

# Northampton Borough Scrutiny Panel 2 -Retail Experience



Please find enclosed the agenda and supporting papers for **Scrutiny Panel 2 -Retail Experience**

Date: **Wednesday, 8 August 2012**

Time: **6:00 pm**

Place: **The Jeffrey Room, St. Giles Square, Northampton, NN1 1DE.**

If you need any advice or information regarding this agenda please phone Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer on 01604 837408 or email [ttiff@northampton.gov.uk](mailto:ttiff@northampton.gov.uk) who will be able to assist with your enquiry. For further information regarding **Scrutiny Panel 2 -Retail Experience** please visit the website [www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny)

## Members of the Panel

Chair	Councillor Matthew Lynch
Deputy Chair	Councillor Suresh Patel
Panel Members	Councillor Tony Ansell Councillor Sally Beardsworth Councillor Elizabeth Gowen Councillor Dennis Meredith Councillor Danielle Stone
Co-opted Member	Sheridan New

## Calendar of meetings

Date	Room
18 October 2012 5 December 2012 14 February 2013 24 April 2013	All meetings to be held in the Jeffery Room at the Guildhall unless otherwise stated

# Northampton Borough Scrutiny Panel 2 -Retail Experience

## genda

Item No	Title	Pages	Action required
1	Apologies		Members to note any apologies and substitutions.
2	Minutes		Members to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 5 <sup>th</sup> July 2012.
3	Deputations/ Public Addresses		<p>The Chair to note public address requests.</p> <p>The public can speak on any agenda item for a maximum of three minutes per speaker per item. You are not required to register your intention to speak in advance but should arrive at the meeting a few minutes early, complete a Public Address Protocol and notify the Scrutiny Officer of your intention to speak.</p>
4	Declarations of Interest (including Whipping)		Members to state any interests.
5	Witness Evidence		The Scrutiny Panel to receive the responses to its core questions from key witnesses:
5 (a) 6.05-6.25PM	Cabinet Member (Regeneration, Planning and Enterprise)	4 - 5	
5 (b) 6.25-6.45PM	Cabinet Member (Environment)		
5 (c) 6.45-7.05PM	Head of Regeneration and Development	6	
6	Background documents -Precis' of published documents	7 - 23	<p>The Scrutiny Panel to receive precis' of various published documents:-</p> <p>Central Area Action Plan Northampton Town Centre Health Check 2009 Northampton Town Centre Shopping Survey</p>

## NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 2 -RETAIL EXPERIENCE

Thursday, 5 July 2012

**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillor Matthew Lynch (Chair), Councillor Suresh Patel (Vice Chair) Councillors Tony Ansell, Sally Beardsworth, Elizabeth Gowen, Dennis Meredith, and Danielle Stone

**CO-OPTED MEMBER:** Sheridan New                      Former Manager, Grosvenor Centre

**Officers**                      Derrick Simpson                      Town Centre Manager  
                                 Tracy Tiff                              Scrutiny Officer  
                                 Joanne Birkin                        Democratic Services Officer

#### 1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence from the meeting was received from Marion Goodman, Head of Customer and Cultural Services.

#### 2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2012 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

#### 3. DEPUTATIONS/ PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

#### 4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

#### 5. TOWN CENTRE CHALLENGE EVENT

The Panel considered a briefing note and feedback from the three Councillors who attended a Seminar hosted by Skillsmart Retail on the Town Centre Challenge.

The main points of the discussion were as follows: -

- Smartskill is a skills council for the retail industry. Their aim is to increase investment in skills, set industry standards and promote and enhance the retail sector and therefore to improve sustainable and professional retail development.
- Members were very impressed at the results achieved by Skillsmart. Key factors were encouraging work in partnership, getting the right people around the table and promoting training and apprenticeships within retail industry.

- Overall the success is very much based on the strength of partners i.e. the local BID's and strength of apprenticeship schemes. The aim is to improve the standard of retailing and anything that improves standards will be seen positively by potential customers.
- They had also teamed up with Independent retailers throughout the country to make 4<sup>th</sup> July Independent retailers day, encouraging people to buy something from an independent retailer on that day and promote diversity and shopping choice.
- Panel Members were very impressed with the Stratford shopping centre, which was clean and bright, had a good food court and a dedicated entertainment area, shops were all major retailers with large shopping frontages.
- Members felt that there were positive lessons that could be learnt from Stratford's experience in attempting to improve their retail experience. However, the Olympics had probably provided the catalyst for the investment, creating a unique set of investment circumstances.
- Skillsmart have also worked with the University of Northampton in creating a university degree course in retail.
- It was felt that it would be useful for Skillsmart to make a presentation to the Panel. It was suggested that as the timetable for the meetings was already quite full they should be asked to come before a meeting and make a presentation. It was also suggested that as they do a lot of work with local BID's they should also be asked to attend.

## **AGREED**

1. That the Scrutiny Officer approach Skillsmart and ask them to attend a briefing session prior to one of the Panel meetings.
2. The information from the Seminar hosted by Skillsmart Retail be used to inform the Panel's evidence base.

## **6. CORE QUESTIONS- EXPERT ADVISORS**

The Panel considered the draft core questions to be put to the key witnesses. The main points of discussion were as follows: -

- Members felt that if there were any consumer groups in Northampton they should be included in the list of witness to receive the core questions.
- Members considered that it was very important to centre the questions around working in partnership and include a question about how the witnesses would like the Town Centre to look in the future. There is a lot of work going on in individual areas, which is not necessarily joined up and there needs to be more of an emphasis in getting people to bring people into the town from the wealthier suburbs.

- Several members suggested that there should be more emphasis on special events and the role that they can play in bringing people into the town centre. For example there could have been an event based around the Olympic torch encouraging people to stay in the town centre longer.
- Members felt that there should also be an attempt to have more of a tie in with schools, for example have schools festivals and encourage them to create displays/provide entertainment in the town centre. It was pointed out that curriculums are very busy and there does need to be a lot of forward planning to include these events in the school programme.
- Members of the Panel will be attending the various different forums to ask the core questions, but the Youth Forum will be asking a short series of questions as a survey at one of their events. Within that survey it was agreed that it would be a good idea to include a question of online shopping habits.

**AGREED: -**

1. The core questions, as attached as Appendix A be sent to the witnesses.
2. The Scrutiny Officer to approach the national consumer groups to establish whether there are any local groups and if appropriate send them the core questions.

**7. UNIVERSITY OF NORTHAMPTON**

The Panel were informed that University of Northampton was not able to attend the meeting.

**AGREED:-** That the Scrutiny Officer send the core questions to the University and request a written response to be considered by the Panel at a future meeting.

The meeting concluded at 7:10 pm

## Scrutiny Panel 2 – Retail Experience

### CORE QUESTIONS

How can Northampton Borough Council (NBC) further develop partnership working with the town centre business community?

How can NBC support local businesses throughout the development period of any major building projects in and close by to the town centre

How can Northampton's retail experience be supported and the impact of low inflation and the economic downturn be mitigated?

How can the independent retail sector and multiple/larger chains work in partnership to ensure work towards sustaining the viability of the retail sector?

What effective marketing and promotion would benefit the town's retail sector and how do you feel the profile of the town centre could be raised?

How can retailers, landlords, prospective developers and agents develop the town's retail sector?

How can regulations and advice regarding the retail sector be utilised and accessed more by retailers?

What other activities could have a more positive impact on retailers?

How can independent retailers compete with both larger multiples and internet shopping?

What would you like the town centre will look like in 5 years time?

How good are the communication channels from the Borough Council regarding new town centre developments?

What do you feel would enhance the retail experience to attract new visitors / shoppers and increase the number of return visits to the town centre

Has there be any occasion where you have used the Internet to buy any item and why?

Any other comments

### Additional questions to Cabinet Member (Environment)

What impact does the following have on the levels of cleanliness in the town centre:

Seasonal variation

Enforcement and legal powers  
Resources available  
Partnership working with local businesses for overall presentation of retail areas  
Guidance available for new shops and businesses  
Positioning of waste bins to encourage use  
Vacant premises

**Additional questions to Cabinet Member (Planning, Regeneration and Enterprise) and Head of Regeneration and Development**

In terms of Planning and Regeneration:

Please provide details of support available to retail businesses

What are the key elements required for successful town centre regeneration

Please supply details of whether the role of retail investment can be a catalyst for regeneration

Any other comments

## **NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **Scrutiny Panel 2 – Retail Experience**

#### **CORE QUESTIONS**

How can Northampton Borough Council (NBC) further develop partnership working with the town centre business community?

How can NBC support local businesses throughout the development period of any major building projects in and close by to the town centre

How can Northampton's retail experience be supported and the impact of low inflation and the economic downturn be mitigated?

How can the independent retail sector and multiple/larger chains work in partnership to ensure work towards sustaining the viability of the retail sector?

What effective marketing and promotion would benefit the town's retail sector and how do you feel the profile of the town centre could be raised?

How can retailers, landlords, prospective developers and agents develop the town's retail sector?

How can regulations and advice regarding the retail sector be utilised and accessed more by retailers?

What other activities could have a more positive impact on retailers?

How can independent retailers compete with both larger multiples and internet shopping?

What would you like the town centre will look like in 5 years time?

How good are the communication channels from the Borough Council regarding new town centre developments?

What do you feel would enhance the retail experience to attract new visitors / shoppers and increase the number of return visits to the town centre

Has there be any occasion where you have used the Internet to buy any item and why?

Any other comments

# Northampton Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny



## Overview and Scrutiny

### Scrutiny Panel 2 – Retail Experience

8<sup>TH</sup> August 2012

#### Briefing Note: Precis' of additional published documents

#### 1 Background

1.1 At its inaugural meeting the Scrutiny Panel agreed that as part of its evidence gathering process summaries of various published documents would be provided to the Panel:

- The Portas Review
- The Right to Retail: Can Localism save Britain's small retailers
- Understanding High Street Performance
- Core Strategy – Northampton's Strategic Planning Policies
- Sustainable Community Strategy

1.2 Details of these documents were provided to the Panel at its June 2012 meeting.

1.3 Since that meeting, further documents have been identified as useful background to inform the Panel's evidence base:

- Central Area Action Plan
- Northampton Town Centre Health Check 2009
- Northampton Town Centre Shopping Survey 2010

#### 2 Information

2.1 Detailed below are extracts or summaries of the above reports in respect of retail for the Scrutiny Panel's information:

# Northampton Borough Council

## Overview and Scrutiny

### 2.2 Central Area Action Plan

#### 2.2.1 Extracts from the sections in relation to retail are detailed below

##### Definition of the 'Town Centre'

To be consistent with PPS4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth, the 'Proposals Map' identifies the extent of the town centre and Primary Shopping Area. In sequential planning terms, the Primary Shopping Area is the preferred location for retail development, with the town centre being the preferred location for other 'main town centre uses'. Given the current imbalance and harm that is being caused by competition from out-of-centre developments, and other large district centres, the Plan seeks to ensure that an impact assessment is undertaken to developments proposing 1,000 square meters gross or more of main town centre uses. This will assist in controlling the extent to which additional developments outside the Central Area will continue to grow and compete with the town centre with regard to the variety of main town centre uses.

#### Policy 11

##### Town Centre Boundary

The 'town centre' boundary as defined on the 'Proposals Map' will, for the purposes of sequential testing, be the preferred location for main town centre uses, with the exception of retailing where the Primary Shopping Area will prevail, followed by edge of town centre sites.

Developments of main town centres uses of more than 1,000 square metres gross proposed outside the town centre boundary will be subject to impact assessment.

#### Delivering a Vibrant Retail Centre

Defining and strengthening Northampton's Primary Shopping Area (as shown on the 'Proposals Map') is vital if the Central Area is to fulfil its role as a town centre (as defined by PPS4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth) and the principal shopping centre for Northamptonshire. To show the distinction between the types of use classes within Northampton Central Area, the Primary Shopping Area has been broken down into Primary and Secondary Frontages:

- Primary Frontages are the focus for retail uses
- Secondary Frontages will have a retail focus but provide opportunities for a greater diversity of uses away from retailing, such as financial services, restaurants and drinking establishments

The Council aims to develop a compact and quality retail centre by classifying the frontages and defining a Primary Shopping Area. The Council will also

[www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny)

Call 01604 837408

E-mail: [tiff@northampton.gov.uk](mailto:tiff@northampton.gov.uk)

# Northampton Borough Council

## Overview and Scrutiny

develop a robust retail circuit, which will create a more legible retail centre and strengthen the role of key retailing streets of Abington Street, Fish Street and St Giles Street. The retail circuit will seek to increase the vitality and viability of the town by promoting a range of quality retailing experiences for visitors. This range will include large-scale national stores that will locate in the Grosvenor Centre and its extension, through to smaller-scale individual specialist retailers in St Giles Street. Providing active building frontage on to streets throughout the Central Area and improving the design of shop frontages will be central to developing an effective retail circuit and increasing vitality, together with the increased perception of quality.

A substantial increase in high quality floor space that meets the needs of modern town centre retailers will be required to meet the Central Area's role as a town\_centre. Therefore, the Council has identified future extensions to the Primary Shopping Area. These extensions include the planned extension to the Grosvenor Centre (Policy 17 'Grosvenor Centre Redevelopment') and the redevelopment of the former Fish Market (Policy 19 'Former Fish Market and Adjoining Buildings').

### **Policy 12**

#### **Definition of the Primary Shopping Area**

Northampton Primary Shopping Area will become the main focus for shopping activity within the Borough. Retail development will take place in the Primary Shopping Area as defined on the 'Proposals Map'.

The Primary Shopping Area will be extended as shown on the 'Proposals Map' by the proposed Grosvenor Centre Redevelopment (as defined in Policy 17 'Grosvenor Centre Redevelopment'), the redevelopment of the former Fish Market and adjacent area (as defined in Policy 18 'Former Fish Market and Adjoining Buildings') and the Drapery (as defined in Policy 32 'Drapery').

# Northampton Borough Council

## Overview and Scrutiny

### Policy 13

#### Improving the Retail Offer

Within the Primary Frontages: 'The Character of Shopping Frontages'), the change of use from retail (Class A1) will be allowed where it will not result in:

- A significant decline in the total length of the identified retail frontage below 80%, or, where this is already below 80% reduce further retail frontage, and
- Two or more adjoining premises being used other than for retail

Within the Secondary Frontages 'The Character of Shopping Frontages'), the change of use from retail (Class A1) will be allowed where it will not result in a significant decline in the total length of identified retail frontage below 60%, or, where this is already below 60% reduce further retail frontage.

In addition, development at ground floor level within the Central Area will be expected to:

- Positively contribute to the character and function of a frontage (for primary and secondary frontages a brief assessment of the current and desired future character and function are set out in Appendix F: 'The Character of Shopping Frontages') and be compatible with adjoining uses
- Provide high quality shop fronts which will be consistent with the Shop Front Design Guide
- In the case of non-retail uses, to provide an active frontage with views into the unit or, if this cannot be achieved a high quality window display

#### Market Square

The Market Square is a destination in its own right through its function as a market and event space. It is a major historical landmark and area of public space. It provides a unique opportunity for Northampton to differentiate its retail and leisure experience from competing out-of-town retail parks and other retail centres. Recent investment in the public realm and a programme of events at the Market Square should be used as a starting point for future improvement and investment. In terms of role and function, the Borough Council intends to maximise the potential offered by this asset, by encouraging more restaurants and cafés to invest in the properties fronting the Square.

# Northampton Borough Council

## Overview and Scrutiny

### Policy 31

#### Market Square

The Council will seek to establish leisure uses within the Market Square and enhance its function and appearance by:

- Allowing more restaurants (A3) within the Market Square's Secondary Frontages
- Not allowing the loss of restaurants (A3), unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the proposal will meet the Council's strategic objective for the Market Square
- Ensuring that proposals will complement and improve the quality of the public realm in line with Policy 4.3 'Public Realm'
- Ensure proposals respect or enhance the building design and character of the Market Square in line with Policy 2.1 'Promoting Design Excellence'
- Working with property owners and occupiers to improve the fabric and appearance of buildings
- Seeking to sustain and enhance the Market Square as a venue for the market and as an event space

#### Drapery

This site is bounded by Bradshaw Street and King Street on the north, St. Katherine's gardens on the west, Drapery on the east and Jeyes Jetty on the south. It is bisected by College Street. It currently accommodates the Debenhams department store, associated car parking/ service area and other smaller retail, service, public house and eating and drinking establishments.

There is a strong likelihood that some of the current occupiers of this area, Debenhams in particular, will relocate into the redeveloped Grosvenor Centre. This will provide an opportunity for the area to be redeveloped for additional comparison retailing floorspace of approximately 17,000 square metres after the opening of the Grosvenor Centre extension. This floorspace will be more suited to retailers' requirements, provide an extension to the primary shopping area and enhance the role of the Drapery as a primary shopping frontage. It can also create a better connection to and setting for the St. Katherine's Gardens and the listed College Street Church.

# Northampton Borough Council

## Overview and Scrutiny

### Policy 32

#### Drapery

The Drapery will be regenerated in a manner consistent with the development principles contained within Figure 6.14 of the CAA 'Policy 32: Drapery Development Principles'. It will:

- Provide an extension to the Primary Shopping Area
- Provide up to 17,000 square metres of comparison retail floorspace, together with associated eating establishments
- Positively address and enhance the setting and use of St Katherine's Gardens through appropriate uses and active frontages on the west of the development site
- Reuse and restore historic buildings wherever possible and enhance the setting and make a feature of the listed College Street Church and also 41 Drapery
- Have strong connections that promote movement to and from the Former Fish Market and Adjoining Buildings site in their role as extensions to the Primary Shopping Area
- Enhance Swan Yard and Jeyes Jetty through respecting their historic character whilst seeking to provide attractive and safe links between Drapery and College Street

#### Meeting Retail Capacity

The Council is confident that a substantial extension to the Grosvenor Centre will be delivered, following the signing of a Development Agreement with Legal and General. As a logical extension to the Primary Shopping Area and the town's premier shopping destination, the Grosvenor Centre redevelopment proposal is the key to increasing and enhancing both the supply and quality of retail development for Northampton. It is anticipated that it will fulfil a substantial part of the identified retail capacity in the period to 2021.

It is anticipated that the Grosvenor Centre redevelopment will accommodate between 32,000–37,000 square metres (gross) of comparison floorspace. The Town Centre Health Check identifies the potential for a further 19,000–23,000 square metres (gross) of comparison goods floorspace to be accommodated within the town centre by 2026. The West Northamptonshire Retail Study indicates a potential for Northampton town centre to accommodate 4,500 square metres (net) of convenience floor space by 2021. The actual retail capacity within the Grosvenor Centre development will be determined through the detailed design of the scheme.

# **Northampton Borough Council**

## **Overview and Scrutiny**

The Council has identified two further sites for retail development that have good prospects for delivery. These will help to meet identified retail capacity in the period to 2026. The sites are:

- Abington Street East
- Drapery and land on College Street

### **Grosvenor Centre Redevelopment**

The Grosvenor Centre constitutes a significant part of the retail frontage within the Central Area. The site includes a purpose built shopping centre, the Greyfriars bus station with offices above, the vacant land to the west and east, the Mayorhold multi-storey car park together with associated land including subways and the Upper Mounts surface level car park on Victoria Street. It is one of the biggest and most important development sites within and adjacent to the Primary Shopping Area of the Central Area.

<sup>2</sup>The present development, which took place in the 1970s and 80s, whilst still functional and to a certain extent commercially successful, overall does not constitute an attractive environment. It also has a poor relationship with the rest of the historic environment that surrounds it. The buildings are bulky, monolithic and devoid of architectural interest and visual stimulation. Overall it does not form an attractive pedestrian environment as it is heavily trafficked and there is extremely limited pedestrian movement between the north and south in the daytime. The situation becomes worse in the evenings as it is very isolated when the buildings are closed.

Despite some recent investment it is now beginning to show its age. Its design and layout cannot be easily adapted to accommodate the needs of modern retailers and the demand for new retail premises in the town centre.

The bus station is an important building in terms of its function as a bus interchange and hub for bus services within Northampton as set out in Chapter 5. 'Accessibility and Movement'. The building itself is of its time and whilst warm and dry, is dark and can at times, particularly in the evenings, feel like an intimidating environment. It has a substantial amount (approx 14,000 square metres) of obsolete vacant office floor space and car parking above.

The Grosvenor Centre site redevelopment provides an opportunity for a logical extension and remodelling of the principal purpose built shopping centre within Northampton's centre. This will reinforce the existing primary shopping frontages and cater for longer-term retailer demand. This redevelopment is critical to sustaining Northampton centre's competitiveness as a retail destination and in delivering the Central Area vision. It should also provide the opportunity to accommodate a range of other town centre uses to reinforce the role of the Central Area and provide potential for significant improvements to the townscape.

# Northampton Borough Council

## Overview and Scrutiny

### Policy 17

#### Grosvenor Centre Redevelopment

The Grosvenor Centre Redevelopment will be in a manner consistent with the development principles set out in Figure 6.1 'Policy 17: Grosvenor Centre Redevelopment Development Principles'. It will:

- Provide up to an additional 37,000 square metres gross internal retail floor space plus ancillary uses including restaurant / leisure floor space as an extension to the existing Primary Shopping Area:
  - Provide a suitable long term, and if necessary interim, replacement for the bus station consistent with the criteria set out in Bus Interchange
  - Make the most effective use of the site reflective of its central location to accommodate a mixture of other main town centre uses, such as offices, leisure and entertainment, hotel and also residential development
  - Provide a new pedestrian route, which should be open and feel safe 24-hours a day, between the Market Square and Lady's Lane through to Newlands; and also a pedestrian route between Abington Street and Lady's Lane through to Victoria Street
  - Retain the existing amount of convenience floor space within the Grosvenor Centre and explore all possibilities of accommodating additional convenience floor space to meet identified available capacity
  - Provide sympathetic design of an appropriate scale taking into account the historic character of Sheep Street together with improved pedestrian and cycle connectivity north/ south and reinstate a building line in the missing gap to the north of Lady's Lane and to the south of Greyfriars
  - Be outward looking maximising external active frontages particularly at ground floor level
  - Ensure that new development is well related and sympathetic to the characterisation of the surrounding areas and in particular improves the appearance of all the facade on the Market Square and the setting of Welsh House
  - Provide appropriate public realm that is consistent with the ambitions of the Public Realm Implementation Framework and changes in the character of the highway particularly along Lady's Lane, Sheep Street, Greyfriars, Mayorhold, Victoria Street, Wellington Street, Abington Street and Market Square
  - In recognition of its identified designation as a proposed extension to the Primary Shopping Area (Policy 12 'Definition of the Primary Shopping Area') ensure that the development positively addresses the other sites proposed as extensions to the Primary Shopping Area (Policy 18 'Abington Street East') and also Drapery (Policy 32) to enhance their prospects of delivery
  - Include provision of secure cycle storage facilities: long stay cycle

# Northampton Borough Council

## Overview and Scrutiny

parking for employees and for short stay shoppers, in accordance with the Standards set out in Appendix: E. 'Parking Standards: Central Area Zones'

- Have appropriate parking management measures consistent with Policy 10 'Parking'
- Remove the Greyfriars, Lady's Lane and Wellington Street subways whilst ensuring that pedestrian connectivity is not comprised

### 2.3 Northampton Town Centre Health Check 2009

2.3.1 The Northampton Borough Council Town Centre Health Check was published in October 2009. Roger Tym and Partners had been commissioned to undertake a comprehensive healthcheck of Northampton town centre. The objective of the study was to present a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the Northampton Central Area to inform the emerging Area Action.

2.3.2 Some key reported facts from the Health Check:

Northampton is tied with Peterborough. Amongst the comparator cities only Leicester and Milton Keynes rank higher:

#### Retail Rankings

Venue	2003/04 Ranking	2008 Rank	Change 2004-2008
Northampton	43	43	0
Peterborough	46	43	-3
Milton Keynes	29	30	1
Leicester	10	14	4
Oxford	44	45	1
Coventry	41	60	19

There were 97 vacant units in Northampton at the time of the Goad Survey (2008) which equates to a vacancy rate of 15% and is above the GB average of vacancy rate of 12%. The vacancy units are spread evenly throughout the centre. The vast majority being A1 use class. Two vacant banks, 8 vacant restaurants and 1 vacant public house. The remaining six units were being redeveloped at the time of the Goad Survey. There were no vacant office units.

In May 2009 there were changes to the vacancy rates. In addition to the 97 identified in the Goad survey, there were 22 more, an increase of 23% in seven months. It was stated that this was probably due to the state of the economy at that time.

The Healthcheck identified that there is a good mix of multiples and independents. Compared with nearby town centres, the town is

[www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny)

Call 01604 837408

E-mail: [tiff@northampton.gov.uk](mailto:tiff@northampton.gov.uk)

# Northampton Borough Council

## Overview and Scrutiny

performing well – it has the same proportion of multiples as Leicester and Coventry:

### Percentage of top 20 retailers

Centre	Percentage of top 20 retailers
Northampton	85
Oxford	75
Peterborough	80
Leicester	85
Coventry	85
Milton Keynes	70

Source: [www.focusnet.co.uk](http://www.focusnet.co.uk)

Northampton has very few high profile fashion multiples.

In terms of mix, Northampton is most like Coventry. Milton Keynes has a relatively high proportion of its retail in upper-middle markets. Only Oxford has a notable proportion of its retail offering in upper market shops (5%).

The Healthcheck went on to report that Northampton would clearly benefit from the addition of further mid-end and higher-end fashion retailers, which would bolster the quality and variety of the town centre's shopping offer and enable the town to better compete with neighbouring town centres.

It was reported that Zone A rents in Northampton average £1,507 per sq m in 2007. The rent was lower than all comparator centres: Oxford and Milton Keynes are approximately twice that of Northampton's.

In respect of retail yields, between 2000 and 2008 Northampton's yield has strengthened considerably. In October 2000 Northampton's yield was the strongest of all the comparators, but at the time of the Healthcheck it ranked third and stood at 7.25. The Healthcheck highlighted that yields in Northampton had weakened due to the recession.

The Healthcheck commented that Northampton town centre looked tired and the shop fronts and facades throughout the town were slightly run down with the notable exceptions of the Morrisons area, Fish Street and Marefair. The Grosvenor Centre was reported as dated and the Peacock Place mall described as more modern but many of the shops had closed down and had not been re occupied.

The Healthcheck included a survey with a random sample of visitors to Northampton in May 2009. 204 individuals completed a face to face interview. The surveys were taken on different days of the week. The

[www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny)

Call 01604 837408

# Northampton Borough Council

## Overview and Scrutiny

purpose was to ascertain the respondents' reason for visiting the centre and ascertain their views and comments. In brief, some key facts from the survey:

- The majority travelled to the Northampton by car/van as the driver
- The main reason for the visit was to buy non food items
- Secondary reason for the visit was to buy non food items
- When asked why they would not be visiting an eating/drinking establishment, the majority of respondents indicated it was due to a poor selection/don't like
- In respect of likes and dislikes of the market area, the main positive comment was in respect of independent stalls
- The main dislike in terms of Northampton was the cleanliness and the main positive was eating and drinking closely followed by pedestrianised streets

A telephone survey with 400 households was undertaken in May 2009 in two Zones. Zone one from Moulton to Weston Favell areas and Zone two from New Duston to Collingtree. Respondents were asked about the most popular food and grocery shopping over the previous six months and in which centre they had spent most money on clothes and shoes in past six months:

**Zone 1**

Tesco Extra Mereway	(26%)
Sainsburys Sixfields	(20%)
Northampton	(49%)
Milton Keynes	(22%)

**Zone 2**

Morrisons, Kettering Road	(29%)
Tesco Extra, Weston Favell	(28%)
Northampton	(45%)
Milton Keynes	(16%)

The Market Square is popular with people visiting the town centre but is not very well used by residents overall.

### **The summary contained with the Healthcheck:**

- The town centre has an average proportion of comparison floorspace but a below average proportion of convenience floorspace, with Sainsbury's at the Grosvenor Centre being the only large foodstore.
- Services as a whole are over represented, but restaurants, cafes and fast food are under represented. This is despite high per capita spend compared to nearby city/town centres and a high population within 15 minutes drive time.

[www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny)

Call 01604 837408

E-mail: [tiff@northampton.gov.uk](mailto:tiff@northampton.gov.uk)

# **Northampton Borough Council**

## **Overview and Scrutiny**

- The town centre has 26 of the 31 Goad key multiples, on a par with Leicester and Coventry. It has a “middle” fashion ranking from Management Horizons Europe and is ranked below Milton Keynes and Leicester but at a similar level to the other comparator centres.
- However, occupier demand is low compared to the other centres, where high quality comparison and restaurant operators are seeking space. This is perhaps because of poor perceptions of the town and the lack of clusters of particular types of outlet (e.g. premium retailers or family restaurants).
- Vacancy is very high and as would be expected, this has worsened since the start of the recession. But, because vacancy has always been high compared to other centres, the losses suffered have not been as severe as in other areas.
- Prime Zone A retail rents are low in Northampton, presenting an opportunity for new retailers. Retail yields are strong – on a par with Milton Keynes – and have strengthened over the past decade, perhaps due to improvements to the public realm.
- Crime is recognised as an issue and there are schemes in place to target crime and improve perceptions of safety.
- The public realm is pleasant if somewhat tatty, for example with damaged street furniture. Much of the town centre is pedestrianised. There is generally good signage, although minimal signage from the station. Investment in the public realm has already taken place along Black Lion Hill and further work along Gold Street is due to be completed at the end of July.
- Pedestrian access to and through the centre is good, although the centre is spread out so it takes time to walk from one end to the other. Abington Street is the busiest location, with the Drapery and Gold Street also busy. Only around half of people visiting St. Peters Square, and hardly anyone visiting Morrisons, walk to the rest of the centre.
- Access by car is reasonable. There is less parking than in Leicester and Milton Keynes, but parking is cheaper than in the comparator centres.
- Train and bus links are good but the stations are peripheral and in poor condition. The visitor survey found that most people travel in by either car or bus.
- The town centre has a fairly local catchment – if another centre is either closer or the same distance away, it seems that people will visit that instead.
- Most people visit Northampton only once per month or fortnight, suggesting that they shop in other centres as well.
- Non food shopping is the most popular reason for visiting the centre, which accords with the fact that over half the floorspace is comparison goods. Eating out is a secondary reason for some

# Northampton Borough Council

## Overview and Scrutiny

visitors, although people do not seem to see the town centre as a restaurant destination.

- The market is popular with visitors and they like the independent stalls although feel that there is a lack of choice.
- Overall visitors rate the town centre poorly, in particular for environmental factors including cleanliness, safety and character (although pedestrianised streets are liked).
- Around half of residents surveyed stated that Northampton town centre is their main comparison shopping destination. This accords with the findings of previous studies but is low compared to the situation in, for example, Milton Keynes.
- A low proportion of residents use the Sainsbury's store, stating that supermarkets outside the town centre are easier to get to and easier to park at.
- Reasons for not using Northampton are that it has a poor range of multiples and is difficult to park in. As discussed, there are actually quite a high proportion of multiples, although it is true that the centre lacks premium outlets. There is also reasonable parking provision as compared to surrounding centres.
- With regard to leisure, restaurants are a popular activity and the town centre is reasonably popular – although most people visit their local restaurants. Safety concerns were the most cited reason for not eating out in the town centre.
- Cinema and theatre are also popular – and town center provision for both is good.

### 2.3.3 Detailed below is the relevant section from the CAA in relation to the Health Check 2009.

“However, the Town Centre Health Check<sup>10</sup> identified that the appearance of much of the public realm is tired and has not had sustained investment over a substantial period. The opportunity exists to address some of these poorer areas, particularly the main shopping street - Abington Street - through redevelopment, together with related improvements and investments in transport and general improvements, through the policies and regeneration sites identified within the Plan. “

<sup>10</sup> Roger Tym & Partners, Northampton Town Centre Healthcheck (2009)

# Northampton Borough Council

## Overview and Scrutiny

### 2.4 Northampton Town Centre Shopping Survey June 2010

2.4.1 The Town Centre Survey was undertaken using a framework as set out in the Northampton Town Shopping Survey, January 2005.

<b>Street Name</b>	<b>N<sup>o</sup> of Vacant Units</b>	<b>% of Vacant Units</b>	<b>N<sup>o</sup> Occupied A1 Units</b>	<b>% of Occupied A1 Units</b>	<b>Total N<sup>o</sup> of Units</b>
<b>Wellingborough Road - South(16-68)</b>	5	29%	6	35%	17
<b>Kettering Road - North (5-55)</b>	5	27%	9	50%	18
<b>Abington Square - South</b>	4	18%	9	56%	17
<b>Abington Square - North</b>	1	6%	8	50%	16
<b>York Road - East (27-37)</b>	2	16%	5	46%	11
<b>York Road – West (15 – 25)</b>	4	36%	0	0	10
<b>Abington Street - South</b>	5	4%	26	53%	49
<b>Abington Street – North</b>	7	15%	29	59%	48
<b>Peacock Place</b>	12	41%	13	45%	29
<b>Grovesnor Centre</b>	5	7%	62	86%	66
<b>The Parade</b>	1	11%	6	67%	9
<b>Market Square – South, West &amp; East</b>	4	17%	8	30%	23
<b>Sheep Street – West (5-15)</b>	1	16%	1	16%	6
<b>Sheep Street – East (2-20)</b>	2	20%	4	40%	10
<b>Drapery - East</b>	4	25%	4	25%	16
<b>Drapery - West</b>	5	24%	10	48%	21
<b>Bradshaw Street</b>	2	33%	1	16%	6
<b>College Street Mews</b>	0	n/a	5	83%	6
<b>Gold Street - South</b>	4	22%	8	44%	18
<b>Gold Street – North</b>	2	13%	13	50%	26
<b>Gold Street Mews</b>	0	n/a	8	80%	10
<b>Marefair – South</b>	1	10%	4	40%	10

## Northampton Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny

<b>(7-21)</b>					
<b>St Peters Walk East</b>	1	11%	7	77%	9
<b>St Peters Walk West</b>	1	n/a	5	83%	6
<b>St Peters Square</b>	2	18%	8	72%	11
<b>Bridge Street - West</b>	3	11%	4	14%	28
<b>Bridge Street- East</b>	3	20%	3	20%	15
<b>Mercers Row</b>	0	n/a	6	60%	10
<b>George Row</b>	1	16%	1	16%	8
<b>Wood Hill</b>	0	n/a	2	40%	5
<b>Derngate – North (1-23)</b>	2	12%	5	33%	12
<b>Derngate – South (2-8)</b>	0	n/a	2	33%	6
<b>St Giles Street – South (2-72)</b>	5	18%	16	59%	27
<b>St Giles Street – North (1-79 and Riding Arcade)</b>	1	7%	22	58%	38
<b>Fish Street – East</b>	1	10%	1	10%	10
<b>Fish Street - West</b>	0	n/a	3	27%	11

Total N<sup>o</sup> of Units = 638 Total N<sup>o</sup> of Occupied A1 Units = 324 (50.5%)

Total N<sup>o</sup> of Vacant Units = 97 (14%)

### A1 Shop Fronts

<b>Street Name</b>	<b>Total Shop Frontage (Metres)</b>	<b>Total A1 Shop Frontage Occupied or Vacant (Metres)</b>	<b>% A1 Shop Frontage</b>
<b>Abington Square – South (2-30)</b>	77	57	74%
<b>Abington Street - South</b>	438	302	69%
<b>Abington Street – North</b>	428	276	65%
<b>Peacock Place</b>	374	353	94%
<b>Grovesnor Centre</b>	731	713	97%
<b>The Parade</b>	113	82	73%
<b>Market Square – South</b>	55	17	30%

[www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny)

Call 01604 837408

E-mail: [ttiff@northampton.gov.uk](mailto:ttiff@northampton.gov.uk)

## Northampton Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny

<b>Market Square - West</b>	94	23	25%
<b>Market Square – East</b>	39	32	82%
<b>Sheep Street – East (2-20)</b>	58	31	53%
<b>Drapery - East</b>	130	52	40%
<b>Drapery - West</b>	178	106	59%
<b>Gold Street - South</b>	182	102	56%
<b>Gold Street – North</b>	239	100	41%
<b>Mercers Row</b>	73	40	55%
<b>Wood Hill</b>	52	21	40%
<b>St Giles Street – South (2-72)</b>	190	145	76%
<b>St Giles Street – North (1-65)</b>	122	53	47%
<b>Fish Street – East</b>	88	11	13%
<b>Fish Street - West</b>	78	7	8%

### 3 Conclusions

- 3.1 That the information detailed above informs the evidence base of the Scrutiny Panel's Review.
- 3.2 That a copy of the full version of the documents are available on the [Council's website](http://www.northampton.gov.uk).

# **Northampton Borough Council**

## **Overview and Scrutiny**

Brief Author: Tracy Tiff, Overview and Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of Councillor Matt Lynch, Chair, Scrutiny Panel 2, Retail Experience

13<sup>th</sup> July 2012