

Consultation Plan for the Central Area Action Plan

Background

This is a consultation plan for the Central Area Action Plan Issues and Options discussion paper. It has been prepared in the context of the substantial consultation that has already been carried out with stakeholders around the town. It has also been prepared in line with the requirements of our published Statement of Community Involvement and an acknowledgement of the likely available resources to deliver the consultation.

Consultation with stakeholders in Northampton around the development of the Central Area Action Plan started back in October 2005 with a Stakeholder Consultation Event. This event worked with a range of stakeholders from around the town to define a series of urban design principles to inform the next steps in plan making.

These urban design principles were then used as a tool to consult other stakeholders around the town – primarily the Community Forums set up by Northampton Borough Council.

The feedback from the Stakeholder event has been reported on and is available online at www.northampton.gov.uk. A summary of key findings from the consultation activities that followed the Stakeholder Consultation Event is being produced.

Town Centre Commission

One of the outputs from the Stakeholder Consultation Event was the formulation of a Town Centre Commission. The Commission is made up of around 200 stakeholders drawn from the voluntary, business, transport, education and public sectors. From the Commission membership a representative Steering Group was established. This group consists of 12-14 representatives, plus 3 Elected Members of the Council. The Steering Group should be able to demonstrate accountability to the sector they represent. The Steering Group has been meeting on a regular basis to oversee a community engagement plan to help feed into the production of a Central Area Action Plan and consider the inclusion of stakeholder views into the Central Area Action Plan. This process is ongoing.

Northampton Central Area Design, Development and Movement Framework Consultation

Building Design Partnership (BDP) was commissioned by a client partnership, led by Northampton Borough Council, and including WNDC, Northamptonshire County Council and English Partnerships. BDP produced a Northampton Central Area Design, Development and Movement Framework in November 2006. This document looked to bring forward an exemplar masterplan that would deliver a development, design and movement framework to guide investment in the central area of Northampton until 2021. Northampton Borough Council consulted on this document between 5 February and 30 March 2007.

All of the consultation responses and feedback gathered since October 2005 have played a part in contributing to developing the Issues and Options paper for the Central Area Action Plan.

Consultation Plan

It is proposed to consult on a Central Area Issues and Options discussion paper following approval by Cabinet. The draft document that has been produced for consultation is extensive and provides significant detail about the Central Area.

To date there has been nearly 2 years of consultation on the Central Area. It is important that work to date is recognised and previous consultation exercises are not repeated. Therefore in producing a consultation plan the focus is very much on updating the community and stakeholders as to where we are in the process and capturing any new feedback or issues that may have evolved during the last 2 years.

It is proposed that the focus of this consultation exercise is to look for any gaps that might exist and identifying particular priorities. This will help facilitate the gathering of any new information or issues. It will also act to reassure our stakeholders that we have listened and taken on board feedback that has been provided, but that we must check back with the community as part of the formalised planning process. It is important to note that, given the consultation to date there may be limited new input to offer. This point will be made throughout the consultation to reassure consultees that they do not have to repeat everything that has been said to date.

Details of our commitments to the community in terms of consultation are set out in the Statement of Community Involvement.

Joint Core Strategy

It is anticipated that the Central Area Action Plan Consultation will run simultaneously with the Joint Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation. This is identified as a positive opportunity as clearly the same communities will be consulted for both documents. Whilst the documents are fundamentally very different, the Joint Core Strategy provides the strategic context for the Central Area Action Plan.

It is proposed that the Central Area Action Plan Issues and Options Consultation, where possible, utilises consultation opportunities provided by the Joint Core Strategy. It is envisaged that this will be particularly the exhibitions that will be rolled out in Northampton. However this will all be subject to the overall timing of the process.

Raise Awareness

One of the biggest challenges is to ensure that our community is aware of where we are in the process of delivering the Central Area Action Plan. It is proposed to produce a short summary leaflet which highlights the process that is going on and where further information can be found.

The leaflet will be widely distributed to take away around the town and to existing stakeholder networks, including shopping centres, supermarkets, community centres, schools, colleges, leisure centres and faith buildings. The LDF team has a database of businesses, groups and individuals who wish to be kept informed of consultations. All entries will receive a leaflet mailing.

Exhibitions

Exhibitions will provide an opportunity for people using Northampton to access information about the Central Area Action Plan. The Joint Core Strategy is arranging exhibitions in key local catchment points throughout September. It is envisaged that the Central Area Action Plan consultation will utilise these opportunities to fit together the strategic and the local dimensions.

Consultation Documents

The consultation discussion document will be made available to view through existing networks, including shopping centres, supermarkets, community centres, schools, colleges, leisure centres and faith buildings.

A questionnaire will be supplied for completion with a freepost address. This will invite feedback which looks to define any gaps or missed opportunities within the document.

Community Forums / Area Partnerships

These groups are key links into and out of the communities of Northampton. Previous consultation has taken place with these groups. It is essential that a progress update is provided and an opportunity to comment on the consultation document.

It is proposed that a feedback proforma is provided to each of these groups to use within their meetings. This will look to capture specific feedback in relation to the consultation document. To do this the documents will need to be sent out with clear instructions as to how to feedback.

The Central Area team will offer the opportunity for staff to attend groups meetings. However groups will be encouraged to use the feedback process available as they have already discussed many of the issues and options available for the town and there is limited 'new' information that the planning team can offer.

This will be distributed to key distribution points around the town, including, The Central Library, The One Stop Shop, NBC Cliftonville Reception.

Parish Councils / Residents Associations

Parish Councils and Residents Associations will be provided with information in a similar way to Community Forums and Neighbourhood Partnerships above.

These groups will be provided with a number of copies of the consultation documents to distribute within their areas to raise awareness and encourage participation in the process.

Spring Boroughs

Previous commitments have been made to the residents of Spring Boroughs, as this area is a key focus for regeneration. A questionnaire is required which focuses specifically on capturing feedback from local residents on their local area.

A community meeting process is proposed which will involve residents in shaping the Spring Boroughs preferred options. This will involve building awareness and understanding of the Action Plan, understanding the issues and concerns from the community and identifying opportunities.

Website

The NBC website will provide the main means of accessing all of the documents and will have means of completing an electronic questionnaire.

Press

Press releases will be issued to reflect progress of the consultation. An initial launch release will be produced and a reminder of the consultation deadline 2 weeks before the end of the process.