

Appendices

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NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET REPORT

Report Title

Northampton Town Centre – The Next Steps

AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Cabinet Meeting Date:	17 th July 2013
Key Decision:	Yes
Within Policy:	Yes
Policy Document:	No
Directorate:	Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning and Customers and Communities
Accountable Cabinet Members:	Councillor David Mackintosh Councillor Tim Hadland Councillor Brandon Eldred Councillor Mike Hallam
Ward(s)	Castle

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To set out the council's strategic proposals for improving Northampton Town Centre, incorporating its response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee's May 2013 Retail Experience report.

2. Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 Reaffirms the town centre as a major strategic priority for the council and agrees to add it as an improvement project to **Northampton Alive**.
- 2.2 Agrees to establish a **Town Team** to lead the town centre improvement agenda, as per paragraphs 3.1.76/7 to provide the strategic vision and operational management for Northampton town centre and to oversee a detailed plan for implementing the actions arising from this report.

- 2.3 In accordance with the Administration's manifesto commitment to appoint a **High Street Czar**, agrees to appoint local businessman Stephen Church for a period of four months, for the purpose of producing an independent report proposing a strategic and collaborative vision for the town centre and agrees that the position will be known as **Town Centre Summit Chairman**.
- 2.4 Further to paragraph 2.3, agrees to host a **Town Centre Summit**, on 20th September 2013, led by the Town Centre Summit Chairman, to allow partners and stakeholders to actively inform the town centre vision.
- 2.5 Agrees to introduce a regular **town centre newsletter** from the council to town centre businesses to keep stakeholders well informed and up to date about what is going on.
- 2.6 Agrees to a summer trial of **free car parking** all day Saturday and for two hours on week days during the whole of August 2013 in the council's pay on exit car parks (St John's, Mayorhold and St Michaels), with Sundays continuing to be free all day, leading to a reduction in income that could be £180,000.
- 2.7 Further to recommendation 2.6, agrees to review the impact of **car parking reductions** following the August 2013 trial.
- 2.8 In partnership with Northamptonshire County Council (subject to agreement of the detailed business case), approves the utilisation of the £100,000 received by the council from the Town Centre Innovation Fund to implement **pay on exit at the Grosvenor Centre Car Park**, including the option to pay by credit and debit card.
- 2.9 Further to recommendation 2.8, agrees that pay on exit machines are procured from Metric Group Limited for the reasons set out in paragraphs 4.2.5/6.
- 2.10 Endorses the proposals in the council's 2013/14 Capital Programme to install improved **car park signs** on the main entrance roads into the town centre to direct motorists to their most convenient car park and provide up to the minute information on where spaces are available.
- 2.11 Acknowledges the contribution that **Northampton Town Centre Limited** (the Town Centre BID), has made to improving the Town Centre.
- 2.12 Agrees to commence consultation with local businesses on the creation of a **business improvement district for Wellingborough Road**.
- 2.13 Acknowledges the challenge that **empty shops** and **negligent and/or absent landlords** present to the council's ambitions for a vibrant and thriving town centre and requests that an action plan is promptly developed to address the problem with a **public register of landlords**.
- 2.14 Approves proposals for major improvements to the **public realm** in the **Cultural Quarter**, to be delivered in partnership with Northamptonshire County Council, set to be outlined later this year.
- 2.15 Endorses the establishment of a **town centre ranger** post, dedicated to keeping the town centre in pristine condition.

- 2.16 Makes a commitment to try to reduce the blight of **discarded chewing gum** on town centre streets.
- 2.17 In partnership with Northamptonshire County Council, agrees to launch a formal consultation process to determine whether to **re-open the middle section of Abington Street** to vehicles to allow easier access for shoppers and visitors to the town centre.
- 2.18 Further to recommendation 2.17, agrees to relocate the **Francis Crick Memorial Statue** to a suitable location.
- 2.19 Agrees to rollout **free Wi-Fi** across the entire town centre.
- 2.20 Agrees that an exciting **programme of summer events** is developed to bring more visitors into the town centre, including regular performances provided from a town centre bandstand.
- 2.21 Agrees that dedicated **busker spots** are created around the town centre to encourage more and better quality buskers.
- 2.22 Agrees that a review of the town's **night time economy** is undertaken to make certain the council, local businesses, Northamptonshire Police and other partners work together effectively to ensure the town centre is safe, as well as vibrant, and has something to attract a wide cross section of visitors.
- 2.23 Acknowledges the problem of **street drinkers and beggars** in the town centre and requests that an action plan is promptly developed to address the problem.
- 2.24 Endorses the work currently being undertaken, in partnership with Northamptonshire County Council, on a pioneering **urban bicycle-hire scheme**, to be implemented in the town centre during the summer.
- 2.25 Agrees that a public consultation is undertaken on future of the **Market Square fountain** during the summer of 2013.
- 2.26 Accepts all of the recommendations made in Overview and Scrutiny Committee's May 2013 **Retail Experience report** and thanks Overview and Scrutiny Committee for its valuable work.
- 2.27 Endorses the allocation of £195,000 from the New Homes Bonus Reserve, in accordance with the delegations in the Constitution, to fund recommendations 2.6, 2.18 and 2.19 in 2013/14 and, for all of the remaining recommendations that have a financial impact, with the exception of recommendation 2.8, agrees that they will be funded from previously approved revenue and capital budgets.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

Current position

- 3.1.1 Determined partnership working between the council, businesses, the Town Centre Business Improvement District and other partners has enabled Northampton town centre to perform better than many other similar size town centres since the onset of the economic downturn in 2007. Nonetheless, Northampton has not escaped the recession entirely unscathed, evidenced by factors such as a reduction in footfall and a rise in the empty shop rate.
- 3.1.2 A change in political leadership of the town has brought to bear renewed energy and ambition for the future of the town centre. There is now clear recognition of the contribution a vibrant, thriving town centre will make to the economic and social prosperity of Northampton, and the wider county.
- 3.1.3 In the past two years, many improvements to the town centre have been implemented or set in train, including:
- 3.1.3.1 Free and reduced price car parking successfully introduced in the council's town centre car parks in October 2011 to attract visitors to the town centre and to encourage them to dwell longer.
- 3.1.3.2 Designation of the prestigious Waterside Enterprise Zone to promote investment, jobs and growth in the town.
- 3.1.3.3 Redevelopment of Northampton Railway Station on the site of the historic castle, which now forms a heritage gateway to the town.
- 3.1.3.4 Worked with Northamptonshire County Council on developing proposals for the Angel Street office accommodation regeneration project which will bring thousands of office workers into the town centre, having a major impact on the town centre economy.
- 3.1.3.5 Worked with the University of Northampton to enable the construction of student residential accommodation for nearly 500 students on the former St John's surface car park site.
- 3.1.3.6 Supported the University of Northampton's relocation proposals that will see them move in 2018 to a modern new campus at Avon Nunn Mills, within the Waterside Enterprise Zone.
- 3.1.3.7 Secured agreement for a 105 bed hotel at Albion Place, bringing both visitors and jobs to the town centre.
- 3.1.3.8 Designation of a Cultural Quarter in the town centre, encompassing Northampton's key cultural venues.
- 3.1.3.9 Extensively refurbished Northampton Museum and Art Gallery, significantly improving one of the town centre's main visitor attractions.
- 3.1.3.10 Launch of the Love Northampton web site and tourist information guide to encourage more visitors to the town centre.

- 3.1.3.11 Construction underway of a smart, new, fit for purpose, bus interchange, enabling demolition of the dilapidated and outdated Greyfriars bus station.
- 3.1.3.12 Provision of free Wi-Fi on the Market Square.
- 3.1.3.13 Delivered major improvements to Abington Street public realm, giving the town centre a welcome makeover.
- 3.1.3.14 Major improvements proposed to public realm in the Drapery to enhance the appearance of the area around the new bus interchange.
- 3.1.3.15 The creation of a town centre ranger post, dedicated to keeping the town centre in pristine condition
- 3.1.3.16 Resolved the issues caused by skateboarders in the town centre by creating a modern skate park, with café and toilet facilities set to open shortly.
- 3.1.3.17 In partnership with the police and the Town Centre BID, supported the 'Don't Kill with Kindness' campaign, highlighting the dangers of giving money to beggars.
- 3.1.3.18 Addressed the problem of chuggers in the town centre by entering into a voluntary agreement with the Public Fundraising Regulatory Association (PFRA) which controls the behaviour of and severely restricts the number and location of chuggers operating in the town centre.
- 3.1.3.19 In accordance with the Administration's manifesto commitment to support the Northampton Arts Collective (now known as NN), worked with Northamptonshire County Council to find them a suitable new home in the heart of the town's recently designated Cultural Quarter.
- 3.1.3.20 Hosted our biggest ever programme of events in 2012, including Godiva, Olympic Torch, Music Festival, bringing thousands of visitors into the town centre.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Retail Experience (May 2013)

- 3.1.4 Between May 2012 and May 2013 an overview and scrutiny panel undertook an in depth review to:
 - Investigate how NBC can support the town centre business community
 - Investigate how NBC can support local businesses throughout the development period of any major building projects in and close by to the town centre (i.e. Grosvenor; bus interchange; university accommodation)
 - Identify and examine good practice from other boroughs
 - Identify ways to develop greater involvement / engagement with local, regional and national businesses in public land improvement initiatives

- 3.1.5 As a result of the retail experience review, Overview and Scrutiny Committee has today made recommendations to this Cabinet meeting. It is proposed that all recommendations are accepted by Cabinet, although it should be noted that virtually all of the recommendations have already been implemented or are currently in the process of being implemented.
- 3.1.6 Information about how the recommendations have already been implemented is provided below:
- 3.1.6.1 Love Northampton is the high profile promotion campaign developed by the council and key partners to market and publicise the town's offer and attractions and what's going on here (O&S recommendations 6.1.1-3).
- 3.1.6.2 There are already busking locations identified in the town centre which are in regular use. There are plans this summer to further enhance the town centre street entertainment offer by raising the profile of busking locations, to encourage more buskers into the town centre (O&S recommendation 6.1.4).
- 3.1.6.3 There are also exciting plans in development to create a town centre equivalent of the successful Bands in the Park programme (O&S recommendation 6.1.4).
- 3.1.6.4 Retailers (other town centre businesses) and residents are routinely notified of major developments through a variety of mechanisms including letters, flyers, emails and notices. A town centre newsletter will be launched later in the year to further improve communication with town centre businesses, residents and visitors (O&S recommendation 6.1.5).
- 3.1.6.5 Free and reduced price car parking has, and continues to be, broadly advertised to residents of the town. Indeed, the offer has been well utilised by the public, leading to a significant increase in ticket sales (O&S recommendation 6.1.6).
- 3.1.6.6 In the past, local artists have utilised empty shops. Various other initiatives have also been implemented to approve the appearance of empty shops (O&S recommendation 6.1.7).
- 3.1.6.7 Funding is currently promoted to local businesses through the council's connections with Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership (O&S recommendation 6.1.8).
- 3.1.6.8 The council's planning policies are under regular review to ensure, in so far as the law permits, they support the council's ambitions for a thriving and vibrant town centre (O&S recommendation 6.1.9).
- 3.1.6.9 The council has been involved in and has assisted with the communication of pop up shops and exhibitions (O&S recommendation 6.1.10).
- 3.1.6.10 The intention to appoint a town centre Czar was clearly stated in the manifesto that saw the current Administration elected to power and, indeed, this Cabinet report proposes an appointment to the position (O&S recommendation 6.1.11).

- 3.1.6.11 EMS, the council's environmental services partner, is contractually required to provide a consistent standard of cleansing and maintenance to the town centre and effective monitoring and reporting arrangements are in place to ensure standards are met. EMS works closely with the council, its partners and the Town Centre BID via a variety of mechanisms to understand needs. Robust resources and systems are in place to ensure enforcement action is used as an effective tool in maintaining cleanliness in the town centre and arrangement are in place to allow problems to be reported and dealt with quickly, including an innovative 'report it' app (O&S recommendations 6.1.12-20).
- 3.1.6.12 The council actively works with its town centre partners on an ad hoc basis and in more formal arenas such as the town centre forum and the town centre BID to drive improvements in the town centre on a broad range of matters, including traffic management and improvements to the public realm (O&S recommendations 6.1.21, 22 and 24).
- 3.1.6.13 Through the Northamptonshire Waste Partnership, the council contributes funding to a number of waste education officers who work closely with schools to encourage recycling (O&S recommendation 6.1.23).

Central Area Action Plan

- 3.1.7 The adoption of the Central Area Action Plan (CAAP) earlier this year marks a key milestone in the future development of the town centre, providing a robust, but flexible, planning framework from which further town centre development can flow.

Northampton Alive

- 3.1.8 In March 2012 Northampton Alive was launched, providing an aspirational vision for the regeneration of Northampton, marking the start of a far more coherent and determined approach to the town's future development.
- 3.1.9 Focused around Northampton's major regeneration projects, Northampton Alive has unequivocally set out the town's ambitious regeneration agenda.
- 3.1.10 The new bus interchange is an early success of Northampton Alive. Enabling the demolition of the outdated 1970s Greyfriars bus station and creating space for prime location retail development in its place, the smart new facility will open for business in spring 2014.
- 3.1.11 Under the Northampton Alive banner, the Council continues to work with Legal and General to bring the Grosvenor Centre extension forward, but the proposed large out of town retail development at Rushden Lakes is making progress on this project more difficult.
- 3.1.12 With strong political leadership in place and the planning and regeneration context firmly set, the environment is now considered right for the town centre to be reaffirmed as a major strategic priority for the council and to therefore be added to Northampton Alive.

Waterside Enterprise Zone

- 3.1.13 The largest in the UK, the Waterside Enterprise Zone was launched in 2011. It stretches from the western edge of Northampton across to the town centre. Focused on innovation and enterprise, its purpose is to promote investment, jobs and growth in the town.
- 3.1.14 The Enterprise Zone offers a broad range of benefits to attract new businesses to Northampton, as well as the pre-existing advantages of investing in a well-connected dynamic town.
- 3.1.15 Covering more than 20 sites along the River Nene, the Enterprise Zone offers an ideal location to encourage businesses to relocate and grow in Northampton. With the potential to significantly enhance the economic viability of the town centre, the council is confident that it will lead to the creation of a vibrant commercial district, including both small and medium size businesses and major global brands.
- 3.1.16 The University of Northampton has announced that it will relocate to Avon Nunn Mills, a prime site within the Enterprise Zone, bringing more jobs to the town centre and massively increasing town centre footfall when it opens for business in its modern new campus in 2018.
- 3.1.17 Nationwide has also announced plans to look at the potential to relocate to the Enterprise Zone, bringing in excess of 2,000 jobs into the town centre, which will be another large boost to the Town Centre economy.

Cultural Quarter

- 3.1.18 In January 2013 the council designated an area of the town centre as the Cultural Quarter. Located in Guildhall Road and Derngate, the following key cultural venues are located within it:
- The Northampton Museum and Art gallery (the council's main museum)
 - NN (the newly located Northampton Arts Collective)
 - The award winning Royal and Derngate Theatres
 - 78 Derngate (the restored Rennie Mackintosh designed house)
 - The recently opened, Errol Flynn Film House, dubbed 'a film house for film lovers'
- 3.1.19 Emerging opportunities exist for the Northampton Cultural Quarter arising from the Waterside Enterprise Zone and development initiatives such as the Angel Street and St John's regeneration projects.
- 3.1.20 A three dimensional master planning exercise is currently underway which will set out both the physical development of the area and the activities and interactions that will go on there.
- 3.1.21 One of the early successes of the Cultural Quarter will be major improvements to the public realm that will be implemented later this year.

Business Improvement District

- 3.1.22 A business improvement district (BID) is a defined area within which businesses, following a successful ballot, pay an additional one percent business rates in order to fund projects within the levy area to enhance the area and promote business activity.
- 3.1.23 In January 2011, a BID was established for the town centre. Known as Northampton Town Centre Ltd (NTCL), the town centre BID has worked effectively with the council to deliver many improvements, adding to the economic prosperity of the town centre.
- 3.1.24 Northampton Independents Day, held on July 4, is a great example of the type of campaign undertaken by NTCL. It promoted the town centre's independent traders, championing their individuality, customer service and commitment to quality. Part of the third national Independents' Day, NTCL organised a series of events aimed at raising the profile of local traders and putting smaller firms in the spotlight.
- 3.1.25 On the edge of the town centre, Wellingborough Road is a busy and diverse part of the town, comprising mainly small independent businesses, such as bars, restaurants, cafes, high fashion retail and other specialist shops. It is entirely different in character and culture from the area within the boundary of the town centre BID.
- 3.1.26 It was therefore appropriate that it was not included in the town centre BID boundary. It is however an area that potentially could benefit from its own BID and so it is proposed that consultation is undertaken with local businesses on the creation of a separate business improvement district for Wellingborough Road, with a decision to progress to a ballot of those businesses impacted by the end of September 2013.

Town Centre Parking

- 3.1.27 The council understands that convenient and reasonably priced car parking is one of the keys to improving access to the town centre and plays an important part in attracting visitors and supporting the local economy.
- 3.1.28 An approach to car parking is required in the town centre that will support and enable economic growth and which will encourage and enhance the viability and vibrancy of the town centre.
- 3.1.29 Two years ago, the council introduced free first hour and Sunday car parking and reduced price second hour car parking across its town centre car parks.
- 3.1.30 This bold initiative has been a huge success in increasing usage of the town centre car parks generally and, particularly, in encouraging visitors to the town centre on Sundays.
- 3.1.31 Car park ticket sales for all council car parks increased by nearly 29,000 (9%) for the first two months of 2012/13, compared to the same period in 2011/12.

- 3.1.32 Encouraged by the success of this initiative, it is now proposed to extend the free car parking offer during August 2013 to all day Saturday and two hours free on week days in the council's pay on exit car parks (St John's, Mayorhold and St Michaels). Sunday Parking will, of course, continue to be free in all council car parks.
- 3.1.33 An hour of free car parking, for technical reasons, has had to be limited to those multi-storey car parks that have pay on exit machines (St John's, Mayorhold and St Michaels). One of the main shoppers' car parks, the Grosvenor Centre Car Park, therefore had to be excluded from this aspect of the initiative.
- 3.1.34 It is proposed that investment is now made in upgrading the Grosvenor Centre car park to pay on exit so that it can be added to the one hour free initiative in time for the commencement of the Christmas shopping period in late November.
- 3.1.35 The introduction of pay on exit to the Grosvenor Centre car park will also enable shoppers to dwell longer and will facilitate the introduction of credit and debit card payments.
- 3.1.36 As part of this initiative, it is also proposed to introduce credit and debit card payments to the council's existing pay on exit car parks (i.e. St John's, Mayorhold and St Michaels) and to potentially provide pay on exit solutions in the Royal and Derngate Theatre and in the new hotel at Albion Place.
- 3.1.37 It is proposed that the new pay on exit machines are procured from Metric Group Limited, who are the suppliers of the council's existing pay on exit machines.
- 3.1.38 Other imminent improvements to the town centre car parking offer, include already approved proposals in the council's 2013/14 Capital Programme to install car park signs later in the year on the main entrances to the town centre to improve the visitor experience by directing motorists to their most convenient car park and by providing up to the minute information on where spaces are available.
- 3.1.39 It is also likely that at least one new multi-storey car park will be provided adjacent to the town centre to ensure all car parking needs can be catered for.

Empty Shops

- 3.1.40 Empty shops present a challenge to the council's ambitions for a vibrant and thriving town centre.
- 3.1.41 Over the past two years, the council has supported the Town Centre BID to reduce the visible impact of empty shops through the hanging of attractive vinyls in empty shop windows.
- 3.1.42 Empty town centre shops can often be a problem associated with negligent and/or absent landlords. The Portas Review asserts that councils need to be proactive in managing the problem of empty town centre shops, using the powers and tools at their disposal.

3.1.43 Portas also brings new thinking on this issue, putting forward ideas about 'landlord registers' and 'empty shop management orders'. Such ideas are worthy of further exploration.

3.1.44 It is proposed that we introduce a public register of landlords for the town centre and undertake research to establish what else can be done to address this problem in Northampton.

Night Time Economy

3.1.45 The town centre is a vibrant and thriving night time destination. The night time offer comprises a broad range of bars, restaurants, night clubs and other leisure venues, which make an important contribution to the economic viability of the town.

3.1.46 It is proposed that a review of the night time economy is undertaken to ensure the council works as effectively as possible with night time economy businesses, the police and other partners in order to ensure the town centre remains as safe, clean and attractive at night time as it is during the day.

3.1.47 Examples of effective partnership working include Pubwatch and Best Bar None, voluntary schemes, which promote and support good practice in licensed premises, to try to ensure a safe and secure environment.

3.1.48 Alongside its more general responsibilities, the council recognises that it has an important role to play in the town centre as the Licensing Authority.

3.1.49 The council understands that it is important to continue to be innovative and proactive in the way it uses its licensing powers and that it needs to actively consider using all of the authorities and tools available to it to try to ensure that night time visitors to the town centre feel welcome and are kept safe throughout their visit.

3.1.50 Examples of this innovative and proactive approach are evidenced in the work recently undertaken to enable the council's licensing committee to consider progressing to statutory consultation on the implementation of an Early Morning Restriction Order (although the committee, at its meeting on 18th June 2013, decided not to proceed with the proposal).

3.1.51 Other innovative examples include 'Reducing the Strength', a partnership strategy, aimed at reducing violent crime and antisocial behaviour in the town centre associated with the consumption of super strength alcohol. It is an entirely voluntary measure that encourages retailers to agree to stop selling cheap beers, lagers and ciders with 6.5% or more alcohol volume.

Making the Town Centre Safe and Clean

3.1.52 Working with the police and other partners, the council is committed to ensuring the town centre is a safe place to visit, live and work during both the day and night.

3.1.53 Investment in CCTV and the appropriate deployment of staff, such as neighbourhood wardens, environmental crime officers and the new town centre ranger, help to reduce crime and the fear of crime in the town centre.

- 3.1.54 The council is aware that the presence of street drinkers and beggars detract from the attractiveness of the town centre and can make people feel threatened and unsafe.
- 3.1.55 Campaigns such as 'Don't Kill with Kindness' and 'Reducing the Strength', along with the provision of outreach workers are some of the ways in which the council has addressed this problem, which continues to be a priority for action.
- 3.1.56 The council, with the support of the Police, implemented a Designated Public Places Order (DPPO) in March 2009 as an additional power to deal with the problem of alcohol related anti-social behaviour (ASB). The DPPO gives Police and other accredited officers the power to confiscate alcohol from those drinking in a public place if it is associated with ASB or looks as though it could lead to ASB.
- 3.1.57 As the order has been in place for over three years, in accordance with best practice, It is now proposed that the council undertake a public consultation on the impact of the DPPO on 17th and 18th July, to coincide with this year's 'Don't Kill with Kindness' campaign.
- 3.1.58 The council is also committed to high standards of cleanliness in the town centre. Staff such as neighbourhood wardens, environmental crime officers and the new town centre ranger also help to keep the town centre clean and tidy.
- 3.1.59 Chewing gum is recognised as a particular blight on town centre streets. It is proposed that work is undertaken to identify best practice so that the effective action can be taken to address the problem on a sustainable basis.

Britain in Bloom

- 3.1.60 The council, working with Northampton Town Centre Ltd, other partners and local communities, enters Britain in Bloom each year. The colourful floral displays have an impact borough-wide but there is a very strong focus on the town centre and its main entry roads.
- 3.1.61 The rows of jardinières and the cascading hanging baskets that adorn the town centre throughout the spring and summer have become a popular attraction, bringing additional footfall and encouraging visitors to dwell longer.
- 3.1.62 Last year, Northampton was awarded Silver Gilt in East Midlands in Bloom and silver in the national competition. It is hoped to do even better this year, both regionally and nationally, and for the first time Northampton has entered the prestigious International Bloom competition.

The Market

- 3.1.63 In accordance with the Administration's manifesto commitment, a review has taken place of the market governance arrangements, leading to the establishment of the Market Advisory Group.
- 3.1.64 An independent chair was appointed to the Market Advisory Group, who worked diligently with market traders, elected members and council officers to agree an action plan, the implementation of which is well underway.

- 3.1.65 Until March 2013, the role of independent chair was undertaken by Raymond Overall. It is now Dick Roberts. The council is grateful to them both for their hard work in helping the Market Advisory Group kick start a number of initiatives for the Market Square with market traders and the council.
- 3.1.66 Many improvements to the market have already been delivered, including a rent reduction for stall holders plus new initiatives to attract shoppers and new traders to support the economic viability of the market, which is recognised as an important asset of the town centre.
- 3.1.67 On 25th May 2013, the council, with the support of market traders, took part in the national Love Your Local Market campaign by organising family activities and entertainment on the Market Square.
- 3.1.68 The purpose of the event was to promote the fresh produce and quality goods on sale in order to attract shoppers back to the market.
- 3.1.69 A key feature of the Market Square is the fountain. Installed in 2010, there have unfortunately been on-going problems with its operation associated with water quality. These problems remain unresolved. Work continues to find a solution.
- 3.1.70 Clarity needs to be provided over the future of the fountain, therefore the council will undertake a public consultation on the fountain's future during the summer of 2013.

Bridge Street

- 3.1.71 As well as the general economic situation around the world, other external challenges, outside of the council's direct control, have caused difficulties for local businesses, including the fire at the former Angel Hotel on Bridge Street in January 2012
- 3.1.72 A Listed Building Application has now been submitted to bring about the refurbishment of the former Angel Hotel and, subject to Listed Building Consent, it is hoped the owners will start work shortly.

Town Centre Vision

- 3.1.73 It is proposed that a High Street Czar, to be known as the Town Centre Summit Chairman, is appointed, for a period of four months, for the purpose of producing a report recommending a strategic and collaborative vision for the town centre.
- 3.1.74 It is also proposed that the council hosts a Town Centre Summit, on 20th September 2013, led by the Town Centre Summit Chairman, to allow partners and stakeholders to actively inform the town centre vision.
- 3.1.75 Once a vision is agreed, the next steps will be to quickly develop both the physical and economic regeneration strategies that are capable of delivering the level of innovation and improvement required to make the town centre vision a reality.
- 3.1.76 Appropriate governance arrangements will also be put in place for the Town Centre in the form of a Portas style Town Team.

3.1.77 The town team's membership will be drawn from senior politicians, leaders from key partner organisations, such as the University of Northampton (including representation from the leadership of the student union), Northamptonshire County Council, Northamptonshire Police, Northampton Town Centre Ltd and other town centre partners. The Town Team's purpose will be to drive swift progress and to constantly monitor and re-evaluate what needs to be done.

3.2 Choices (Options)

3.2.1 Cabinet can choose to accept or reject any or all of the 27 recommendations of this report, which provide a raft of major and more minor proposals for improving the town centre.

3.2.2 The main choice for Cabinet to make is to decide if it wishes to determine the town centre to be amongst its key regeneration priorities and to therefore agree that the town centre should be added to the portfolio of strategic regeneration projects that comprise Northampton Alive.

3.2.3 If indeed it does, then it should agree the major recommendations of this report which provide an effective way forward for the council to achieve this aim in collaboration with key town centre partners.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

4.1.1 Northampton Alive sets out the council's policy position on regeneration. The implications of this report would be to add to Northampton Alive the town centre as an additional improvement priority.

4.1.2 The proposed town centre summit will lead to the establishment of a strategic and collaborative vision for the town centre and the subsequent development of both the physical and economic regeneration strategies that will translate the vision into reality.

4.2 Resources and Risk

4.2.1 Most of the financial implications of this report have already been approved through the council's revenue budget and/or its capital programme. There are though some significant financial implications, not yet budgeted for, arising from the car park proposals set out in recommendations 2.6 - 2.8.

4.2.2 The loss of budgeted income arising from increasing free car parking during the whole of August 2013 in the council's pay on exit car parks (St John's, Mayorhold and St Michaels) to all day Saturday and for two hours on week days could be £180,000 which will be met from the council's New Homes Bonus (recommendation 2.6).

- 4.2.3 It should also be noted the review of the car parking changes following the August 2013 trial may have an impact on the Council's future revenue budget position. This impact will be assessed as part of the review (recommendation 2.7).
- 4.2.4 The cost of implementing a pay on exit system at the Grosvenor Centre Car Park and associated enhancements is assessed at just under £200,000. This will be funded using the £100,000 awarded to the council from the Town Centre Innovation Fund and with a £100,000 contribution from Northamptonshire County Council, subject to agreement of the business case (recommendation 2.8).
- 4.2.5 It is proposed that the new pay on exit machines are procured from Metric Group at a cost of approximately £68,000. Metric Group is the supplier of the council's existing pay on exit machines. This way forward will enable a more coherent, flexible and resilient approach to the future management of the car parking system in relation to matters such as information management, asset utilisation, processes and system compatibility, training and development and management maintenance of IT infra-structure.
- 4.2.6 For reasons of best value, due consideration has been given to tendering for the supply of the new pay on exit machines, however it is judged that it would not be practicable to work with a different supplier and the benefits that may be achieved from testing the market would very likely be far outweighed by the dis-benefits.
- 4.2.7 The council's 2013/14 Capital Programme includes investment of £200,000 to fund car park signs that direct motorists to the most convenient car park. This investment was announced in the Budget for 2013/14.
- 4.2.8 The cost of rolling out free Wi-fi across the town centre will be approximately £10,000 (recommendation 18) and will be met from the council's New Homes Bonus.
- 4.2.9 The cost of the summer events programme will be £5,000 (recommendation 19) and will be met from the council's New Homes Bonus.
- 4.2.10 Funding for the town centre ranger post will be met from in year efficiencies achieved in the Director of Customer and Communities revenue budget.
- 4.2.11 All risks arising from proposals set out in this report will be appropriately assessed and managed prior to implementation and on an on-going basis as deemed necessary.

4.3 Legal

- 4.3.1 The main legal implications arising from this report relate to the procurement of pay on exit machines and associated peripheries and changes to traffic regulation orders, arising from the proposed reduction in car park charges.
- 4.3.2 These legal implications will be appropriately addressed if the relevant recommendations of this report are agreed.

4.4 Equality

- 4.4.1 There are no equality implications directly arising from this report.
- 4.4.2 Improvement of the town centre has the potential to bring benefits to all sections of Northampton's communities and the wider county. It will be important for these benefits to be understood and realised.
- 4.4.3 The council has stringent standards in relation to equalities and any changes introduced will be appropriately screened, assessed and addressed to ensure they are fully consistent with these standards.

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

- 4.5.1 Consultation will take place with key partners and stakeholders in the town centre.
- 4.5.2 The key consultation vehicle will be the Town Centre Summit which will be held on 20th September, 2013.
- 4.5.3 Information gathered will be used to inform the vision and strategies that will be used to drive the regeneration of the town centre.

4.6 How the Proposals Deliver Priority Outcomes

- 4.6.1 One of the council's main priorities is to ensure a successful vibrant town centre economy for Northampton to promote growth and prosperity for the town.
- 4.6.2 Implementation of the proposals contained in this report has the potential to significantly contribute to this priority.

4.7 Other Implications

- 4.7.1 None

Background Papers

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Retail Experience (May 2013)

The Portas Review (available at www.communities.gov.uk/portasreview)

Contact officers:

Steven Boyes (Director of Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning
and Julie Seddon (Director of Customers and Communities)
0300 330 7000