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# All systems go for Rochdale town centre development

The final hurdle blocking a multi-million pound deal to redevelop a dilapidated part of the town centre has been cleared.

Rochdale council says it now hopes to put pen to paper on a £100m agreement with developers Genr8 to regenerate the eastern side of the town centre 'in the next week or so'.

It comes after the council reached an agreement with the owners of the Wheatsheaf Shopping Centre to surrender the lease of the old town centre library and build a new entrance to the mall off Baillie Street.

Protracted negotiations to secure that agreement had delayed wider council plans to sign a deal to get the scheme going. Now that hurdle has been overcome, the council say work will 'quicken' on the project which will see a new retail and entertainment complex built around the current bus station.

Councillor Peter Williams, the council's cabinet member for economic development, said: "Progress will now quicken on the next phase of the town centre redevelopments.

"The owners of the Wheatsheaf Shopping Centre can also make progress with their own investment plans."

Councillors approved plans to sign a £100m deal with developers Genr8 to transform the area around the current bus station and old 'Black Box' municipal offices, in November last year.

Final plans are yet to be agreed, but they could include a hotel, shops, restaurants, a cinema and a 500-space car park spread across 300,000 sq ft.

Because the scheme includes the demolition of the existing walkway linking the soon-to-be torn down bus station and Wheatsheaf Shopping Centres, agreement needed to be reached with them as well.

This had complicated the council's need to extract itself from a 999-year lease they had on a unit in the centre that used to house the town's main library, which has now moved to the new municipal offices.

Delays finalising this had delayed the whole project, as the Observer reported last month, but Coun Williams said sticking points had now been agreed.

He said: "We have now confirmed the basis for the legal agreements with the owners of the Wheatsheaf Centre and this now allows us to move forward with the formal signing of the development agreement with Genr8 and Kajima that was substantially agreed last November.

"It has been important to make sure that we had a clear timetable in place for the demolition of the old bus station and multi-storey car park and an agreed design for the new Wheatsheaf entrance.

"Clearly the centre's new Baillie Street pedestrian entrance is a vital part of our wider proposals for the town centre as it will help link the current shopping area with the planned new retail and leisure developments."

John Hudson, chief executive of Rochdale Development Agency (RDA), said real progress was being made and work to clear the site would begin soon.

He said: "We are now able to move forward with the next phases of development .

"With that in mind the council has invited formal tenders from demolition contractors to start removing the old municipal office buildings, the current bus station, overhead walkways and multi-storey car park as soon as the new bus interchange is open.,

Mike Smith, a partner at Genr8, said: "Rochdale council, supported by the RDA, has done a magnificent job in creating this unique development opportunity right at the heart of the town centre and immediately next to the new transport interchange.

"We are really pleased that the project is now ready to go live and look forward to working with the council and RDA to deliver an appropriate retail and leisure development on this important site."