Channel is in the swim...

The green light has been given to a pioneering scheme to transform part of Bradford city centre with a mixed-use development surrounding a canal basin.

The £25m development near Great George Street, created out of the former Comb Years timber warehouse by Comb Years and centralised form of the city's new Canal Basin, was backed by Bradford City Council regeneration plans. Councillors have signed off on the project.

The five-acre site is due to be the location of a new £350m urban village. The scheme is part of a wider plan to regenerate the city centre and turn it into a living, breathing urban village.

The development is expected to create up to 1,000 homes, with 24,000 sq ft of retail space, 10,000 sq ft of office space and 1,000 sq ft of leisure facilities.

Channel Basin will feature two towers, 10 and 24 storeys high, and provide 1,800 homes around a new canal basin. Bradford Council has given the scheme planning permission subject to it not being called in by Communities and Local Government Secretary Ruth Kelly.

The scheme is part of a masterplan to redevelop the city, which is being led by Bradford City Centre. The project is expected to take 20 years to complete in a staged build.

John Roberts

£350m urban village plans backed

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CONSULTATION IS
ALL HEART

Bradford Centre Regeneration will submit a planning application for its Park in the Heart scheme in June. The urban regeneration company this week unveiled its latest images of the Gillenplan-designed scheme – a mix of cafes and bars around an artificial lake by Bradford’s City Hall – following the completion of a public consultation last week. Plans for the site arose from a Will Alsop masterplan for Bradford. Bradford city council will apply for £24.5m of lottery funding to pay for the development.
Almost four years after Will Alsop’s masterplan for the transformation of Bradford was unveiled, the city’s public leaders are promising that delivery will begin this year.

Bradford council and urban regeneration company Bradford Centre Regeneration appear to be inextricably linked, and it is the key to making the vision a reality (see box).

Tony Reeves, Bradford council’s chief executive, says: “We set the design benchmark, done the due diligence, looked at how the city will be managed and maintained, and looked at the type of housing market we want to create.

“So it’s not unreasonable for this year to be the year of implementation. The planning needs to be brought to a conclusion and we need to see real progress.”

Statements like these will be music to the ears of agents, who are keen to see Bradford’s long-held vision become a reality (see box).

“The opportunity now is to build on the good prospects for retail growth, leading to a more diverse development,” says Jonathan Turner, a director at the Leeds office of Dorranslows, which advises BCR.

“There is substantial pent-up demand and a great deal of developer activity, but this has yet to manifest itself in the form of contracts in the air.”

Reeves, who joined Bradford council last year, is the first to acknowledge there are problems. He admits that local planning needs “sorting out” and suggests that the city needs to improve its “credibility.”

So which of Bradford’s major developments will progress as proposed by Reeves during 2007?

The £530m Channel urban village scheme has already passed a major milestone, having received detailed permission for phase 1 last month, alongside outline permission for the entire development scheme. It contains a mix of offices, retail and leisure along 1,400 homes. A planning application and potentially a decision are expected during the summer for the £350m New Victoria Place. Longwell and Arkwright’s conversion of the former Odeon cinema will provide 50,000 sq ft of offices alongside a hotel, leisure space and 300 flats.

Robins Budgey, director at Lambert Smith Hampton in Leeds and agent on New Victoria Place, says Bradford has a particular need for offices.

“There are a handful of good requirements and the city has an exciting demographic, but there is no stock,” he says. “Once some of the schemes start, development will start to snowball.”

The neighbouring Business Forest scheme is another on the list. Iain Marshall, chief executive of BCR, says proposals for the 90,000 sq ft first phase of offices, outlining the development opportunity, are being “packaged” and will be brought to the market in autumn, as the search for a developer begins.

Mirror pool progress is also anticipated at the Park at the Heart project (see box), in front of City Hall, which includes the mirror pool outlined in Alsop’s masterplan. The council is applying for Lottery funding for the project this month, and a decision is expected in November.

Reeves makes plain his desire to see progress at Westfield’s £300m Broadway scheme, which includes 580,000 sq ft of retail alongside residential space and 41,000 sq ft of offices, which will be occupied by Bradford council.

“We want to see a start on site by the end of the year,” says Reeves.

The site is cleared, with 117,000 sq ft of pre-planning work completed at Debenham’s and 59,000 sq ft at BHS. Westfield’s official line is that it is waiting for firm lettings before confirming a start date. However, sources at the developer are making encouraging noises that Reeves’s end-of-year deadline can be met.

“The relationship between Westfield and the council is stronger than ever,” says Reeves. “The scheme is just about ready to go.”

Jonathan O’Connor, agency surveyor at Bradford-based Edellisons, describes the Broadway scheme as the “key” totracting further investment.

“Once Westfield is in under way, the city centre and part, leisure areas such as The Light will become a much more attractive place for office schemes. So the plans for Bradford are magnificent. The next 12 months is about getting them up and running.”