



**NORTHAMPTON**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

#### **SCRUTINY PANEL 2 – RETAIL EXPERIENCE**

**14<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2013**

#### **BRIEFING NOTE: RESPONSES TO THE PANEL'S CORE QUESTIONS FROM NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY FORUMS**

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Panel on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2012, it was agreed that Members of the Panel would attend meetings of the Northampton Community Forums and ask attendees for their responses to the Panel's core questions.

#### **Information**

### **2 Disabled People's Forum**

- 2.1 Councillor Danielle Stone attended the Disabled People's Forum on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2012. Responses from attendees at the meeting are detailed below.
- 2.2 The Forum was concerned about the number of empty shops and one suggestion was that it would be useful to have dialogue with landlords to discuss negotiating a lower rental of properties. The Forum noted that the Business Improvement District (BID) was developing ways forward by looking at a variety of options to improve and attract new business to the area.
- 2.3 One Forum member voiced their concerns that there were too many eateries, pubs and clubs in the town and that any further development or expansion of these should be halted.
- 2.4 A further concern was expressed about the lack of gardening and electrical stores within the town centre. The Forum commented on the lack of public toilets in the town centre.
- 2.5 A suggestion was proposed that parking facilities could be improved to increase footfall in the town centre. The Forum was informed that there were three car parks within the town centre where charges were not applicable for the first hour, which was of great benefit for people coming in to the town to shop.
- 2.6 The Forum felt that the bus interchange would also increase the amount of foot fall in the town centre, which in turn would increase the use of the

market. Work was being undertaken with market traders in order to work towards improving trade for the market holders.

- 2.7 Other comments put forward by the Forum included making signage more visible to ensure that motorists and pedestrians are given instructions on how to access the town centre, making sure that the gateway into Northampton is clear and clean and well maintained. Some signage could be erected to reflect the modernisation and developments within the town centre.

### **3 Pensioners' Forum**

- 3.1 Councillor Danielle Stone attended the Pensioners' Forum on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012. A precis of the responses from attendees at the meeting is detailed below.

**Respondent 1** - The town centre deteriorated when the insurance agents and solicitors moved out of town into retail parks, taking away the workers who had used the town centre in the lunchtimes/ after work. He bought clothes in town and shopped for groceries at a nearby supermarket. He feels that grocery shops won't return to the town centre unless they are smaller specialist retailers such as those on St Giles Street. The respondent uses the market and feels that traders should form a cooperative and run the market.

**Respondent 2** - The number of empty shops dragged the town centre area down. The respondent uses the local supermarket and sometimes shops for groceries on line as it means that she does not have to carry it. The respondent shops for clothes in the town centre as she likes to see and feel items. She uses shops such as Wilkos and the Pound Shop. The respondent also likes to look in charity shops for bric a brac and household items. She would like to see a reasonably priced antiques/collectibles shop in the town centre.

**Respondent 3** uses the town centre for a variety of services as well as shopping. He shops at the local supermarkets, charity shops, buys clothes at Marks and Spencer's. He also shops at Wilkos and the Pound Shop and the market. The respondent uses the local barber, local coffee shop and the library. The respondent feels that the market was more vibrant when the shops that surround it were more attractive and regular music events were held. He would like to see fewer betting shops and low value eating places.

**Respondent 4** had been taxi driver for many years. He advised that feedback he had received was the areas around town were well served with local shopping parades but that the town centre had lost key shops. The respondent felt that, in his opinion, car parking changes had been detrimental to the town.

**Respondent 5** comes into town several times a week. He feels that the approaches to the town centre, such as along the Kettering Road are a disgrace with boarded up shops, graffiti etc. The respondent considered that the market no longer offered variety and he was disappointed that the Sunday Art Markets no longer took place.

**Respondent 6** does not shop if possible. He uses his allotment to grow his own produce and felt that these and community gardens should be promoted. He shops at Wilkos and uses the library. He considered that the role of Northampton as a market town has changed and that losing the cattle market had reduced the numbers of people coming into the town.

**Respondent 7** feels that the rise of the supermarkets has led to the deterioration of the town centre by providing a wide range of goods out of the town centre. St Giles Street is the only attractive street because of the mix of independent shops. There are no longer any fruit and veg shops outside of the supermarkets or any butchers or fishmongers in the town centre. The respondent shops out of town at John Lewis at Milton Keynes.

**Respondent 8** uses Marks and Spencer's, town centre coffee shops and supermarkets. He shops at local mini supermarkets and uses the market.

#### **Additional comments**

Some members of the Forum felt that the change in retail habits was, in part, a generation change. Younger working people did not have the time to shop in a variety of places but used supermarkets as they were able to shop in one place. The Forum felt that at its height the market may have been very successful.

#### **4 LGBT and Q Forum**

4.1 Councillor Matt Lynch, Chair, Scrutiny Panel 2, attended the meeting of the LGBT and Q Forum on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2012 posing the Panel's core questions to members.

4.2 Responses from attendees:

#### **Please supply details of your shopping experience in Northampton**

- Some shops are hard to locate. It would help to have more maps or audio-visual devices
- Parking in Northampton is hard to find and is expensive
- There is lots of traffic in Northampton, making it difficult to drive in the town, and motorists frequently park on double yellow lines, thus contributing to the congestion. There should be better "no parking" signage, and this should be enforced more rigorously
- In view of competition with Milton Keynes and Leicester, a park-and-ride scheme would help attract shoppers into Northampton

**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?**

- Not enough is made of Northampton's older buildings. The town's heritage needs to be enhanced
- Northampton lacks "personality", compared to towns like Milton Keynes and Leicester
- The town centre needs a lick of paint; currently, many buildings in the town are very grey
- Local artists could create artwork on display boards outside buildings

**Do you feel communication levels from the Borough Council regarding new town centre developments are effective and why?**

- Communication via Forums is good
- Communication with visitors needs to be improved
- Many of the Forum members were aware of the Love Northampton website and felt that this was a good way of communicating

**What would you like town centre to look like in 5 years' time?**

- It is fine to preserve buildings, but the town does need a focal point
- The Market Square is dated, and needs rejuvenating. The Square would benefit from a focal point, such as a fountain
- Some members of the Forum said that they used the market; one member said that they used it for buying vegetables

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

- Most members of the forum said that they had bought on the Internet and over the telephone. It is much easier and more convenient to use these methods. However, for more expensive products, it is good to see them before purchasing
- Internet shopping and retail shopping are two different activities.
- There are lots of specialist shops in St Giles Street; would always buy such items in person
- There needs to be a specific Northampton identity or theme for signs, perhaps with a unified colour or design

## General comments:

- Communication within the Grosvenor centre is difficult. Mobile phones do not work there. It would be good to have Wi-Fi in the shopping centre
- Northampton would benefit from a major shopping centre such as the Westfield centres in London
- More people should be celebrating Northampton's heritage (examples include the double helix and Charles Bradlaugh). Public art could make Northampton more attractive to visitors and shoppers
- The recent Pride of Lions display was attractive

## 5 Diverse Communities Equalities Forum

- 5.1 Councillor Suresh Patel, Co-Chair, Diverse Communities Forum, took the Panel's core questions to the meeting held on 22nd November 2012. As there was limited attendance it was agreed that the questions would not be discussed.

## 6 Youth Forum

- 6.1 The Youth Forum put the Panel's core questions to its members and various connections over the summer period but unfortunately received no responses. Therefore the survey was re submitted in September 2012, ending on 31 October 2012 and it was also listed on the consultation page of the Council's website. There were six respondents to the survey who provided responses to the core questions as detailed below.

### **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?**

Incentivise the shop owner by lowering the rents of the units even for a temporary period of time

The Grosvenor, Peacock Place, Abington Street and Derngate are blighted by empty shops

Why the talk of new shops when there are units already there that are empty?

Keep the town centre clean

We cannot turn the clock back but we can learn from the past

We encouraged labour intensive businesses (Solicitors, Insurance, Accountants etc.) to move out of town centres, the employees of these concerns were the ones that shopped in town at lunchtimes and at the end of the day, can we not encourage business back?

The market traders could be encouraged to form a co-operative (say Northampton Market Ltd.) to run the operation, NBC to lay out all the ground rules and police it and then take a nominal site rent from the business

Either make a proper job of the fountain or scrap it

Try and reduce parking charges with more free periods

A wider range of quality shops and reduction in the budget/"pound" shops in the main retail centres. Larger circulatory areas between shops  
 Free parking for longer than 1 hour, or a reduction in the overall prices (recently went to the opticians, went straight back to the car afterwards else would have gone over hour and had to pay a 2hr fee)  
 Clean Streets (regular litter picking and jet washing of footpaths)  
 More incentives to come into town e.g. cheap parking, discounts across town such as 20% off once a month across all stores?  
 Could the Cobblers or Saints set up a clothing/merchandise shop in one of the empty shops in Abington Street to remind the community of our rich sporting history?  
 More independent small retailers. Less cheap Pound shops  
 A larger M&S  
 Making the town more easily accessible by car - reduce congestion to make journey times into and out of the town quicker  
 More on-street parking  
 Opening the central area of Abington Street between Wellington Street and St Giles Terrace to vehicles with significant parking  
 Open Bridge Street, Gold Street and Marefare to vehicles  
 More planting - trees. Hanging baskets etc. all the year round  
 A better Market offer  
 A zero tolerance policy towards beggars, drunks, and those drinking on the streets  
 A shuttle bus linking the railway station, hospital, St James Retail Park and Morrison's on Victoria Promenade with the town Centre  
 A much better cleansing regime with chewing gum removed from pavements and all gullies free of debris so they work.  
 Pavements should be washed daily like in France  
 Better Christmas Lights like there was back in the 60s  
 Lower car parking charges  
 Car parking closer to the shops  
 Cleaner streets  
 Fewer tatty cheapo shops  
 Shop facades to be more in keeping with the original architecture of the buildings  
 No seasonal "Here today, gone tomorrow" shops selling "tacky cheapo Rubbish"  
 Better customer services instead of the "take it or lump it" attitude that pervades most shops but especially banks  
 Sort out the Bridge Street blockage so that customers can actually access the town centre  
 Ban delivery lorries & vans in shopping hours - deliveries and street cleansing to be done at night

**Do you feel communication levels from the Borough Council regarding new town centre developments are effective and why?**

No they are effective and often contradictory in nature  
 Yes, there has been a big improvement of late  
 Poor. Difficult to know quite what is happening with Grosvenor centre – is it going ahead or not?  
 Fountain switched off - did bacterial infection not come into the design?  
 Community use of open area in market square seems hard - how does one go about getting access?  
 As a member of the public I feel that the town has lost momentum with regards

to the Grosvenor centre redevelopment plans  
Perhaps more of an interface between a local success such as  
Weston Favell Centre could be worthwhile  
The council seem to take two steps forward and one step back.  
The people of Northampton deserve nice shops that appeal to all ages and  
also a pleasant night life  
Good information available on line, but not for the majority who are not on line.  
There is a need to connect more with those not on line so that they can  
be informed.  
The Borough Council is the most secretive and uncommunicative organisation  
unless a person is able to access the web or buy the "Chron"  
It never listens anyway, as it is driven either by party political dogma  
on one hand, and by bureaucratic intransigence on the other

### **What would you like the town centre to look like in five year's time?**

Full of busy and various shops  
More vibrant with an active market  
better range of quality shops, continue street art projects  
(e.g. safari & pride of Northampton  
- preferably with smartphone apps), improved access by roads  
(inner ring road is hopeless)  
more open air car parks - not gloomy multi-stories  
I would like it to look to other historic but forward thinking towns  
and cities such as Lincoln  
and Norwich classic examples of cities who have over the past decade grown their  
University around the town while improving job prospects, the sky line and  
the economy of the city  
No empty shops. More small independent retailers.  
The Grosvenor Centre extended.  
A better Market offer.  
Abington Street open to vehicles attracting more people to that  
area of town and providing more on street parking.  
A much cleaner town free of chewing gum etc.  
No beggars, drunks or people drinking on the streets.  
A fountain / water feature worthy of a large town that works  
- if London and towns in European Countries can have so many water  
features without presenting health problems, why can't Northampton?  
Quicker journey times by car into and out of the town centre  
No increase in parking charges. A shuttle bus around the town  
Greyfriars bus station demolished and the site re-developed  
Premises above shops occupied  
Alive and vibrant, giving a worthwhile shopping experience that would  
encourage me to return

### **If you shop on the Internet to buy please explain why?**

Its cheaper and convenient especially if the shops don't exist in town  
Because we do not have the variety in the shops and the cost of transport/parking  
easier, cheaper, better range, quality delivered to door, don't need to worry  
about parking cost / distance to car from shop, lack of town centre offer,  
no car congestion (hate going near Gas street roundabout on a Saturday).  
You have closed St John's open car park - multi storeys are gloomy and  
too tight  
Easy to do

Saves wandering around shops to get what you want then when you find it your specification / colour / size is not in stock  
No parking / travelling costs. Better prices / value for money  
A much more vibrant town that is attractive and makes people want to visit it  
I don't shop on the Internet

**Do you have any other comments about shopping in Northampton town centre?**

Fill up the empty Office Spaces, Sol House, The offices opposite Sol Central, Sheep Street. By offering competitive rates businesses or start-ups could use the office space this would have a potential two fold impact:

1. Increased use of public transport Trains\Buses
2. Increased footfall in the town centre for shops, cafes etc

No

Have lived in the town 8 years, been continual promises of regeneration of town centre but little action

Grosvenor is too small and out dated, the design of what is there is poor, elements are gloomy and uninviting (e.g. outside Sainsbury's / passage to current bus station). Yet due to openness / balcony upstairs actually feels better than down, but no clear signage or suggestion of quality up there to get us there in the first place. The kiosks at market end are no better than the chuggers of Abington street: SKY, cash 4 gold type, etc lower tone and use up floor area that would make centre look and feel bigger. Width of "street" just isn't big enough for kiosks and circulation leaving me feeling claustrophobic and inclined not to return.

Would rather go to MK where the centre is bigger, brighter, has quality shops & restaurants (John Lewis, Apple, Wagamama, etc. etc.)

I do not shop in town as much as I would like to due to the shop selection and the state of the streets.

Retail shopping centres have had their day.

As more and more people take to shopping on line fewer and fewer people are going to shop in retail - town / city - centres.

People need to wake up to this and adopt a mind-set appropriate to changing retail habits, recognising that town / city centres have had their day in the age of the internet. Town / city centres should be developed to compliment the internet, providing an experience that will attract people in this modern internet age.

The out of town retail parks and supermarkets with free parking offer cost-effective and time-effective shopping - the Town Centre needs to become a place that I would want to visit, rather than have to visit

## **7 Conclusions**

7.1 One Forum felt that the bus interchange would increase the amount of footfall in the town centre which in turn would increase the use of the market.

7.2 It was noted that the Business Improvement District (BID) was developing ways forward by looking at a variety of options to improve and attract new business to the area.



- 7.3 Improved signage was suggested as was the introduction of more maps or audio-visual devices to assist shoppers.
- 7.4 A number of Forum members used the town centre for clothes shopping and buying goods from the independent stores. Buying from the Internet was also popular.
- 7.5 A number of respondents supported the independent stores, particularly those located in St Giles Street.
- 7.6 A number of Forum members use the market.
- 7.7 The LGBT and Q Forum suggested that local artists could create artwork on display boards outside buildings
- 7.8 The rise of the supermarkets had led to the deterioration of town centres. It is convenient to be able to buy goods from the same shop.
- 7.9 Parking facilities was referred to and the suggestion of a park and ride scheme was proposed. There are three car parks within the town centre where charges are not applicable for the first hour, which is of great benefit for people coming in to the town to shop.
- 7.10 In general, communication with the Borough Council via the Forums was felt to be good but communication with visitors could be improved.
- 7.11 The Love Northampton website was supported as was the recent Pride of Lions display.
- 7.12 Northampton's heritage should be celebrated.
- 7.13 Six individuals responded to the Youth Forum's survey and their comments included celebrating the rich sporting suggestions for the introduction of more free periods of parking and more on street parking facilities, support for the independent stores was given. The respondents suggested regular litter picking and jet washing of the footpaths would be useful. The streets art projects were supported. Comments advised that good information was available on line but it would be useful for there to be other communication methods. A number of respondents shopped on line mainly due to the cost and convenience.

## **8 Recommendations**

- 8.1 That the responses to the Panel's core questions from the Northampton Community Forums be used to inform the Panel's evidence base.

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Date: 4<sup>th</sup> December 2012