



CABINET REPORT

Report Title	SHOPFRONT DESIGN GUIDE SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT
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AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Cabinet Meeting Date:	16 th June 2011
Key Decision:	Yes
Listed on Forward Plan:	Yes
Within Policy:	Yes
Policy Document:	Yes
Directorate:	Planning and Regeneration
Accountable Cabinet Member:	Councillor John Yates
Ward(s)	All

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The report seeks to apprise Cabinet of representations received to formal consultation undertaken on the draft Shopfront Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document. It sets out Officer responses to these representations together with proposed amendments to the Guide. It also seeks approval of the Guide as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet notes the representations made to the consultation on the draft Shopfront Design Guide SPD and agrees the associated Officer responses in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Cabinet approves the Shopfront Design Guide attached in Appendix 2 as a Supplementary Planning Document to replace the Shopfront Design Guide April 1998.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

- 3.1.1 The need for development to exhibit high quality design and enhance Northampton's historic character is a key objective within the emerging West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy and Northampton Central Area Action Plan. To support policies within the Northampton Local Plan 1997, a Shopfront Design Guide was adopted as a Supplementary Planning Guidance in April 1998. Practical experience of the use of the Guide over the last 12 years together with the increased emphasis on high quality design has highlighted some weaknesses that need to be addressed. In particular, it is considered too generic in many respects, not providing sufficient detail to ensure that applications for quality shopfronts were submitted and approved.
- 3.1.2 In response to this, a draft Shopfront Design Guide was published for consultation, with a view to it being adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document to replace the existing Guide.
- 3.1.3 It contains updated design principles, which are more in line with current Government policies and guidance. It also provides further details on the implementation of policies contained in both the adopted Northampton Local Plan (saved), the Central Area Action Plan and the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy.
- 3.1.4 Once adopted, the Council is required by regulation to let people know that if any person is aggrieved by its contents they can consider applying to the High Court for a judicial review of the decision to adopt the Supplementary Planning Document. Any such application must be made within 3 months of the adoption date.

3.2 Issues

3.2.1 Planning process

- 3.2.1.1 Northampton's town centre, as well as its district and local centres, has experienced an increase in poor quality and sometimes unauthorised shopfronts over the last few years.

3.2.2 Poor physical appearance

- 3.2.2.1 As the number of poorly designed shopfronts increases, the negative impacts on the street scene worsen. The character and architectural rhythm of a parade of shops can be damaged by the installation of poor quality shopfronts.

3.2.2 Town centre performance

- 3.2.3.1 Evidence shows that Northampton's town centre has been performing reasonably well but could be improved. Encouraging new regular visitors to the town centre who will participate in both shopping and leisure activities can be partly facilitated by improving the physical appearance of the town at

ground floor level and increasing the safety and perception of safety in the centre. The installation of high quality shopfronts can have a positive impact on both of the above issues.

3.3 Public consultation

3.3.1 A draft document for consultation was prepared, containing one general design principle, and eleven more specific principles including those relating to individual elements of a shopfront such as stallrisers, pilasters, security measures and lighting.

3.3.1 The formal public consultation exercise was for the period between the 17th March and the 16th April. This timescale accords with the legal requirements contained in the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which states that representations on Supplementary Planning Documents should be for a period of “no less than 4 weeks or more than 6 weeks starting on the day on which the local planning authority complies with regulation 17 (guidance on public participation)”.

3.3.2 In undertaking the public consultation exercise, Officers:

- 3.3.4 a) Prepared a press release which was published in the Chronicle & Echo;
- 3.3.4 b) Published an advert notice in the Chronicle & Echo;
- 3.3.4 c) E-mailed consultees on the Local Development Framework database, attaching a notification letter advising them about the document and its consultation; and
- 3.3.4 d) Released the following consultation documents: the draft Shopfront Design Guide SPD, the draft Consultation Statement, the draft Sustainability Appraisal and the Environmental Impact Assessment screening form

3.3.3 A total of 9 representations were received. A summary of their comments can be found in the Consultation Statement (Appendix 1). Comments were received for the draft Supplementary Planning Document only. The overall response was positive. The Council’s intention to improve the design of shopfronts was welcomed, although there were concerns about the enforcement of these principles. There were also additional design considerations on offer, although they relate predominantly on retaining local character, supporting/enhancing the heritage elements of the principles and further guidance from an equalities perspective. Where appropriate, these comments have been used to finalise the Supplementary Planning Document. A copy of the Shopfront Design Guide, which incorporates amendments made in response to representations received, is provided in Appendix 2.

3.4 Choices (Options)

3.4.1 Option 1: Do nothing and use the existing Guide

- 3.4.1.1 The existing Guide was published in April 1998, and is severely out of date. The Guide is also quite generic and does not provide sufficient detailed principles, which would benefit both applicants and those assessing the merits of any proposed changes.
- 3.4.1.2 By doing nothing and relying on the existing Guide, there is the potential that poor quality applications will continue to be submitted. In addition, Planning Officers assessing these applications are unlikely to have sufficient clear, locally distinctive, policy guidance to enable them refuse planning permission. This could be to the detriment of the physical appearance and economic future of the town and its district/local centres.

3.4.2 Option 2: Adopt the updated Guide attached in Appendix 2 as a Supplementary Planning Document

- 3.4.2.1 The Guide has been updated to overcome the shortfalls that have been identified in its use over the last 12 years. In addition it has been able to take account of the significant shifts in national policy since 1998, in particular:
- a) PPS1 (Planning for Sustainable Communities) – which places significant importance in design when preparing plans;
 - b) PPS4 (Planning for Sustainable Economic Development) – which promotes a town centre first approach when it comes to developments of main uses such as retail, offices and commercial leisure. To meet this objective, clear and effective principles and policies which will improve the physical, accessibility and environmental aspects of a town are required; and
 - c) Design guidelines published by CABE
- 3.4.2.2 The new Guide will strengthen the Council's position in seeking to enforce the principles of good shopfront design when planning applications come forward. It will also encourage applicants to seek professional advice on design matters before submitting a planning application.

3.4.3 Option 3: Adopt the updated Guide attached in Appendix 2 as a Supplementary Planning Document with amendments

- 3.4.3.1 The Guide can be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document subject to further amendments if Cabinet consider that there are sound planning reasons, which are justified by evidence base.
- 3.4.3.2 It is recommended that Option 2, or Option 3 if it is applicable, is pursued.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

- 4.1.1 The report sets out some design principles, which have been shaped by the policies contained in the existing Northampton Local Plan, the pre-submission draft to the Central Area Action Plan and the pre-submission draft West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy.
- 4.1.2 This Guide will provide a clear design framework to contribute to the improvements of ground floor shops and commercial frontages, which will ultimately enhance and/or improve the street scene and local character.

4.2 Resources and Risk

- 4.2.1 Financial Implications – none. The Guide will be one of the many tools used to determine planning applications.

4.3 Legal

- 4.3.1 The Guide has been produced in accordance with the relevant planning regulations. As a Supplementary Planning Document, it will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

4.4 Equality

- 4.4.1 Consistent with the duties placed under the Equalities Act 2010 an Equality Impact Assessment screening form was completed at the inception of the work. This exercise helped identify those parts of the community with protected characteristics, which would assist in shaping the design principles. As a result of this there was early engagement with the Council's Pensioner and Disability Forums that were able to influence the contents of the guide prior to its wider consultation. Officers have been praised by these groups for the pro-active approach that they have taken.
- 4.4.2 The guide incorporates design principles, which will improve accessibility for disadvantaged groups, including the disabled, parents using push chairs and the elderly. Guidance on issues such as materials and colour has been improved as a result of these responses. The finalised guide will include reference to the ability to be available in other languages and formats.

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

- 4.5.1 Internal colleagues within the following sections: Development Control, Built and Natural Heritage, Building Control, Regeneration and Economic Intelligence.

4.5.2 External consultees: Northamptonshire Police, Chair of the Northampton Town Business Improvement District, West Northamptonshire Development Corporation, Pensioners Forum and Northamptonshire Association for the Blind.

4.5.3 Public wide consultation: A formal public consultation was undertaken between the 17th March and the 26th April 2011.

4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes

4.6.1 The implementation of this Guide by planning applicants and development control officers will result in improved shopfronts, which will ultimately improve the physical appearance of the town and other retail centres. This will meet the Council's priority to regenerate the town centre as identified in the Corporate Plan.

4.7 Other Implications

4.7.1 None.

5. Background Papers

- 5.1 Northampton's Shopfront Design Guide April 1998;
- 5.2 Northampton's adopted Local Plan June 1997;
- 5.3 Northampton Central Area Action Plan pre-submission draft November 2010;
- 5.4 West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy pre-submission draft February 2011
- 5.5 Shopfront Design Guide Draft Supplementary Planning Document Equality Impact Assessment Part 1: Screening 2011
<http://www.northampton.gov.uk/downloads/ShopFrontEIA-ScreeningFeb2011.pdf>
- 5.6 Shopfront Design Guide Draft Supplementary Planning Document Consultation Statement March 2011
<http://www.northampton.gov.uk/downloads/ShopFrontDG-Consultation-Statement.pdf>
- 5.7 Shopfront Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document Consultation Draft 2011 <http://www.northampton.gov.uk/downloads/ShopfrontDesignGuide-Draft-SPD.pdf>
- 5.8 Shopfront Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document Draft Sustainability Report 2011
<http://www.northampton.gov.uk/downloads/ShopFrontDG-SEA-March2011.pdf>

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