



CABINET REPORT

Report Title	Northampton Town Centre Masterplan
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AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Cabinet Meeting Date:	16 th October 2019
Key Decision:	YES
Within Policy:	NO
Policy Document:	YES
Service Area:	Economy, Assets and Culture.
Accountable Cabinet Members:	Cllr. Tim Hadland,
Ward(s)	Castle

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To approve the Northampton Town Centre Masterplan (2019), which establishes a clear vision for the town centre and enables the delivery of the transformational change required for Northampton to once again have a town centre that residents, visitors and businesses will be proud of.
- 1.2 It will provide Northampton Borough Council, our partners and future investors with a framework to guide the development of the town centre and will be the tool to deliver change.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 Cabinet approve the Northampton Town Centre Masterplan which sets the Principles and the approach that will be taken in order to deliver transformational change.
- 2.2 Cabinet notes the results of the consultation and how the masterplan has accounted for these within its design.

- 2.3 The Masterplan is used to inform emerging planning policy within the town centre
- 2.4 Cabinet note the progress made to date, timescales and next steps for the Future High Street Fund application and the priority areas for intervention.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

- 3.1.1 Structural changes to retail are taking place in town centres across the country, affecting the way people shop and communities use their town centres. People are shopping more online while out of town shopping locations continue to pull people away from traditional town centre locations.
- 3.1.2 Change on the high street is not a new phenomenon with the way people use their high streets constantly evolving. However, the speed of these changes has increased dramatically in recent decades. The unprecedented growth of online shopping in particular has had a big effect on high streets. Between 2007 and 2018 online sales increased six-fold while the growth of in-store sales lagged behind. In 2000 online retailing accounted for less than 1% of total retail sales while in October 2018 almost a fifth of all retail sales took place online
- 3.1.3 The speed of this change has meant that high streets and local areas have not had sufficient time to adapt to meet these challenges. While there are examples of successful regeneration of town centres, many places across the country are struggling to transform in response to these structural changes.

Northampton Town Centre

- 3.1.4 Northampton Town Centre plays a vital role as a major centre serving the town and a wider catchment of over 1m people. Northampton has a long history dating back before the Middle Ages and the town centre reflects this in its mix of modern and historic buildings and the varied uses that they host.
- 3.1.5 Retailing is the predominant land use within Northampton town centre alongside other significant uses include cultural, entertainment and leisure.
- 3.1.6 Over the last 25 years, the town centre has not seen the level of retail investment that would be expected for a centre of its size. Although there has been some small-scale retail investment, this has not addressed the needs of modern town centre retailers.
- 3.1.7 Large stores are still vacant following the closures of BHS and M&S, which are dated in terms of floorplates, causing them to be unattractive to potential retailers. Whilst Northampton's catchment population has a high level of spending per person, the Abington Street and the Grosvenor Centre are currently regarded by retail operators as primarily catering for lower income groups.

3.1.8 Northampton, similarly to many of these other towns across the country, has seen vacancy rates and footfall data support the analysis above, with vacancy rates for the whole of the town centre area increasing from 12.7% in 2015 to 13.9% in 2019. Within the primary shopping area, this increase is even more pronounced increasing from 14.7% in 2015 through to 17.5% in 2019. Footfall has fallen by over 15% in the town centre over the past 3 years, from 24.5m in 2016 down to 20.6 in 2018.

Northampton Forward

3.1.9 Northampton Borough Council recognised the need for change within the town centre in late 2018 and invited a range of key local stakeholders to meet to establish how this change could be realised.

3.1.10 Northampton Forward was established, made up of Northampton Borough Council, Northamptonshire County Council, South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership, The University of Northampton, private sector representatives, Northamptonshire Police, Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce, Royal and Derngate, Community representative, Northampton Town Centre Business Improvement District.

3.1.11 Northampton Forward is an informal partnership with the primary role of co-ordinating and driving forwards the integrated regeneration and growth within Northampton, including Northampton Town Centre.

3.1.12 To represent the views of the widest range of local stakeholders Northampton Forward will develop a number of thematic sub groups in order to focus on specific areas of activity. These may include but are not limited to; marketing, young people, and heritage.

Future High Street Fund

3.1.13 Before Northampton Forward were due to first meet, MHCLG released details of a new funding source called the Future High Street Fund (FHSF) at the very end of 2018. The Future High Street Fund is a £620m fund that is designed to support places by co-funding transformative, structural changes to overcome challenges in their area.

3.1.14 The first stage of the application process, Phase 1, called for places to come forward with Expressions of Interest (EoI) by 22 March 2019 setting out their challenges and strategic approach to regenerating town centres.

3.1.15 In order to achieve this Northampton Town Centre needed to establish a strategic approach for the town centre. In January 2019, 5plus Architects were appointed to undertake a high-level masterplan study of Northampton's town centre area.

3.1.16 A series of development and regeneration opportunities were devised to establish a transformative vision for the town centre. These opportunities helped illustrate the bold ambitions to re-imagine the town centre and support the EoI to secure funding from the Government's Future High Street Fund.

3.1.17 The concept masterplan was focused around 5 Opportunity Areas:
1. The Arrival: Marefair and Gold Street.

2. Market Square, the heart of the town.
3. Greyfriars.
4. Fish Street and St. Giles Street.
5. Abington Street.

3.1.18 The vision that was included within the EoI stated that Northampton Town Centre will be a vibrant and attractive place where people can live, work and enjoy life to the fullest. Our Vision is based around the key principles of:

- Transforming the heart
- Smaller and stronger retail core
- Creating a residential community
- Culture, History and Heritage

3.1.19 Transforming the Heart - *We will transform the heart of the town by overhauling the current Market Square area into a high-quality space that reflects the ambition and pride within the town. We will focus on what makes Northampton unique; creating a new event space, a refashioned market and greatly enhanced public realm that will all work together to act as a regional attractor*

3.1.20 Smaller and stronger retail core - *At the same time, we will allow the retail core to shrink, creating a smaller but stronger retail area anchored around stable retailers and cultural assets in the town centre. Encouraging existing halo/independent retailers from fringes of the town centre into the new units around the Market Square, adding further to the newly created offer in this area and driving a different demographic into the heart of the town centre. We will actively encourage and repurpose vacant retail units and the space above retail into new residential, office and leisure opportunities.*

3.1.21 Creating a residential community - *We will bring residential communities back into the town centre through transforming tired shopping areas into attractive mixed-use developments and unlocking brownfield sites. New opportunities for North-South links will be created to reconnect the Greyfriars area with the rest of the town centre opening up this 4 acre residential opportunity.*

3.1.22 Culture, History and Heritage - *With the largest cluster of world class shoe manufacturers based in the town, a great history of sporting achievements, and the University of Northampton's new £330m campus recently opening on the edge of the town centre there is a lot to celebrate and help to catalyse success. With our transformative vision working alongside these great assets we will boost the morale of this too-often overlooked town, repositioning Northampton as a major creative centre where talent, ideas & enterprise meet.*

3.1.23 Following a submission of proposals to the Future High Street Fund, Northampton Borough Council commissioned a detailed masterplan to be established in order to develop out these principles.

Detailed Masterplan

3.1.24 The first activity in progressing the detailed masterplan was to carry out a consultation with the public in order to seek the views of what had been proposed and submitted as part of the vision within the FHSF EoI.

3.1.25 Careful consideration was given to this consultation process, to enable and allow a broad range of views to be shared from all aspects of the town centre community.

3.1.26 The six week consultation ran from mid-May until June 30th and included:

- A public exhibition attended by Council representatives and members of Northampton Forward held over six days and across two locations.
- Online publication of the consultation material
- An online survey
- A survey questionnaire printed in the local paper for postal submission
- Leaflets and flyers distributed at the consultation sessions, Libraries and community buildings

3.1.27 Over 1500 people were spoken to across the events held and over 650 written consultation responses received, the results of which have been collated and used to inform the development of the detailed masterplan proposals.

3.1.28 The main themes from the consultation were around: Heritage, Retail, Food and Beverage, Appearance, Community, Green Spaces, Pedestrianisation, Leisure and Residential

3.1.29 The Masterplan demonstrates how these have been addressed within the document and a separate appendix on the consultation is included to view the responses to each question in detail.

3.1.30 The Masterplan analyses a wide variety of elements in order to ensure that the opportunities fully account the complex nature and history of the town centre. These include Strategic Context, Planning Context, Historic Context, Land Uses, Existing Conditions, Character Areas, Heritage, Movement, Public Realm and Ownerships

3.1.31 Themes for the town centre were drawn from the site analysis topics. These represent key issues the masterplan will look to address and underpin the development of the masterplan:

- The Town Centre Boundary
- Connecting the Town
- Consolidation of the Retail Core
- Development Opportunities
- Catalyst Regeneration Projects

3.1.32 The masterplan is based on a set of design principles which will oversee the transformation of the town centre as it moves towards a denser, greener and connected environment. These design principles are Arrival, Cohesion, Identity, Growth, Access & Movement, Transport and Green Infrastructure.

3.1.33 These design principles are the response to the challenges highlighted in the themes discussed earlier in this report. Together, these design principles seek to revitalise the town centre with a comprehensive, vibrant and unique range of residential, retail, leisure, employment and cultural activities, which will see Northampton once again become a destination and focal point for the wider county.

3.1.34 In order to develop a range of development and urban design proposals were scoped. These were focussed on, consolidating the retail core, growing the density of the town centre and nurturing an ecosystem for all kinds of urban life to flourish and expand. These proposals are framed within five town centre Quarters:

- Market Square
- Greyfriars
- Abington Street - Eastgate Quarter
- The Cultural Quarter
- Marefair

3.1.35 Market Square

Market square is the most important public space in the whole of Northamptonshire, but its current appearance does not promote this fact. Extensive, high quality public realm regeneration is needed to bring the square back to its former glory and reinstate it's civic value. Pivotal to the identity of Market Square is the market itself. Transforming the existing stalls to provide a more attractive and future-proofed platform for independent traders will encourage greater footfall and bring a new demographic into the space.

3.1.36 Key interventions in this area will include:

- Extensive public realm and landscaping improvements
- Emporium Way - Improved pedestrian access through to the north of the town
- Removal of bus bays and improvements to the streetscape along Drapery
- Improved market stalls/trading facilities
- Opportunity for the creation of a food pavilion to anchor footfall
- Regeneration/redevelopment of key buildings around edge of the square.

3.1.37 Greyfriars

The Greyfriars site presents a major opportunity for regeneration to Northampton's town centre. This significant development opportunity can be used to bring much needed activity back into the town centre and at the same time reconnect the northern part of the town centre area with the core. The masterplan seeks to introduce residential uses on a large scale to create a new urban neighbourhood that is accompanied by intrinsic landscaping, a hierarchy of functional open spaces and movement corridors. Commercial or Civic office space is proposed alongside the existing public service buildings on Victoria Street. Through this, the Greyfriars area will support a mixture of uses, providing more town centre employment opportunities and ensuring activity is spread throughout the day.

3.1.38 Key interventions in this area will include:

- Closure of Greyfriars road to improve pedestrian connectivity with town centre.
- Creation of new linear park along Greyfriars
- Development opportunity for major new residential led mixed use development.
- Creation of a new coach and bus interchange to provide capacity for the stops removed from Drapery and move coaches closer to the town centre.
- Commercial or civic office development opportunity along Victoria Street.

3.1.39 Abington Street

The development opportunities around Abington Street can help redefine this struggling part of the town centre as a residential neighbourhood known as the Eastgate Quarter. Other complimentary uses are proposed alongside residential, allowing public, private and work life to coexist making Eastgate an attractive destination for visitors as well as locals.

3.1.40 Key interventions in this area will include:

- Allowing greater flexibility for residential uses along Abington Street
- Re-opening up historic north – south links in the area to allow for better pedestrian flow.
- Creating residential development opportunities for the market to deliver.
- Declutter and undertake small-scale public realm changes along Fish Street.

3.1.41 The Cultural Quarter

With the area being the most successful within the town centre and further investment underway with the Northampton Museum and Art Gallery as well as at the Vulcan Works this area is focussed on building upon what is already there. Key development opportunities can be used to introduce a variety of active uses to broaden the offer and appeal of Northampton's the Cultural Quarter.

3.1.42 Key interventions in this area will include:

- 24 Guildhall Road refurbished in order to add to the variety of cultural uses within the area.
- Albion Place car park redeveloped to provide an office or residential opportunity.
- Rear of Albion Place car park developed as an in-fill site to create high quality residential

3.1.43 Marefair

Responding to the immediate context of Marefair and the Spring Boroughs neighbourhood, while also addressing the need to increase the residential opportunities in the town centre will be seen as a good use to draw activity into the town.

3.1.44 Key interventions in this area will include:

- Enabling a residential development opportunity on the southern car parks within this area.
- Activation of building frontages to cut down dead spaces on the route.
- Enforce/create policies to enhance building frontages.
- Delivery of the Castle House site, a medium scale residential opportunity, which reinforces the historic Marefair streetscape and addresses a new park with links to the castle site

3.1.45 The Masterplan was signed off by the Northampton Forward Board at its meeting on 01/10/19.

3.1.46 Once adopted the Town Centre Masterplan will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. However, the weight which will be

able to be attached to it is limited. Therefore, the emerging Local Plan Part 2 will include an updated Town Centre policy supporting the principle of mixed uses within the town designated town centre area, and referring to the masterplan. Once the Local Plan Part 2 is adopted, this will allow greater weight to be attached to the masterplan

FHSF Business Case

3.1.47 Northampton Town Centre was successful in getting through to the next stage of the Future High Street Fund application process and is now required to develop a full business case for capital investment. The business case needs to be in line with treasury Green Book appraisal guidelines. MHCLG will be funding £150,000 towards the costs of developing the business case and associated documentation.

3.1.48 The stages set out for completing this work are:

- 13th September – Rough Order of Magnitude (ROM) submission
- 15th January – Draft business case submission
- 30th April – Full business case submission

3.1.49 A project team to deliver the FHSF business case has been established. The team consists of Grant Thornton (Business Case development), 5Plus (Lead Architect), Gillespies (Landscape Architect), CS2 (cost consultancy) and Avison Young (Commercial support).

3.1.50 The Rough Order of Magnitude was submitting on 13th September. It notified MHCLG that we would be applying for £25m, the maximum allowed.

3.2 Issues

3.2.1 As the changes proposed are transformational in nature there will undoubtedly be some areas which cause a level of disagreement. Thorough stakeholder and public consultation has taken place on the emerging proposals and these have been considered when developing the recommended approach. Without a transformational approach to addressing the challenges within the town centre it will continue to face further decline.

3.3 Choices (Options)

- 3.3.1 To proceed with the adoption of the Masterplan work as planned and as described in this report.
- 3.3.2 To not proceed with adopting the masterplan. This will mean that there is no agreed vision for the town centre, giving no weight to planning applications that are received for the town centre. By not having it agreed by NBC then applications for funding will also be weaker with funding bodies needing to see that the approach and strategic case for applications is endorsed by the local authority.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

- 4.1.1 This Masterplan will act as adopted NBC policy and will be used to inform emerging planning policy.

4.2 Resources and Risk

- 4.2.1 The development of the masterplan has been funded through existing budgets.

4.3 Legal

- 4.3.1 No comments

4.4 Equality and Health

- 4.4.1 The regeneration set out in this masterplan will have positive benefits to residents and the wider community. As projects are developed based on the Masterplan EIA's will be carried out.

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

- 4.5.1 Public consultation was carried out on the Masterplan as noted in para's 3.1.23 – 3.1.28

4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes

- 4.6.1 This project delivers under the corporate objective of 'Creating a thriving, vibrant town' and 'Shaping place and driving growth' by enabling the regeneration of the town centre.

4.7 Other Implications

- 4.7.1 N/A

5. Background Papers

- 5.1 Concept Town Centre Masterplan
- 5.2 Town Centre Masterplan
- 5.3 Consultation Summary report

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 The masterplan has been used as the basis for the development of the Future High Street Fund. The next steps are laid out in 3.1.47.

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