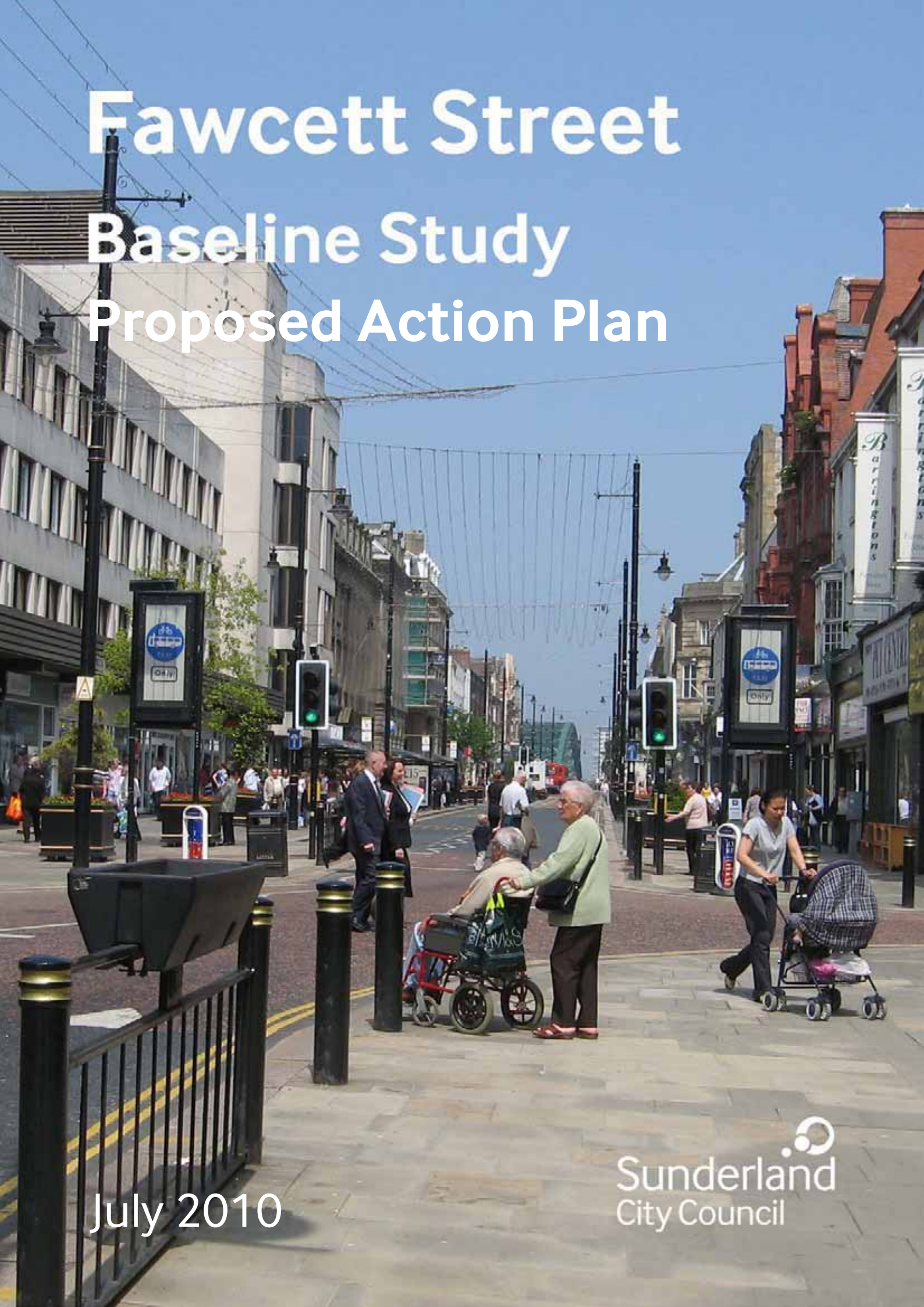


# Fawcett Street Baseline Study Proposed Action Plan



July 2010

  
Sunderland  
City Council

## **Fawcett Street Improvements**

Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee

12<sup>th</sup> July 2010 – Proposed Action Plan

### **1.0 Introduction**

In January 2010 the Planning Implementation team produced a baseline study of Fawcett Street to present members with an overview of existing appraisals and planning policy statements which have been produced to highlight the City Council's aspirations for this important street. Following the publication of this study, a member's site visit on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2010 was followed by a workshop to identify the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of Fawcett Street.

Notes of member's findings identified the desire to create an action plan for interventions within Fawcett Street.

### **2.0 Possible Methods of Intervention**

#### **2.1 Streetscene and Public Realm Improvements**

Recent assessment using the Pedestrian Environment Review System (PERS) audit alongside the recent members site visit have concluded a number of issues and opportunities relating to the streetscene and public realm within Fawcett Street.

Analysis of the provision and maintenance of paving throughout Fawcett Street indicates that certain sections of paving may not be fit-for-purpose to support certain functions of the street. Despite high footfall within this busy street the width and alignment of large sections of pavement create situations of user conflict. The section between Borough Road and Athenaeum Street is an important example of these conflicts here narrow pavements create conflict between shoppers and people waiting for buses.

The presence of street furniture, signage and seasonal decorations alongside a poor maintenance regime serve to add to this conflict and give Fawcett Street a highly cluttered appearance.

Members have suggested that interventions should seek to resolve these conflicts and provide a public realm which is safe and accessible to all. Furthermore these interventions should be designed for ease of future maintenance and repairs.

Action points and associated risks:

### **2.1.1 Comprehensive Streetscene Improvements**

The appraisal of options for a comprehensive programme of public realm improvements to take place within Fawcett Street, similar to those current being implemented throughout Sunnyside could become an action point for future study. Using the Sunnyside public realm improvements to provide a baseline for a scheme of works within Fawcett Street, the total estimated cost for improvements would be approximately £1.7 million pounds. Appendix 1 gives an overall breakdown of these costs which are based upon a scheme of works to include:

- Lifting and replacing existing pavement materials with new York stone flags (of a similar standard to those used in Sunnyside)
- Rationalisation and renewal/replacement of lighting, street furniture, signage and road markings along Fawcett Street
- Provision of shared surfaces at St Thomas Street, High Street West and Athenaeum Street junctions

*Deliverability – Unknown* (Dependent upon availability of funding)

*Economic Cost – High* (Intervention would be managed and funded by City Council)

### **2.1.2 Localised Streetscene Improvements**

Given the financial commitment required by the City Council needed to implement a comprehensive programme of streetscene improvements within Fawcett Street, it may be more achievable to instead focus efforts upon interventions upon specific areas of the street using a phasing approach. Appendix 2 uses the conclusions of the PERS review and members site visit to isolate four areas of potential interventions:

- Area 1 - Fawcett Street/ Borough Road junction
- Area 2 - Section between Borough Road and Athenaeum Street
- Area 3 - Fawcett Street/ Sir Thomas Street
- Area 4 - Fawcett Street/ High Street West junction

*Deliverability – Unknown* (Dependent upon availability of funding)

*Economic Cost – High* (Intervention would be managed and funded by City Council)

### **2.1.3 Street Furniture Review**

A street furniture review would serve to continue the momentum of the recent public realm 'quick wins' project and provide a detailed study of street furniture within Fawcett Street. This review could be used to inform future projects to remove, renew or replace existing street furniture and de-clutter the pedestrian environment.

*Deliverability – High* (1-2 months based upon workload pressures, from completion of review to feedback of findings)

*Economic Cost – Low* (Review would be undertaken in-house by the Planning Implementation team)

## **2.2 Vehicular Access and Movement**

Vehicular access and movement within Fawcett Street has been highlighted as a particular point for consideration. The access and movement by buses is considered to be an important issue for consideration. Whilst there is conflict between the movement of pedestrians and buses throughout this street, previous studies have indicated that removing buses completely could reduce overall pedestrian footfall.

Consequently the Central Area Urban Design Strategy suggests that a rationalisation of bus stops and real time information could improve this situation and provide a more viable option to managing this conflict.

Action points and associated risks:

### **2.2.1 Pedestrian Priority Zone – Option Appraisal**

The creation of a pedestrian priority zone within Fawcett Street could provide a much needed solution to the conflict between pedestrian-vehicular access and movement. The appraisal of options for a pedestrian priority zone would require consultation with the City Councils Transport Engineers and network operators to ensure a satisfactory level of bus service could be maintained.

The opportunities to de-clutter Fawcett Street via a rationalisation of the number of bus stops and traffic signals present would become a key objective for these appraisals. As would options to implement and enforce a reduced speed limit of 20 mph within the 'pedestrian priority zone.'

*Deliverability – Unknown* (Based upon feedback from internal and external stakeholders)

*Economic Cost – Unknown* (Based upon feedback from internal and external stakeholders)

### **2.2.2 Real Time Passenger Information – Option Appraisal**

Providing real time passenger information along Fawcett Street could reduce passenger waiting times and reduce the level of 'user clutter' within the street.

The creation of a real time passenger traffic information system would form part of wider City Centre project in conjunction with the City Services Directorate and network operators. Real time information could be used to improve interchange efficiency between Fawcett Street, John Street and Central Station and create an enhanced pedestrian environment overall.

*Deliverability – Unknown* (Based upon feedback from internal and external stakeholders)

*Economic Cost – Unknown* (Based upon feedback from internal and external stakeholders)

## **2.3 Built Environment**

Analysis within the baseline report produced in January 2010 indicated that relatively few shop units along Fawcett Street remained vacant. Furthermore given the dynamic nature of this street, vacant shop units reopen reasonably quickly.

The presence of a number of buildings exhibiting high quality architecture of historical reference adds to the character and identity of this historic street. However an assessment of the maintenance and shop frontages, signage and window displays which support these buildings often detracts from the quality of the street overall.

Consequently actions regarding the built environment of Fawcett Street should be focussed upon the maintenance and enhancement of existing buildings and the improvement to the shop frontages, signage and displays of existing businesses.

Action points and associated Risks:

### **2.3.1 Cleaning/maintenance grant to restore existing buildings and provide high quality shop fronts/window displays**

The appraisal of options for a cleaning/maintenance grant should be informed by the outcomes of previous schemes which have operated within Fawcett Street, as part of a wider grant scheme. Notable examples of such schemes include the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) (2002 – 2007) and the City Centre Financial Assistance Scheme for Commercial Premises (1995 – 2002).

Within Fawcett Street, a notable example of a building restored and repaired under THI funding is the Athenaeum Buildings; here the value of grant funding was approximately £100,000 in 2005.

Under the latter the average cost of each scheme was approximately £40,000 and the average grant paid was approximately £15,000.

Appendix 6 of the baseline study compiled in January 2010 highlighted that 47 of the 83 properties located within Fawcett Street are of a medium/high risk; based upon an assessment of maintenance requirements and the quality of shopfronts.

Based upon the average grant paid under the 1995-2002 grant scheme, the estimated amount of grant funding needed to resolve these risks would be approximately £850,000 (allowing for inflation between 2002-2010).

*Deliverability – Unknown* (Dependent upon availability of funding and take-up of grants by individual businesses)

*Economic Cost – High* (Intervention would be managed and funded by City Council)

### **2.3.2 Production of a Shop Front Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)**

Production of a Shop Front design guide SPD would provide guidance to businesses wishing to renew existing shopfronts not just within Fawcett Street but city wide, the production of such a guide would support the guidance contained within the adopted Sunnyside Character Appraisal and Management Strategy (CAMS).

*Deliverability – High* (6-8 Months from production to adoption of document as formal planning guidance)

*Economic Cost – Low* (Development led by private sector)

### **3.0 Economic Considerations**

The above report highlights a number of projects and outcomes which could be initiated as part of a wider programme to improve the functions and operation of Fawcett Street.

Members are minded to consider the economic context of Fawcett Street when commenting upon the action points. Recent schemes and improvements within Fawcett Street have happened with financial support and from financial assistance schemes utilising grant funding from the City in partnership with HLF, English Heritage and ONE NorthEast.

As of March 2010 all current grant schemes will cease. Therefore securing further improvements and interventions will require further funding from the City Council to enhance and support the functions, operations of this important street.

## Appendix 1

### Comprehensive Public Realm Improvements – Estimated Budget

#### FAWCETT STREET, SUNDERLAND (High Street West Junction to Borough Road)

Scope of Work	Quant	Unit	Cost/ Unit £	£
Preliminaries and site set-up costs	50	weeks	4,500.00	225,000
Take up existing paving, level and relay	6,455	m2	25.00	161,375
New York stone paving, high strength bedding and jointing mortar	6,455	m2	110.00	710,050
New Granite sett shared surface area, high strength bedding and jointing				
St Thomas St Junction	50	m2	100.00	5,000
High Street West	200	m2	100.00	20,000
Athenaeum St	125	m2	100.00	12,500
Diversion Cost and traffic management to carry out above weekend working and bus route disruption @ £5k per area			item	15,000
Take up existing kerbs	680	m	6.00	4,080
Existing kerbs laid on new foundations	680	m	65.00	44,200
New yellow lining to amended kerblines	680	m	3.50	2,380
New street lights at 12m centres (both sides)	36	nr	3,000.00	108,000
Street Furniture				
seating	10	nr	5,000.00	50,000
bins	20	nr	1,000.00	20,000
Contribution to New electronic bus shelters		P Sum		50,000
New trees with pits and grills / or planter	4	nr	5,000.00	20,000
New Pedestrian Signage (leg city, includes design)		P Sum		25,000
Road traffic signage		P Sum		7,500
Drainage works where footways widened	0	m	120.00	0

Allowance for new kerb units @ 10%	68	m	130.00	8,840
Replace existing macadam wearing course	2,180	m2	40.00	87,200
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>£ 1,576,125</b>
Contingency				10%
				157,612.50
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>				<b>1,733,738</b>

**Notes**

Excludes design team fees

Excludes artwork

Excludes specialist lighting

Assume all new natural stone paving in pedestrianised area

Assume no change to existing drainage, except where footways widened

Assume new bus shelters contribution from public transport operators

Approximate areas used

6455	m2	paving
2180	m2	carriageway
8635	m2	total area



## Appendix 2

### Localised Streetscene Improvements – Proposed Action Areas Plan



## **Appendix 3**

### **Members Study Visit 12 March 2010 - Note of findings**

Members of the Environment and Attractive Scrutiny carried out a study visit along Fawcett Street which runs between Burdon Road and High Street West in the city centre, on 12 March 2010. Using the Pedestrian Environment Review System (PERS) format of the baseline study undertaken by the Planning and Environment Service, Members were able to identify the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities presented by Fawcett Street for further consideration as a possible action plan.

Having completed this site visit members returned to the Civic Centre and discussed their key findings which centred on the following themes:

#### **1. Pavement Provision**

- Members questioned whether the alignment and width of paving was appropriate for the individual functions of particular parts of Fawcett Street. This issue was seen to be particularly important in the section of the street between Borough Road and Athenaeum Street; where on the west side the movement of pedestrians is restricted by the relatively footway provision which also accommodates bus shelters and queues at the bus stops.
- Generally paving along the entirety of Fawcett Street was considered to be of poor quality. Members questioned whether this could be accounted for by the materials selected, the quality of initial workmanship and/or the subsequent maintenance regime employed.
- Members commented that the provision of pavements needs to be safe and accessible to all. The installation requirements, maintenance and repairs access for utility companies needs to be factored into the design process for any new public realm schemes.
- Concepts of shared space/raised tables at the road junctions along Fawcett Street were discussed and required further consideration..
- In particular members did not like the pedestrian island at the fawcettstreet Borough road and Burdon Road junction and discussed the means for consideration, by which it could be improved.

#### **2. Vehicular Movement**

- Conflict between pedestrians and vehicular (bus movement) was identified and Members discussed ways in which to remedy these perceptions.
- Limiting access further through the re-routing of taxis and some buses was discussed.
- Enforcing a 20 mph speed limit along Fawcett Street alongside traffic calming measures to making bus drivers more aware of their speeds could be beneficial.
- Changing materials and priorities at key crossings and junctions to create pedestrian priority areas was discussed at length. A key opportunity space was considered to be the Fawcett Street and St Thomas Street junction. The ideas discussed included the creation of a public square or shared space/raised table.

- Bus movement into Fawcett Street from Holmeside was considered to be problematic and creates situations of conflict with pedestrian users of this space. Members considered this a topic for further discussion with transport engineers.

### **3. Streetscene**

- Visual clutter was discussed as a major issue within Fawcett Street which serves to detract and dilute the function and image of what is an important street within Sunderland city centre.
- Members questioned the for the numbers of signs, some duplicating information and the retention of traffic signals which are perhaps no longer needed. Signs, including street names should be better quality, consistent and legible to assist in wayfinding throughout the city centre.
- Some Christmas light displays are left in place throughout the year and add to the clutter outside of the Christmas period (if they are not to be used at other times).
- Members suggested a review of all street furniture in Fawcett Street to help in its de-clutter and improve its overall appearance.
- Planters presented a particular point for discussion, should these be removed or retained? Should they be replaced with street trees to help in the creation of a green city centre?
- Members noted that the Streetscene projects underway in High Street West, Athenaeum Street and St Thomas Street could provide guidance for further public realm works to be undertaken in the future.

### **4. Built environment**

- Members noted that there were relatively few vacant shop units along Fawcett Street but raised questions about how those units that are vacant could be brought back into use. Discussion of what could be achieved in the interim, including temporary window displays was considered to be an idea that merits further consideration.
- It was noted that Fawcett Street includes many buildings of high quality historic architecture. However even some of the better buildings were considered to be poorly maintained. Members questioned what could be done to remedy this problem. Could the City Council provide some form of cleaning/maintenance grant?
- Many upper floors are not fully used and have often been neglected. There was discussion of how other uses including residential could be introduced to revitalise these spaces.
- Members considered the former Connexions building an important building to be brought back into use and an opportunity to add to the diversity of uses along Fawcett Street.

### **5. Economic factors**

- Members referred to the emerging Economic masterplan and queried if the aims could support the rejuvenation of Fawcett Street.
- There was discussion of the opportunities to encourage greater levels of employment in city centre and increasing the numbers of residential occupation to

drive economic performance and investment in Fawcett Street; by creating additional demand for evening/lunchtime uses.

- The opening hours of premises in Fawcett Street and whether activity could be extended to include evenings were raised.
- Would having a mixed use approach to increase the variety of uses present attract new investment into Fawcett Street?
- Overall Fawcett Street was viewed by members to be an underused resource and the general consensus was that we could get more from the street.

### **Visit to Fawcett Street – Feedback**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed Members to give consideration to the issues raised during the tour of Fawcett Street which was undertaken on 12th March, 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, presented the report and advised Members of the findings which had centred on pavement provision, vehicular movement, street scene, built environment and economic factors.

These findings would be used to develop recommendations and an action plan for improvements to the area.

Councillor Wakefield commented that the library was not obvious enough; it should be projected into the street to make it more of a focal point.

Councillor Tye suggested that the empty buildings could have high definition advertising screens installed in the windows as had been done at the Metro Centre.

Mr Lowes advised that this was being given consideration however there needed to be consideration given to ways of installing the advertising without the need for planning permission. In the Metro Centre or The Bridges there was no need for planning permission. The situation with empty buildings was dynamic, with the shops often reopening quickly.

Councillor Wood commented on the street scene aspect. There was no need for some of the traffic lights on Fawcett Street. There was a need to improve the built environment and improve the buildings in the area. Flags could be flown to add colour to the street. He queried what the next steps would be and what timescales were in place for developing the actions.

Mr Lowes advised that there would be large cost implications to a wholesale improvement project. There were currently street scene improvements being piloted to see what value for money there would be and what public opinion would be on the changes. There was a need to start planning for 2011 onwards.

The Chairman requested that a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee. Mr Lowes agreed to provide this.

Councillor Kelly commented that he felt Fawcett Street was little more than a bus lane which created an intimidating environment for pedestrians. Northumberland Street in Newcastle had been like this however it had been pedestrianised which had made the street much more pleasant. This could be a possible course of action for Fawcett Street and would help with achieving other aims such as improving the projection of the library.

Mr Lowes advised that there would be technical issues involved with pedestrianising the street and this had been looked at previously. The current position would be reported in the next report to the committee.

Councillor Wakefield agreed that the buses were intimidating and that pedestrianisation of the street would make a huge difference.

The Chairman commented that the visit was a good idea. He had noticed that people were not staying within Fawcett Street; they were carrying out their business and then leaving. There was no café culture within the street unlike in streets of this type in other cities.

RESOLVED that the feedback report be received and noted and a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the committee.