‘Northampton is the prototype for the 21st century county town, its Market Square the centre of life for a fast growing creative and enterprising community in a developing region’
## Section One: Base Line

### Contents

- **Introduction** 4-7
- **Need and Opportunity** 8-11
  - Policy Context
- **The Legacy of Northampton** 12-17
  - Historical Evolution
  - Conservation of Northampton
- **Unravelling the Nature of Northampton** 18-41
  - Townscape Appraisal 20-23
  - First Impressions 24
  - Richness of Architecture 25
  - Scale and Proportion 26-27
  - Materials Used in Northampton 28-31
  - The Impact of Modern Interventions 32-33
  - Lighting 34-35
  - Character Areas 36-41
- **The Walkable Town** 42-43
  - The Walkable Town
  - Traffic in the Town 44-45
  - Transport Strategy 46-47
  - Streetscape Aspirations 48
  - A Network of Public Spaces 49-51
  - The Image of the Public Realm 52-53
  - The Implementation Framework Plan 54-55

### Contents (continued)

- **Surface Treatment** 162-165
- **Paving Specification** 166
- **Typical Paving Layout** 167
- **Kerbs and Channels** 168-169
- **Carriageways** 170-171
- **Typical Details - principles for setting out** 172-173
- **Drainage** 174-175
- **Mobility for All** 176-177

- **Street Furniture** 198-199
  - Street Furniture Style 200
  - Street Furniture Order 201-202
  - Street Clutter: Furniture 203-205
  - Individual Elements 206-209
  - Street Furniture Matrix 210-211

- **Signage** 212-213
  - Traffic Signage 214-217
  - Way Finding 218
  - Pedestrian Direction and Information 219
  - Signs 220-221

- **Street Trees and Planting** 222-223
  - Street Tree Planting 224-225
  - Tree Planting Guidelines 226
  - Street Trees and Planting 227
  - Tree Specification 228
  - Street Tree Types 229
  - Planting and Floral Displays 230-231

- **Lighting Specification** 232-261

- **Maintenance & Street Cleaning** 262-267
northampton

Section 1 : Base Line
In 2005, a steering group of WNDC, Northamptonshire County Council and Northampton Borough Council had ambitious plans to transform the town into a regionally recognised centre. A team comprising of BDP and MVA Highway Consultants were commissioned to prepare a Masterplan for the next 15 years. Termed as ‘Northampton Central Area Design Development and Movement Framework’, this document became the first in a series for the town centre, alongside the ‘Green Infrastructure Projects Strategy’ and now the Public Realm Implementation Framework (PRIF). Together these documents will help to guide future area action plans and supplementary planning documents.

The overall objective of the PRIF is to act as a guide to the selection, design, installation and care of Northampton’s public realm and its historic preservation.

The PRIF is intended for those designing and implementing works within the public realm including for new developments, for transport schemes, for planning, and for those responsible for maintenance and repair. It therefore particularly relates to Officers of Northampton and Northamptonshire County or their representatives, contractors carrying out works, and to the Utility companies working in the area. It is also of relevance to residents, businesses and visitors to the area who are interested in the future presentation and care of the town’s public realm.

The opportunity to achieve significant improvements in the environment of the Northampton town will arise principally from major changes to transport patterns achieved by the progressive implementation of a Transport Strategy. The PRIF provides the vision and structure for guiding the transport strategy.

Initially guided by internal consultation with key officers and non-statutory bodies, the PRIF is currently at a stage for wider public consultation and ready to be overseen by a steering group comprising of the principal stakeholders in the town.
Northampton is a county town that was once described by the writer Daniel Defoe in 1724 as ‘the handsomest and best built town in all this part of England’. This reputation was founded famously, on the visually rich architecture and townscape, much of which remains evident today.

This legacy of visually rich architecture and robust townscape form has strongly influenced the general character of the town. However, in this document we are considering the quality of the spaces between the buildings. The quality of these streets and spaces combine with the buildings to create distinctive places and influence the detail character experienced at close proximity, everyday, by people walking, shopping or living in the town.

Northampton contains a vast amount of public space that includes parks, gardens, streets, and squares, including one of the largest market squares in England. The streets and urban pattern of Northampton today have intrinsic value as mostly intact historic development, providing the setting for the surrounding composition of its buildings. The medieval street layout has proved to be a robust solution through time, holding a rich tapestry of history, surviving through a ‘Great Fire’, Georgian and Victorian interventions and more recent development interventions.

Unfortunately, the appearance and functional quality of the public realm no longer reaches the high standards of many of its buildings. However, it is this element of townscape that will tie Northampton together, linking the different areas of the town, to create more space for pedestrians and provide a network of attractive public spaces that people wish to occupy. Improving in the public realm will be a long term investment, and if done well will last for a period of 50-100 years.

In 2006 Northampton Borough Council (NBC) had ambitious plans to transform the town into a regionally recognised centre. A design team of Building Design Partnership (BDP), and MVA highway consultants worked together on behalf of NBC in partnership with West Northamptonshire Development Corporation, Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) and English Partnership to prepare a Masterplan for the next 15 years.

Termed as ‘Northampton Central Area, Design, Development and Movement Framework’, this non-statutory document for the town centre is helping to inform the development of the Central Area Action Plan (CAAP).

Associated reports were produced for NCC during this time. The ‘Green Infrastructure Projects Plan, Spring Boroughs, Northampton’ was undertaken in collaboration with the ‘Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs assessment and Audit’ by Northampton Borough Council (NBC). This document examined the overall typology of green space provision in Northampton, defined in three overarching themes of green infrastructure. These included improving Existing Parks and Large Open Spaces; Improving Green Connections and Green in the
Community. ‘Northampton Public Realm Strategy’ produced by BDP was an initial scoping document that highlighted the need and opportunity for public realm intervention within Northampton.

This document, the ‘Public Realm Implementation Framework for Northampton’ (PRIF) is a result of further development of the public realm, to provide clear guidance regarding the next stages of Northampton’s regeneration programme.

It has taken into consideration work produced by NBC and NCC such as their Townscape Heritage Initiative Scheme and Transport Strategy, and has gone through an extensive consultation process with many other bodies and individuals.

**The Objectives of the PRIF are to:**

- **Provide detailed knowledge and investigation.**
  In order to influence the town’s future a thorough knowledge of both the physical, cultural, social and economic consideration will be examined. This will involve a detailed system of consultation with knowledge holders and extensive level of site investigations.

- **Establish a strong vision for the town.**
  This will ensure that there is a holistic coherent framework set in place as the town develops over a period of time. This vision emanates from the thorough investigation of where the town has come from and where it aims to be in the future.

- **Ensure an innovative approach to transport.**
  The approach to the way streets are planned has a critical influence on the development of the public realm. Whether streets take a shared use approach, are bus only, have two-way traffic, or contain bus stops are all factors that can influence the detail aspects, such as the surface treatment of carriageways, the height of kerbs, and indeed the overall function and environment that a street delivers.

- **Capture the idiosyncrasies within the town.**
  Identify character, and fine tune design, within the parameters of a strong ‘vision,’ so that areas, streets or spaces within the town are tailored to enhance their distinctiveness and attractiveness.

- **Deliver a town with order and cohesion.**
  The approach to all fixtures in the streetscape requires a strong and coordinated approach that transcends both the county and local authorities, in areas such as highways, streetscape, culture and heritage. This should ensure that the approach to the style and layout of signage, bins, lighting, artwork, street trees, traffic signals and all types of street furniture has an innovative coordinated strategy. This will help tackle the remnants of street clutter throughout the town.

- **Provide inspiring and responsive Art.**
  Overlaying a strong arts strategy that is intelligent, relevant and tangible to the essence of the town. This will transcend the realms of public art, seasonal art, festivals, and visiting artists with the sole purpose of animating the life of the town.

- **Illuminate Northampton.**
  A strong Lighting Strategy will work closely with the overall vision for a town. This will increase the use of the town beyond the hours of daylight. Lighting brings with it its own unique character and animation. To provide a comprehensive overall design guide for the public realm incorporating all major issues including palette of materials, lighting, transportation issues, and public art.

- **Maintain quality.**
  To identify a future management strategy. This will ensure that design proposals have the support required in order to sustain the ongoing quality levels of the public realm into the future.

**The Outcomes of the PRIF:**

The design of Northampton’s public realm encompasses a wide range of issues, and this manual will contain guidelines intended to cover those aspects of greatest importance.

It aims to encourage a design process combining an understanding of the area in terms of its heritage with forward thinking and innovative design, and it will identify the works packages for design and implementation.

In essence the Public Realm Implementation Framework (PRIF) will promote:

- The creation of a coherent, high quality external environment

- Strong local identity and ‘sense of place’

- Accessibility for all users of the public realm

- Maintaining and reinforcing a secure and safe environment
The PRIF will influence changes in the function of streets. Working in close collaboration with local authority transport planners and taking into consideration work already produced within the Central Area Framework. The PRIF will establish a framework for the town that puts people and public life at the centre of new plans for the centre of Northampton. This will serve to influence the future transport strategy for Northampton’s Central Area.

The PRIF will also establish a clear hierarchy in the importance of public streets and spaces to enable maintenance budgets to be best implemented, using tailor made regimes and programmes to best fit with the aspirational quality of the varied street classifications and areas.

The Boundary for the PRIF has been set inside that of the Central Area Action Plan (CAAP) along the edge of the ring road. This forms a natural boundary for intervention at the commercial centre of Northampton exempting the peripheral areas which consist mainly of residential use.

An exception has been made for Spring Boroughs given its status as a deprived neighbourhood and the relatively poor quality of the area’s public realm.
Needs & Opportunities

"Oh! To wander through the city. Truly a delightful and adorable existence. Strolling is a science, the gastronomy of the eye. Strolling is Life". Balzac

Policy Context

This section of the report provides the rationale for intervention and the policy context for the Public Realm Implementation Framework (PRIF).

The policy background within which the PRIF will operate needs to be clearly understood in order that the implementation of public realm works can proceed as swiftly and effectively as possible. A firm grounding in existing policy will assist in ensuring the support of all partner organisations most notably NCC, NBC, and West Northants Development Corporation (WNDC). The policy and regeneration context for the PRIF relates to statutory and non-statutory policies and strategies at the national, regional and local level, and also best practice in urban design and the public realm.

National Policy Context

The Sustainable Communities Plan

The Sustainable Communities Plan (2003) seeks to address a number of strategic challenges facing the South East of England and makes clear that where new or expanded communities are needed, these should be well designed, high quality and attractive places, where people will choose to live and work. The Town Centre does however have an essential role to play in facilitating the Sustainable Communities Plan by:

a. Providing a focal point for the expanding town and establishing a positive image and perception of the town as a desirable place to live and work;

b. Providing the shops and services required by an increasing population;

c. Accommodating new jobs to reduce out commuting, provide increased patronage for the town centre shops and services and employment opportunities to tackle local deprivation;

d. Acting as a catalyst for urban renewal in the town centre and surrounding areas, and;

e. Restoring community pride in the town.

The Regional Context

The MKSM growth pole

The Regional Spatial Strategy review extends the life of the growth plan to 2026, which includes the Milton Keynes and South Midlands sub-Regional Strategy. The Milton Keynes & South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy (MKSM), published in March 2005 as proposed alterations to the Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) covering the East of England, East Midlands and South East of England, provides the policy basis for the growth plans in Northampton. This provides strategic guidance to NBC in preparing their Local Development Documents (LDD).

A key objective of the Strategy is to ensure that development is sustainable and of a high quality of design.

The sub regional context – West Northamptonshire Development Corporation

WNDC has been set up by government to work with NBC, Daventry District Council, South Northants District Council & NCC and partners to make Northampton, Daventry & Towcester better places to live, work and invest, delivering among other aims quality...
places where buildings are well designed enhance their surroundings and contribute to a better environment.

WNDC launched its Prospectus ‘Realising the Opportunity – West Northamptonshire in the 21st Century – A Prospectus for growth and prosperity’ in Northampton in late 2005. The prospectus outlines ten key areas for action, scheduled to be completed in line with the local authority Local Development Framework (LDF) including:

a. Establishing a more recognisable sense of place and identity;
b. Improving connectivity; and
c. Achieving quality in the built and natural environment.

WNDC has planning powers to determine planning applications within the Central Area. They will deal with all applications for development and change of use in Northampton town centre and strategic applications in the wider central area, with the exception of householder applications.

Local Context: replacement of the UDP with a Local Development Framework

The Northampton Local Plan was adopted in June 1997 and provides the current planning framework for the town centre. This includes a town centre inset plan which details planning policies and development opportunities in the central area.

In line with national planning policy, NBC are working jointly with Daventry District and South Northamptonshire District to deliver the Local Development Framework for the whole of West Northamptonshire (the area of the three combined authorities).

Some documents, in particular the Joint Core Strategy, will be produced jointly and will cover the whole of West Northamptonshire. Some documents will be produced by one authority and will only apply to their authority area. One of these is the Central Area Action Plan. The LDF for Northampton will replace the Local Plan in due course. The LDF comprises the following:

a. The Local Development Scheme (LDS), approved by the Cabinets of all three Councils and the Government Office for the East Midlands in March 2007. This sets a structure and timetable for the preparation of Development Plan Documents (DPDs).

This has superseded the 2005 Local Development Scheme (LDS).

b. The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) adopted in March 2006. This sets out the means of engaging with stakeholders on the LDF and of consulting with the general public.

c. The Joint Core Strategy. This is now at the Issues and Options stage, as per the LDS of March 2007, and sets out the long-term spatial vision for Northampton and the strategic policies and proposals to deliver that vision. The Issues and Options Report is the first stage in producing the Core Strategy. This Report was issued to key stakeholders including the general public for consultation during June/July 2005.

d. Area Action Plans (AAP) are Development Plan Documents which are used to provide the planning framework for areas where significant change or conservation is needed. A key feature of area action plans will be the focus on implementation. The Borough Council is preparing Area Action Plans for the Central Area. A Town Centre Commission has been formed, comprising an invited conference of over 100 people to oversee the development of the Plan. This report will be used as background information for the preparation of the Area Action Plan.

e. In addition, there is one adopted Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in Northampton, Freeschool Street Masterplan. Subject to review, any further SPDs will be prepared to provide detailed guidance in support of planning and regeneration objectives, especially in the central area of Northampton. Site briefs or masterplans may be produced alongside work on the LDF to help examine the development potential of sites, support the development activity of the West Northamptonshire Urban Development Corporation and provide a context for development control decisions. If taken forward as SPDs, they will support and develop proposals identified in the Allocations LDD.

f. These documents will be subject to Sustainability Appraisal, which is intended to assess the impact of plan policies from an environmental, economic and social perspective, in order to test the performance of a plan against the objectives of sustainable development and thereby provide the basis for its improvement.
The Legacy of Northampton

“All Learning starts with conservation”
John Seely Brown

Historical Evolution

“...the handsomest and best built town in all this part of England...finely rebuilt with brick and stone, and the streets made spacious and wide”.
(1724), Daniel Defoe author and traveller

First time visitors to Northampton cannot fail to notice the history of the town, written large in the built heritage, medieval street pattern and impressive Market Square. This, combined with a distinctive use of local materials, particularly the honey coloured stone and ornate decoration, gives Northampton a sense of permanence and stature. The fact that the historic town centre is recognisable in the contemporary street map, over 120 years on, is proof of the heritage value of the built environment and streetscape of the town, much of which is still evident on the ground. This is a key selling point for Northampton in comparison to its modern neighbours.

Northampton’s history, highlighting in particular the main events that have moulded its distinctive character and qualities; showing how historic developments have contributed to the public realm.

The last Millennium
Little is known of the period between Roman departure and the 8th Century, by which time Northampton had become an important regional centre. Northampton was originally formed along the three crossing fords on the River Nene. The settlement was protected to the south and west by the river, with the castle placed strategically at the western crossing ford. The
eastern part of the settlement was protected by the original settlement (castle) walls. The line of the wall can be seen on the 1610 map. Buildings and road alignments where later developed out from the centre line of the wall, creating Drapery, College Street, Kingswell Street, Bridge Street and Scarletwell Street. Within the original settlement was a ‘crossroads’ that met at Horsemarket and Marefair junction, with the north south trade routes to London crossing the two fords south of the settlement where the River Nene branched into two. The strong form of the ‘Cross Road’ that remains prevalent today grew north - south along the alignment of the original castle walls connecting to the travel and trade routes joining the River Nene in the south. The east-west routes developed from the castle grounds and western ford (now the station) remained on the original alignment crossing the north route at the tip of All Saints Church, slightly realigned from its original crossing point at Horsemarket. At the endpoints of the crossroads sit the three churches of St. Peters Church, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, St. Giles Church which anchor these routes even further.

At the intersection of the crossroads, directly adjacent and east of the original castle walls, developed one of the largest Market Squares in England at 5.9 acres. This footprint has dominated the urban form of Northampton from the 1600s right through to the present day. A common misconception is that the Market Square is contained to the south by the buildings forming Drum Lane and Conduit Lane and to the east of the Drapery. In fact, the true form of the Market Square is enclosed by the western edge of the Drapery, George Row to the south and Wood Hill to the east and actually contained All Saints Church, and the other buildings within its footprint. As illustrated below Market Square forms an impressive stamp on the townscape of Northampton, providing a point about which a grid of streets developed around. The grid of major transport routes running into the Market Square provide a robust and flexible urban form from which many of the streets still survive today.

Northampton expanded rapidly in the 12th Century, becoming the third largest town in England. Major building works included Northampton Castle (now 1610 (Urban Pattern) 1884 (Urban Grain) 1999 (Urban Pattern)
demolished) near the present railway station; churches, religious houses; town walls. In 1662 the great walls of the city were destroyed allowing Northampton to mature. Most of Northampton’s medieval timber buildings were destroyed in the Great Fire of 1675. A new Northampton quickly grew from the ashes. In the town, the diverse pattern of narrow frontages to streets intensified in the mid 17th century as the town revived and individual builders subdivided and redeveloped plots to house the growing population. After the fire its handsome wide streets were planned around the Market Square dating back to 1235. The square is surrounded on all four sides by a wealth of historic buildings that retain much of their old world charm despite being converted to modern day shops.

**Shoe Industry**

With the coming of the railways in 1845 and the emergence of modern roads, the easier distribution of goods had made the established shoe industry of Northampton a world wide commodity. Mechanisation of the shoe industry meant that small individual premises industrialised, leading to rapid expansion of the town between 1800 and 1901. Mass-production methods, together with the improved communications network, gave a massive boost to the shoe industry and the prosperity of the town. Many terraced streets were built by major manufacturers to house work forces.
With the terraced streets came the first public realm improvements where the streets of Northampton became lit by gas.

In 1880 horse drawn trams ran in the streets, replaced in 1904 by the electric tram, and by 1911 the town streets were tarred for first time. The alignment of the present day ring road is modelled over the southern, (1886) Victorian orbital routes. This Victorian intervention of creating orbital routes to the south east of the town centre, manifested as a boulevard to overlook the parkland and better link the town centre with the morally uplifting countryside beyond. The first set of traffic lights were installed at the junction of Abington Street and Fish Street (in 1913, only the third set in England at the time).

Traffic improvements came into force with the implementation of traffic improvement procedures. The bottleneck in lower Abington Street was removed by demolishing the large building occupied by the General Post Office and Labour Exchange in 1946. Extensive one-way streets and prohibited parking areas were introduced into the town centre by the 1960’s.

Perhaps the most significant event in Northampton’s recent history was its designation as a New Town (1965) leading to a huge expansion of its population. A Development Corporation was formed in 1968 and building work began in 1970. The town’s expansion started with slum clearance; road-widening; new road building; influx of new and varied commerce and light industry (mainly directed to the outskirts of the town core).

The first new area to be built was the Eastern District, designed to provide housing for 45,000 people. This was followed in the late 1970s and early 1980s by the Western District, and subsequently by the Southern District.

Development during the 1980’s saw a combination of the Grosvenor Shopping Centre and large format retail units replacing the historic grain of Northampton’s central areas.

The accumulative increase in new development within Northampton over the last 50 years has been a telling factor in the migration of retail focus in an eastwardly direction, towards streets such as Abington Street and St Giles’ Street, which were historically residential in use. Former important retail streets such as Gold Street, where goldsmiths once made their trade, now attract the cheaper ‘Pound Shop’ outlets and fast food takeways.

The impact of this new development has been most significant on areas in the north of the town. The Grosvenor Centre and the Bus Station have starved the flow of people to historically important areas such as the Sheep Street and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and large residential hinterland north of the ring road.

Despite the traffic, planning and architectural interventions of recent years, many of Northampton’s core streets still follow much of the same pattern as originally laid out in the 17th century. There remains a high number of surviving listed buildings in and around Northampton, which preserve an embedded ‘quality value’ for the town and provide the structure for the successful rennaissance of Northampton’s streets and spaces.
Historical Development Summary

• This section highlights the main events that have moulded Northampton’s distinctive character and qualities; showing how historic developments have contributed to the public realm.

• Within the original settlement was a ‘crossroads’ that met at Horsemarket and Marefair junction. The strong form of the ‘crossroad’ that is still evident today remains an important route for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. It is important that this historic route is highlighted in the public realm strategy.

• The ‘Market Square’ provides a central focus for the town and gives Northampton a special identity. This inherited asset, the largest in England at 5.9 acres, should be recognised in the development of a public realm strategy.

• Northampton became a world wide capital of the shoe industry. Many terraced streets were built to house the workforce of this rapidly growing industry developing a distinct urban form. This heritage reveals itself within the urban and built form of Northampton today. The strategy needs to build on and preserve the local distinctiveness to retain Northampton’s distinct character.

• The combination of the Grosvenor shopping centre and 1980’s large format retail units have replaced some of the fine historic grain of Northampton, reinforcing a separation between the town and its periphery. The public realm strategy should seek to reconnect these areas of the town centre.

• Northampton’s historic identity is still intact and it is important for the public realm to continue this heritage conservation whilst the town evolves in the future. When developing the public realm strategy there needs to be a complementary and sensitive solution when designing within this historic context, whilst adhering to modern legislation and needs.
Conservation of Northampton

Conservation Areas

There are four Conservation Areas within the central area of Northampton, three based on the parishes of All Saints, Holy Sepulchre and St. Giles and the fourth based on Derngate.

a. All Saints – Covering the historic core and market square
b. Holy Sepulchre – Covering the Church and Sheep Street
c. St Giles – Covering the Church, Spencer Parade, York Road and the west side of Cheyne Walk.
d. Derngate – Covering Derngate, Albion Place, Castilian Place and Victoria Promenade.

The combined Conservation Areas therefore cover much of the historic core, focusing on the key routes crossing the town centre as follows:

a. Sheep Street / The Drapery from the north
b. Gold Street from the west
c. Bridge Street from the south
d. Derngate and St. Giles from the east.

In addition, the conservation areas cover the core historic areas around the Market Square and the Guildhall and the frontages to Victoria Promenade, Cheyne Walk and York Road which form the south east quadrant of the town centre ring road. There are also numerous listed buildings in the Central Area, not recorded individually in this report but reflected in the approach taken to development where appropriate.

Each has been specially designated for protection and enhancement, following consultation with local residents and property owners, because of its distinctive character and appearance. The townscape of each Conservation Area is a unique collection of buildings, streets and open spaces together with trees, walls and other, often subtle features. The designation of a conservation area aims to preserve and enhance the quality of the environment.

Listed Buildings

A ‘listed building’ is a building, object or structure that has been judged to be of national historical or architectural interest. It is included on a register called the “List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest”, drawn up under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The purpose of listing is to protect the special character of the building.

Hazelrigg House on Marefair is a Grade II* building probably built between 1570-80, one of the few houses to escape the fire of September 1675 when only a part was destroyed. The plan overleaf shows the Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings within the Central Area of Northampton.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

A Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) is a building, structure or any other work above or below ground (other than a dwelling house or building in use for ecclesiastical purposes) that is included in a schedule compiled by the Secretary of State under the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

Monuments within the site boundary of Northampton town centre are, Northampton Castle Site and the Saxon Palace Complex. The only physical remains of the castle area is the re-located Postern Gate at the corner of Black Lion Hill and St. Andrew’s Road, and the mound located to the eastern side of St. Andrews Road, which contains stones from the ancient wall.

The other SAM, the Saxon Palace Complex containing medieval urban deposits is located at the crossroads of Marefair and St. Peter’s Way.
Plan of conservation areas, listed buildings and monuments.
Unravelling the Nature of Northampton

“...Northampton should follow in the tradition of the rich architectural monuments those ages had left behind...”

Townscape Appraisal

The fine existing quality of Northampton’s townscape is its greatest inherited asset. To capitalise on this and promote the public life of the town, the streets, squares and spaces also need to reflect this quality.

Northampton possesses a richness of Georgian and Victorian Architecture located within a strong medieval urban pattern of streets and spaces, and stamped into the very heart of the town is one of the most impressive Market Squares in England. These highlighted elements are an indication of the cultural wealth and heritage that the town can boast.

The fine grained network of existing streets promote good levels of accessibility and connectivity. The existing urban grain also provides a good basis from which to improve the fortunes of the area. With this we can maintain and improve the ‘walkability’ of the town by enhancing the streets and alleyways where necessary, and creating connections to the destinations around and on the edge of the town. The network of streets which have developed alongside the historical evolution of the town form a basis for a clear movement strategy.

However, many routes have been severed or blocked as a result of more recent developments, thus inhibiting natural connections through parts of the town. Large scale developments (especially the Grosvenor Centre and the Bus Station) have imposing footprints that have broken the natural historic grain to the north of the town centre. These blockages have reduced...
Looking towards Guildhall. The bend in the road creates a sense of 'what is beyond', revealing the Guildhall as you pass.

The impact of the bus station and Grosvenor Centre replaces the fine morphology of the original townscape.

pedestrian penetration to areas north of the town, including connections to the wider hinterland. The need for a better hierarchy of street and place, especially in areas north of Market Place, should come through wholesale redevelopment as a result of the Masterplan.

The Masterplan townscape appraisal illustrates, at a broad level, the areas of good, neutral and poor townscape. These were carried out through informal site surveys and based on professional judgements. This is broken down into:

- **Landmarks** - the key building landmarks or key spaces, with a heavy influence on townscape. Positive landmarks include features such as Guildhall, All Saints Church, Hazelrigg House and Market Square. Negative townscape elements include Sol Central with its imposing scale and massing, the bus station with its severing impact on the town and the train station that provides a poor first impression to visitors.

- **Routes** - these are the main streets within the town centre. Positive routes include St Giles' Street through to Market Square. Other streets such as Gold Street, Horse Market, St Peter’s Way have potential to make a positive impact on the town, linking areas together but currently suffer from traffic impact and poor public realm.

- **Barriers** - refers to the severance effects of traffic dominated routes in particular but also to blank, non-permeable street level facades. Major barriers include Horse Market, Mayor Hold, Greyfriars and Angel Street.

- **Frontages** - the quality of the built frontage to the main streets and spaces.

Not surprisingly, the areas of ‘Good’ townscape quality correlate closely with the retained historic street pattern and building fabric. The areas where there has been greatest intervention in the building fabric, to deliver road widening schemes such as along Horse Market or comprehensive area redevelopment such as the Grosvenor Centre, correlate with the areas of ‘Poor’ townscape quality.

Recognition of the positive townscape features of the town centre can help inform the basis for the development of the public realm and can also be applied to any development proposals in the Central Area, helping to promote the distinctiveness of Northampton compared to competing centres.

As already emphasised it is the quality of Northampton’s townscape that is likely to set it apart from competing towns.
Above: Masterplan Townscape Appraisal identifies good, neutral and bad areas of townscape. Unravelling the nature of Northampton.
A Sense of Arrival

‘Gateways to Northampton may well generate cause for concern.

Regent Square, which intersects one of the main thoroughfares into the town, is dominated by a bright blue sex shop, a hoarding-covered appliance store and a boarded-up unit, just metres from one of the oldest churches in the country.’

Evening Telegraph, June 2005

Northampton has several key routes into the town, each highlighted by a particular outer or internal gateway point. It is at these locations where the first impressions of Northampton are won or lost. Regent Square to the north is a prime example of this. Other key areas that have developed as gateway locations include:

- The vehicular entrance between Upper and Lower Mounts.
- To the west, the railway station along St Peter’s Way and Black Lion Hill is and another important entrance into the town centre.
- Moving southward, two further important entrance points for visitors include the Gas Street roundabout on St Peters Way, and Bridge Street.
- Derngate marks the historic entrance into the town from the east, remaining unchanged from its original position along the extended Castle Walls.

As well as outer gateways, there are a number of internal gateways or points of transition within Northampton. These have been identified as clear changes in townscape marking the transition from one character area into another. (The section entitled Scale and Proportion develops this notion further.)

Internal gateways are more attributed to pedestrian movement, in contrast to the outer gateways which tend to be experienced from vehicles. These can be as simple as the experience that a driver has when has found his carpark, leaves his car and walks into town. Another quote from the Evening Telegraph provides a telling story of first impressions;

‘Many visitors get their first glimpse of Northampton’s town centre when they leave their car in the huge Mayorhold, which has spaces for 1,149 vehicles and recently had a £3.1 million facelift. Unfortunately, when they stride out for the shops, they are often confronted with street drinkers in Northampton’s “wet area” – a tolerated drinking area set aside by the borough council when it brought in a town centre alcohol ban in December 2001.’

Important internal gateways identified through the townscape appraisal are:

- Horsemarket junction with Gold Street and Marefair on the western arm of the cross
- Horsemarket Junction with Mayorhold and Greyfriars
- The junction of Greyfriars and the Drapery on the northern arm of the ‘Cross
- The junction of St John’s Street and Bridge Street on the southern arm of the ‘Cross
- St Giles’ Square at the confluence of St Giles’ Street, Derngate and Guildhall Road
- St Giles’ Street and Spencer Parade
- Abington Street and York Road
- Market Square accessed from the Grosvenor Centre
- The meeting of St John’s Station Passage and Guildhall Road along the ‘Cultural Mile’ route

It is important that these existing nodal points, are enhanced to create an impressive and unforgettable point of arrival for visitors arriving into Northampton, focusing on important vistas and approach roads, gateway locations and distinct arrival platforms.

Gas Street Roundabout looking north towards All Saints Church.

Gateway at the foot of Bridge Street. The ‘Paparazzi’ shows how to maximise the gable end of the building at this key location.
Richness of Architecture

The heritage value of the town’s built environment remains very evident. The extensive survival of historic building fabric from the 18th and 19th centuries and the ornate design and detailing can be appreciated by all.

There are numerous examples of fine architecture, mainly concentrated within the historic core. Such aesthetically merited buildings are All Saints Church a fine example of ‘Wren’ style by Henry Bell, Guildhall and The County Hall, and The ‘Soldiers Church’ of the Holy Sepulchre.

Northampton also possesses later examples of ‘Arts and Craft Movement’ and Art Deco including buildings on Abington Street, such as the Co-op Department Store and 78 Derngate, designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

There are also important clusters of Georgian development such as Albion Place, with its graceful gardens and fine Georgian facades.

In recent times the town has suffered more from the visual treatment of the buildings. Inappropriate shop frontage ‘renovations’, graffiti, dereliction, closure or detrimental uses for the appropriate setting, particularly along key retail streets such as Abington Street. This coupled with the poor treatment of the streetscape has detracted focus away from Northampton’s rich visual qualities.

Unfortunately, in order to fully appreciate the qualities of Northampton one has to look upwards, ignoring the street, the shop fronts, and the life at ground level.

Local Building Vernacular

The essential elements of Northampton are embraced in a unique palette of materials. The beautiful honey coloured local stone speaks of permanence and local sourcing. Red Granite, Yorkstone and the warm tones of Iron Stone are some of the materials that have been used within the built environment.

The oak of the medieval town and market square; the iron representative of the rise of the Victorian town and the coming of the railway and industry; and leather representing local traditions of craft and fashion are all materials that have influenced the development of the town through time.

The qualities of these materials should be considered when producing the future town palette of the public realm.
Scale ratio is defined by the enclosure set by the heights of buildings against the width of street.

Scale ratio determines character and helps to inform future approaches to the public realm.

For example differences in massing or street ratio can highlight a change in street character, such as highlighting a gateway or a public space. A good example of this can be found at the junction of Horse Market, where Marefair meets Gold Street. The scale ratio of Marefair is 1:2 (streets half as high than they are wide). This changes to a ratio of 1:1 as you move into Gold Street, creating a much more enclosed street scene and natural gateway at the entrance to Gold Street. (See image on right)

Lanes and Alleyways are characterised by very narrow routes where buildings are 4 to 5 storeys high creating a street enclosure of 5:1. (5 times as high as they are wide) This distinct character type again informs how the public realm is approached.

The ringroad along Horse Market where recent highway interventions have sliced a wide void in the townscape creating a street enclosure of 1:4 (streets 4 times as wide as they are high) demonstrates the impact of low street enclosure on a space. In this instance the approach to incorporating street trees could help to ‘neck down’ the space and improve street enclosure. This has been achieved successfully along Victoria Promenade.

Along Abington Street, the main shopping street the scale ratio is approximately 1:3 (streets 3 times as wide as they are tall). This results in a street that suffers from poor enclosure. As a result, streetscape and landscape (for example street trees or kerblines) have an important role in providing the elements that help to break down the space and create a more pedestrian scale environment.

The treatment of the Drapery is a good example of how the existing public realm approach does not match the well balanced historic scale ratio. Pavements should reflect the vertical scale of the buildings with more generous horizontal space. The scale ratio of the street in this instance can be improved by re-allocating the balance of space by creating wider streets and narrower carriageways. The use of kerblines therefore plays an important role in defining the edge these routes and influencing the character of the street.

Analysing the scale and proportion of different street types will add another layer of understanding to the process of identifying a strong street hierarchy for Northampton.
Unravelling the nature of Northampton

View down the Drapery showing an internal gateway
‘Paving and surface materials define the platform of the built environment. They form the plinth on which the buildings are set.’ Streets for All

The local character of Northampton has been developed by the use of traditional local materials. The collection of colours, shades and patterns of the stone is fundamental in identifying the character of the town.

The historic architecture of Northampton draws its palette from the local vernacular with rust colours coming from iron stone, pinks and reds within the red granite and creams within the yorkstone. This consistent range of warm colours is still used today to establish the future complementing built frontages.

The surfacing of the public realm has emerged gradually over time, with glimpses of the past still visible today. The public realm is diverse and eclectic within the core of the city. Where the consistent use of materials and forms have been used within the public realm a sense of unity has been achieved. Where a standard approach to the materials and forms are adopted, within certain character areas, a sense of place has materialised. This identity is weakened where non-natural materials have been used in a way that is inconsistent and poorly laid out. Abington Street is a good example of this type of intervention.

**Carriageways**

The road surfaces of Northampton have always reflected the functional needs and economic realities. The earliest roads were compacted earth. These were later covered with locally sourced granite / basalt pebbles as those found covered with tarmac on Sheep Street. Later surfaces were laid with setts (rectangular paving stone with curved top). These were mainly used along main roads whereas side streets tended to be laid with small limestone pebbles. As the process of laying setts was not only a costly process but
labour intensive it was restricted to certain areas such as gullies, crossing points and main streets. The most common stone used in Northampton’s public realm was limestone, red/grey granites and yorkstone.

Pavements / Footpaths

Historic photographs give reference to the pavements being consistently laid with large limestone or riven yorkstone flags (shown on previous page) on Abington Street and Derngate up until recent times. These tended to be larger scale contrasting well with the smaller setts to the carriageways.

Today, many of the traditional surfaces have been replaced with a mix of more modern surfaces such as concrete pavers, small modular brick block paving or black top. This range of materials, tend to be randomly ‘pepper-potted’ across many streets as a result of many years of isolated maintenance and resurfacing, independent public realm schemes or surface overlaying. Thus creating an adhoc, inconsistent and illegible floorscape.

Kerbs

A high proportion of the kerbs within the core of Northampton tend to be granite. Along the principal streets (which have historically been recognised by their location, scale and function) such as St. Gile’s Street and Derngate the kerbs are broad topped with adjacent side streets narrow topped. More recently concrete kerbs have been used but mainly outside the central core, the colour texture and weathering of these features are unsympathetic to the local environs and conflict with the historic materials.

(The definitive hierarchy of streets has been identified on the Implementation Framework Plan at the end of Section 1)
Key
1. Mixed concrete flags
2. Concrete Footways
3. Patterned brick block paving
4. Tegula Setts
5. York stone (diamond sawn)
6. Concrete flags 400 x 400
7. Granite Setts
8. Brick Block Pavings
9. Concrete flags 600 x 400 + brick bading
10. Concrete Flags 600 x 400
11. Concrete Footways
12. Tarmac Car Parks
13. Yorkstone (riven cut)

Existing Materials in Northampton

- The Station
- Horse Market
- Upper Mounts
- Holy Sepulchre
- All Saints
- St Giles
Materials Summary

- The surface dressing of the carriageway has developed over time in response to changing patterns of use, economics and technology.

- Along principal streets, red and grey granite kerbs and yorkstone flags have been used consistently in the pavements.

- Principal streets have wide-top kerbs

- In less important streets the kerbs are narrow topped

- The historic precedent for street design is
  - Smaller units used within the carriageways.
  - Yorkstone flags used on the pavements.
  - Granite/basalt sett gullies and kerbs

- The economic constraints of the time have guided the choice of materials.

- There should be a balance between the historic model of previous decades, and the functional requirements and standard guidance that are demanded in the current climate.

- Current guidance and building regulations have to be conformed to within the public realm.

- The ‘Streets for All’; East Midlands publication states,
  - Natural, local materials are preferred to man-made alternatives and used to reinforce the identity of the town.
  - Relate ground surfaces to their surrounding, streetscape context.
  - Retain the historic form of streets by maintaining kerb lines and maintain and restore historic paving
The quality of public realm within the town centre is suffering from a lack of cohesion, manifested in low standards of design control, material choices, and maintenance procedures as a result of minimal budget allowances.

Paving of the town’s key streets and spaces are of a low quality consisting mainly of a mix of different brick patterns, tarmac repairs and concrete pavers. These mix of styles and colours compete with each other and conflict with their surroundings. This adds to the sense of visual confusion that detracts from the heritage and character of Northampton. The areas of higher quality that have survived recent interventions are isolated and in contrast are visually lighter than the rest of the town.

Street furniture within a public realm should strengthen and add to the identity of the public realm but the existing furniture choice throughout Northampton has a detrimental effect on the perception of the streetscape. It is outdated, worn and incongruent to the surroundings. The street furniture is a mix of styles ranging from various eras and detracts from the existing streetscape.

The major vehicular routes through the town centre conflict with pedestrian activity. The balance of pavement to road along many of the principal streets is a major barrier to movement and activity in Northampton, with narrow footways penning in the pedestrian along routes dominated by the presence of vehicles. This is particularly evident along the Drapery which has become an empty canyon of bus lane markings and excessively high kerbs.

Abington Street (primary retail street) This is a pedestrianised street. The surfacing is mainly brick paving throughout. The traditional street pattern has been overlaid with an approach that is monomorphic resulting in a streetscape that is overwhelmingly empty and uninteresting. The mix of dated street furniture and lighting are not cohesive in lifting the streetscape character.

Pedestrian crossing on St. Giles Street. The traditional vernacular of materials have been replaced with cheaper concrete flags and brick pavers. Only the pink granite kerbs have survived recent surfacing interventions.

The Drapery. This historic route was formerly a prime shopping street. It now suffers from the functional impact of bus stops. Together with wide carriageways, high kerbs and shelters, the bus orientated environment combines to make the pedestrian experience constricted and detached. The quality of street furniture is adhoc and poorly contributes to the overall street character.

An example of poor coordination and management as modern street interventions are overlaid on traditional layouts, leaving a patchwork of poorly considered design and mix of materials.
The other extreme can be said of streets like Abington Street where the introduction of pedestrianisation has led to a street that is devoid of interest. This is a result of a poor streetscape and surfacing approach consisting of wall to wall brick pavers that are inappropriate in scale, and lack definition and invention.

The town should highlight and improve public spaces, whether they be on arrival, along key nodes, in the heart of the town or in quiet inconspicuous corners. This strengthens the sense of delight and discovery throughout the town. Such spaces should be visually related to each other and the streets linking them, in order to develop continuity and connections around the town. The allocation of high quality public and focal spaces within the town centre is currently low. Northampton should benefit from places to sit and relax and take in the atmosphere of a well designed town centre.

Opportunities to enhance the appearance of surface car parks within the town should be considered. These large areas of tarmac, often without vegetation, offer little contribution to the public realm.

The public realm suffers from poor legibility and should develop stronger connections to train and bus stations, trails around the town and links to the wider hinterland.

Historic precedence has meant that there is little landscape within Northampton’s core area. Where trees have been planted within the public realm, there are many examples of poor maintenance where tree roots have damaged surrounding surfaces, or where trees have been removed but not the pits.

Summary of existing streetscape

- Man-made materials dominate the street character.
- Vernacular materials within the town have a reduced coverage.
- Most of the town centre has a basic level maintenance.
- Poor co-ordinated approach to materials through the town.

Visibility Rail Guards constrict pedestrian movement and add unwanted clutter to the streetscape.

Existing benches are a mix of styles dating from different eras in the town’s development. The example shown is unsightly and cumbersome and detracts from the overall appearance of the streetscape.

Trees and tree grilles along Abington Street have fallen into disrepair. Many of the tree pits where trees have been removed have been filled in with concrete leaving behind empty circles where trees once stood. The example shown demonstrates poor maintenance as the tree roots have displaced the original grilles.

More recent surface interventions have replaced the original natural stone surfaces. Only the granite kerbs have been retained. The colour of the materials conflict with the warm honey coloured hues of the building materials found throughout Northampton.
Current Situation

Northampton is evident as a lively and prosperous historical market town, with many references to its earlier trading and manufacturing origins. It is recognised that there is an opportunity to accentuate the local heritage and present architectural assets that are not currently maximised through a considered and co-ordinated design strategy.

The vibrancy of Northampton town centre that is present during the day diminishes considerably after sun-down and through the night, and the existing lighting conditions contribute to this condition:

Monochromatic low-pressure and high pressure sodium discharge light sources are used extensively within the town and are inherently poor at rendering colour. The utilitarian lighting strategy currently employed means that the architectural wealth of the townscape is often overlooked. In addition a feeling of safety and security is not universally present, and may therefore preclude people from making full use of the benefits of the town centre during the hours of darkness.

The lighting equipment in the centre of town comprises various design styles that, like other existing elements within the public realm, are not complimentary to the existing built environment.

Lanterns, post and bracket styles, mounting heights and layouts of luminaires vary. The resulting streetscape is incoherent, and is therefore disorientating to users of the town’s infrastructure.

Some street lanterns are poorly positioned, creating glare and obtrusive lighting into dwellings or unilluminated areas at ground level as a result of obstruction from buildings.

There are architecturally interesting and historically relevant facades that could contribute to the night-time scene. Currently facade lighting is an under-utilised resource, and where there is some evidence of this form of lighting the luminaires are not operational. At present in some areas the wall mounted bulkhead luminaires direct light across this street to buildings opposite creating a flat and indiscriminatry lit scene.

The placement of artwork within the town centre, used as a means of creating a local identity during the day can be significant in forming character and focus within an evening urban scene, but is generally not utilised.

Practical reasons for improving the lighting of the outdoor environment include: ambience, identity, safety, security, orientation, promotion, enterprise and spectacle. Lighting can
help to create a safe, attractive and prosperous business district, residential neighbourhood and visitor destination.

Research has shown that money invested in town centre lighting can help to generate savings in the costs of crime and insurance to local authorities, businesses and individual victims. Improved security and ambience attract people back into the area during the hours of darkness.

There is established and recognised evidence that whiter light also makes areas of mixed pedestrian and road traffic a safer place to be.

Typical luminaire choices for lighting public open areas

Harsh and confusing facade lighting example on Marefair

Streetlighting shining in the residential apartment window

The artwork isn’t illuminated during the hours of darkness

Bright and glary bulkhead luminaire creating flat illumination to the opposite building across the street

Typical luminaire choices for lighting public open areas
As part of the Central Area Framework key character areas where identified to help establish approaches in the development of these individual areas. The PRIF will develop this in more detail, helping to understand what it is that makes these character areas unique and special within the town. In doing so, this will help to promote individual approaches to the public realm and identify the idiosyncratic details that set these areas apart from other areas in the town.

Whilst we are still looking for a public realm solution that is holistic and unites the town together, it is important to respond to the function and character of the individual elements within the town in order to promote a greater depth of interest and character.

Townscape Zones

Northampton is identified by its ‘character areas’. These are sub areas which have common townscape characteristics, and are defined by historical evolution, by edges, created by natural topographical features or man made features such as buildings, roads, railway lines etc. They are also identified by their functional characteristics, how the area is used, where people live, where they shop, or whether the area is distinguished by the cluster of theatres, restaurants and museums.

Within Northampton, five distinct character areas have been established. The boundaries of which have evolved from the original masterplan following more detailed analysis. They are:

- Historic Core
- Georgian Quarter
- Cultural and Arts
- Business Leisure District
- Residential Quarter (Spring Boroughs)
Historic Core

The Historic Core is characterised by a distinct cruciform of grander streets forming ‘the Cross’, set around the largest Historical Market Square in England.

Architectural statements such as All Saints Church, the Guildhall and a complement of a finer network of intimate streets, and lanes opening up into grand squares and smaller spaces all contribute towards creating a distinct sense of place.

The Historic Core is a rich mix of Georgian and Victorian architecture of four to five storey, overlaid on a dense and compact traditional medieval street pattern. Intimate ginnels or alleys with good enclosure, lead from many of the key streets such as the Drapery and Mercer’s Row into more secluded courtyards or quieter secondary streets, adding another layer permeability and interest.

At the eastern end of the historic core the two arms of St Giles’ Street and Abington Street including the Grosvenor Centre have now become the main retail focus in the town. The narrower St Giles’ Street has retained much of its charm and has many similarities with Gold Street located on the western arm of ‘the Cross’ in terms of scale and massing. Abington Street on the other hand is a grand street containing a range of architectural styles from Art Deco and the arts and craft movement moving into more recent late 20th century development, whilst retaining good examples of earlier heritage such as the Library.

Intimate streets such as Fish Street, St Giles Terrace and the internal shopping arcades provide another layer of connectivity, linking the primary retail circuits.

To the west Marefair and Gold Street follow the western arm of the Cross and act as the main route linking the Railway Station with the heart of the town. Along Gold Street the quality of architecture is impressive with four to five storey properties lining the street. The junction of Gold Street, Marefair and Horse Market is a critical link between the station and the town.

Key features of this character area include:

a. The extensive survival of historic building fabric from the 18th and 19th centuries and the ornate design and detailing.

b. The scale and quality of the Market Square, potentially the largest Market Square in England.

c. The attractive ‘set piece’ of All Saints Church and the oblique and detailed views of Guildhall.

d. The key retail circuits tying back into the Market Square.
The Georgian Quarter

Georgian Quarter is distinguished by the classic three and four storey residential type town houses, usually with basements laid out along continuous building lines that have a strong order, rhythm and symmetry. This is particularly evident along Derngate which runs through the heart of this area.

Albion Place is a hidden gem which characterises the qualities of this area with the fine georgian architecture and gardens, as well as the Art Deco interior of 78 Derngate designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

An important feature of this area lies in the traditional detail of its railings, steps up into buildings, lamposts and other street furniture.

Landscape is more evident in this part of the town due to a less dense townscape providing opportunity for open green space. Street trees line the principle routes through to Beckett’s Park and Victoria Promenade.

Key features of this character area include:

a. Railings fronting many of the properties.

b. Soft landscape present in the form of street trees, publicly accessed and private green open space.

c. Continuous building lines and strong order and symmetry on the building facades.

The Culture & Arts Quarter

The Culture and Arts Quarter is underpinned by the Guildhall Road that leads up to the Guildhall from St Johns Street. New development is helping to re-invigorate the function and use of this area.

The Derngate and Royal Theatres are key features, and the around Angel Street retains much of the character found within the historic core with small plot sizes narrow alleys and interesting hidden spaces.

At the junction of St John’s Street the historic central character of the town ends.

Key features of this character area include:

a. The distinct curved, sloping form of Guildhall Road, containing the Royal Theatre.

b. Victorian buildings along Angel Street including the original prison walls

c. The distinct granite setts retained on
The Leisure and Business Quarter

The Leisure and Business Quarter located to the north of the historic core is dominated by the Bus Station, combined with the Grosvenor Centre and associated multi-storey car parks.

Lady’s Lane and Greyfriars have been elevated above the natural topography to alleviate the levels of large scale development and as a result a warren of subways, ramps and steps have been created. This treatment has segregated the town from one of its most important historical artifacts, Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This is Northampton’s oldest standing building, built in 1100 on the orders of the first Earl of Northampton, Simon de Senlis and one of England’s few surviving round churches.

Regent Square gateway is an important arrival point into Northampton from the north and combined with the character of Sheep Street could establish a strong entrance into the town.

With the exception of Sheep Street which retains the finer scale found in the historic core, the scale of development is very large with expanses of carpark and underutilised open space. This is highlighted with the new Crown Courts, Northampton House, and the low density layout of apartments along Victoria Street and Newland.

Key features of this character area include:


b. Isolated green space, disconnected public realm, and subways separating this area from the town centre.

c. The severing effect of Lady’s Lane and Greyfriars.

d. The historic value of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and Sheep Street.

e. Important arrival gateways into the town at Regent Square and the Mounts.

Spring Boroughs Residential Quarter

Located north west of the town and severed from the core area by Horse Market, Mayor Hold and Broad Street, this area is defined by a series of lower density, residential suburban layouts.

This area is distinctly different to the...
historic core area in terms of its lower sprawling density of medium to high towers set against large areas of open space. There is a lack of clarity between private or public space.

Distinct areas of townscape include St Peter’s and Doddridge House that contain green courtyards.

To the south, the imposing presence of Sol Central is a visual and physical barrier to the rest of the town.

Routes need better legibility as well as entrances into and out of the area. This is a distinctly residential area and as such requires its own specific approach to public realm.

Important connections and gateways into the town centre include Mayor Hold, Greyfriars and Bath Street; and St Mary’s Street, Horse Market and St Katherine’s Square.

Key features of this character area include:

a. The severing effect of Horse Market and Mayor Hold
b. An abundance of green space which is poorly defined and lacks clear function
c. Grid of streets requiring better cohesion and legibility
Unravelling the nature of Northampton

Looking From The Drapery to Market Square
The Walkable Town

Following analysis of the physical aspects of Northampton this chapter identifies the current condition of the pedestrian environment and demonstrates how the developing Transport Strategy for Northampton and PRIF can work harmoniously to improve the current conditions and make Northampton a more ‘Walkable Town’.

In order to make Northampton a better town for people, the conditions for walking, sitting, shopping, recreation, and social life need to be right. Northampton needs to be a town that people want to linger in and enjoy, and not just use in transit.

This approach will create the right conditions for economic growth and kick start the regeneration of the area as people spend more money in the town and visit the town more regularly. A town centre that people want to frequent will also encourage more to work and live in the area.

The latest government guidance on street design issued by the DfT; ‘Manual for Streets’ gives advice that moves away from previous Design Bulletin 32, and is geared towards reducing the dominance of private cars on streets.

The manual emphasises creative street design that puts quality of life first. It is aimed at transforming the way that people think about street design, moving the priority away from cars and back to pedestrians. The design approach to Northampton’s streets should reflect a function and activity that puts people and the businesses in the town first.

Street frontage plays an important part in the walkability of streets. The existing lack of active frontage in parts of Northampton, particularly noticeable around the Bus Station and Grosvenor Centre development, has taken on a diminished visual identity and vibrancy, creating an uninviting public realm that deters users.

The relationship between the building facades and the street should be strengthened allowing edges to spill onto the street. Capturing road space and increasing street widths will promote effortless movement and improved walking conditions, preventing crowding, overspill into to the road and an interrupted walking rhythm.

Enabling buildings to reach out to the street with the reintroduction of awnings that provide shelter and encourage people to sit outside, maximising the effects of windows to enhance the interior / exterior visual connections are examples of how to set the stage for increasing activity on the street.

A streetscape that encourages social interaction will heighten the pleasure experienced by the pedestrian, and encourage them to use the town for longer periods.

“All truly great thoughts are conceived by walking.”
Friedrich Nietzsche
Most of the difficulties related to the quality of the pedestrian experience are caused by the priority placed on traffic and how it has historically been planned and engineered in the town. Wide carriageways and narrow footways, dual carriageways, subways, high kerbs for buses, unnecessary footpath interruption for servicing, guard rails, poor crossings and highway signage on the footpath are all examples of how planning for traffic has deteriorated the conditions for pedestrians in the town.

In order to tackle the detail issues of the pedestrian environment it is essential that a top-down approach is delivered within Northampton. This will be implemented through wider strategies of improving the efficiency of the highway network and the operation of the parking areas and the reduction of unnecessary traffic movements within the town centre. Even though vehicles are an important element within the town providing convenience and service, it is becoming more important to shift the focus towards a pedestrian priority environment.

The approach to the way streets are planned has a critical influence to the development of the public realm. Whether streets have restricted vehicle access, take a shared use approach, are bus only, have two-way traffic, or contain bus stops are all factors that can influence both the detail aspects such as the surface treatment of carriageways, the height of kerbs, and indeed the overall function and environment that a street delivers. Measures have been put forward through the Northampton Transport Strategy to transfer precedence to the pedestrian, without affecting the town’s function.
Refuge collection and feeder pillars should be discreet and set back away from the main pedestrian thoroughfares.

Street elements located along a narrow footpath impede the flow of movement. Having the service boxes set back against the building line would reduce conflict with the pedestrian.

'A' frame signage can create an obstruction to movement within the footway.

Subways create enclosed spaces that invite safety issues for potential users.

Poorly considered choice of paving surfaces and lack of maintenance can make walking difficult.

Badly planned parking creates obstacles that can potentially conflict within the use of the public realm.
General Overview
A detailed transport baseline assessment for the town centre has been undertaken by Northampton County Council (NCC). The Central Area Framework summarises the main points identified in this detailed assessment in relation to the masterplan.

NCC Transport Strategy
The strategy includes the following key elements which are to be implemented over the next 5 to 10 years.

a. Completion of the Outer Ring Road around the north and west of the town though a combination of developer and government funding.
b. Provision of Park and Ride sites at Upton and Riverside with further sites to be identified close to the A508 to the north and south of the town.
c. Potential parkway station close to the M1 on the West Coast Mainline.
d. Provision of bus priority measures on all the main radial routes into the town centre.
e. Implementation of SCOOT UTC and bus priority at all signals on the radial routes into the town.

Within the town centre the Transport Strategy includes:

a. Downgrading of the inner ring road and improving the accessibility of the town centre using non-motorised modes;
b. Relocation or removal of the bus station;
c. Provision of additional bus priority and changes to the junction layouts to accommodate proposed park and ride vehicles and other general public transport vehicles.
d. Improvements to bus infrastructure in the town centre;
e. Improvements to the streetscape within the town.

Aims of the Masterplan
Transport Strategy produced by MVA Consultants

The transport strategy has four main aims:

• Breakdown pedestrian severance for people moving into and around the town centre and improve the pedestrian environment throughout the town centre.
• Improve public transport facilities and circulation within the town centre together with better integration of bus stops and the rail station with the heart of town centre and the integration of the park and ride services into the heart of the town centre.
• Increase the efficiency of the

Key

- 20mph Routes
- Distributor Roads
- Access Roads
- Pedestrianised
- Bus & Access Only
- Pedestrian priority

Left : MVA Proposed Road Usage for Northampton

Key

- Southern Bus Route
- Western Bus Route
- North-East Bus Route
- Eastern Bus Route
- Northern Bus Route
- Primary car park route
- Secondary car park route
- Existing Car Parks
- Proposed Car Parks

Left : MVA Bus and Car Park Routes for Northampton
highway network and the operation of the parking areas and reduce unnecessary traffic movements within the town centre. This includes the relocation of town centre parking to the park and ride sites resulting in an overall reduction in the levels of traffic accessing the town centre.

- Facilitate and maximise opportunities for new development.

**Town Centre Improvements**

Three general carriageway types are proposed within the town centre as identified below; in addition there may be other restrictions in terms of on-street parking and permitted vehicles that may be applied to the routes.

a. Pedestrian only – in addition to the existing pedestrianised areas new pedestrian only routes are proposed. These generally provide routes between the railway station and the town centre in the west of the town and routes through the proposed extension to the Grosvenor centre in the north of the town. Levels of activity should be high enough to preclude cars; if not pedestrian priority routes are to be preferred.

b. Pedestrian Priority Routes – These routes are generally located in the core of the town centre where traffic levels are to be minimised and pedestrian levels are to be maximised but access still has to be maintained. Traffic speeds within these areas will be reduced to walking speeds when there is a pedestrian presence through the design of the streets. Pedestrians will be encouraged to walk anywhere within the overall carriageway with the vehicle areas designated by changes in the surface and small changes in level rather than standard kerbs.

c. 20 MPH Routes – All other routes within the town centre will be restricted using traffic management measures to a 20 mph speed limit. These are seen as low capacity routes. There is also significant pedestrian/vehicle interaction along these routes which can lead to difficulties in crossing the roads.

**Improved Public Transport Facilities and Circulation.**

Improvements to bus based public transport access to the town centre through the provision of bus priority measures along the radial access roads and the implementation of park and ride is a primary part of the council’s transport strategy for the Northampton area in order to encourage greater use of this travel mode and reduce the dominance of car based travel to the town centre.

The town centre masterplan proposals aim to extend these bus priority measures and passenger provisions in the town centre to maximise the opportunity to utilise public transport, especially the proposed park and ride service.

The positive outcomes of a Transport Strategy, will enable many previously traffic dominated routes to become ‘humanised’. This may be related to the provision of infrastructure projects which take some of the traffic loading off these routes, and may also relate to physical works which, through design, give a greater priority to pedestrian movement and activity.
The Outcome of Northampton’s Transport Strategy on the Streetscape

The strategic changes that the Transport Strategy will employ need to be achieved within a good standard of quality and design in accordance with the town’s historic character. This is where the planning aspirations of ‘Manual for Streets’ (DfT) meets the quality thresholds set within ‘Streets for All’ (English Heritage).

Some key changes to the public realm brought about by the transport strategy are:-

1. Increasing the amount of pedestrian space and shared use streets.

An example of this is relocating the major traffic routes from the inner ring road enabling carriageways to be downgraded at key locations and allowing the town to expand.

Making buses the preferred transport choice for getting to and from Northampton Town Centre and using new parking standards to prevent private vehicles from penetrating into the heart of the town to encourage modal shift and enhance the environmental quality of the town.

The transport strategy will encourage a Walkable and Cycle-able town centre, by providing opportunities to increase the width of pavements, through the reduction of the carriageway, eg along Gold Street through the designation of a ‘bus only’ route. Such changes will improve the pedestrian environment and increase footfall along wider footpaths.

2. Improving pedestrian crossings

There should be a general consistency and standard approach to all road crossings to ensure clarity.

- Create seamless crossings by installing ‘straight-across’ layouts where possible.
- Use raised table crossings to slow traffic and give the pedestrian priority
- Eliminate traffic islands and staggered crossings where possible
- Reduce vehicle speeds across the town centre

3. Removal of Pedestrian guard rails

The removal of barriers will improve movement across the town centre. Guard rails coupled with staggered crossings impede natural flows of pedestrian movement, in many cases enforcing unwanted detours.

Within Northampton guard rails have helped to reinforce the physical barrier between the residential areas that surround the town and the town centre itself.

4. Rationalising highway signage and traffic control equipment.

The plethora of ancillary highway fixtures, from signage, traffic lights to CCTV camera masts are a blight and barrier to free flowing movement on the streets of Northampton. In order to change the perception of streets in Northampton a fundamental factor is to remove the unnecessary clutter. This does not mean compromising the road safety. It means a rethink of where and how fixtures are placed in the public realm. To avoid unnecessary doubling up of stands or mounting poles, integrating lighting columns with other fixtures, siting fixtures in a co-ordinated manner and ensuring that a clutter plan is drawn up and agreed between the County and the Borough.

5. Removal of subways

A number of subways are situated to the north of the town near the bus station. These subways no longer a safe form of crossing and should be replaced by ground level crossing points. The removal of these voids will provide an improved pedestrian orientated environment achieved through the design of the public real palette. These sites offer possible future storage solutions.
A Network of Public Spaces

The success of a town depends on how well connections work. The measure of their success is not just their functional performance, but how they contribute to the quality and character of the urban area. Providing a high quality of streets, squares and spaces will develop a stage for vibrant and active ‘Town-Life’.

Urban Design Compendium by English Partnership

A network of well-designed public space will be at the heart of the PRIF. The streets, alleys, squares and greens will provide a sequence of public spaces that will accommodate a rich variety of activity, making walking and cycling through the town a pleasure, and providing a stage for the public life of the town.

The public spaces within the town will anchor and support the street network. A spatial order or hierarchy of public spaces has been applied within the PRIF that will help to define the design approach based on function, scale, character and importance within the town. The following themes, illustrated by the ‘Network of Public Spaces’ plan (see page 53), identify individual spaces and set them within their function and contextual relevance in the town.

Gateways and Approaches

To celebrate a sense of arrival into Northampton approaches and entry points were identified as part of the Central Area Framework and developed further within the baseline. These routes and spaces form the important first impression of the town and it is therefore essential that their appearance is memorable through the use of materials, lighting, tree planting or artwork. The previous chapter ‘A Sense of Arrival’ has covered this topic in more detail. The key approach routes are listed below;

1. Regent Square
2. Black Lion Hill/ St Peter’s Way
3. Towcester Road/ Gas Street
4. Derngate/ Bedford Road

Major Parks and Gardens

The Major Parks and Gardens within Northampton have developed along the River Nene along the edge of the town. These green open spaces were identified within the Central Area Framework and developed further within the ‘Green Infrastructure Projects Plan’. These include Victoria Park, Becket Park, The Foot Meadows and Millers Meadow. Although these areas fall outside the project area, they still provide important links with the town centre with many of these green corridors providing key routes from and to the surrounding hinterland.
Important green open spaces within the town core include Memorial Square.

**Town Squares**

Town Squares include Market Square, that incorporates the smaller space in front of the All Saints Church at the major crossroads of the town. Other spaces include St. Katherine Square adjacent to Memorial Square, and St Gile’s Square in front of the Guildhall.

As identified in the Central Area Framework, Market Square has a unique identity within the town, and aspirations are to reinforce its position through function and public realm design approach. Market Square is a central meeting point and activity generator and recognised through design for its classic townscape form and importance in scale. Its current use as a thriving Market should also be maintained in some way, whilst allowing flexibility to integrate with other uses.

**Parks and Town Spaces**

These spaces will develop their own unique identity and set of specific requirements depending on which character area of the town they are situated. New spaces may be allocated in the future as part of the ‘Cultural Mile’ increasing the public access and awareness of the town’s cultural assets and parks.

**Church Grounds**

The majority of green open space within the town centre is comprised of church grounds. These include St. Giles’, St. Peter’s and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. As they are owned by the church they have been preserved and provide welcome green open space for semi-public use.

**Public Buildings**

All accessible parts of public buildings are public spaces. Suitable consideration should be taken with the thresholds of public buildings, creating a positive transition from the building into the public realm. Opportunity should be provided for social activity, meeting points, exhibition and performance spaces. Where possible activities within public buildings should be drawn into the adjacent public spaces.

**Garden Courts**

Garden Courts are semi-public/private space providing a distinct experience for the local community and visitors alike. Garden courts include small gardens and are located within the Residential quarter and Georgian business quarter of the city. New spaces may be allocated in the future as part of the ‘Cultural Mile’ increasing the public access and awareness of the town’s cultural assets and parks.
The pedestrian footfall diagram shows an indicative street activity hierarchy based on informal site surveys within Northampton town centre. Many of the high pedestrian flows are within the historic core. Unfortunately the quality of the public realm in these locations does not compliment the levels of use or the rich townscape.

The ‘Image of The Town’ develops the analysis of the pedestrian footfall diagram further taking into consideration the following:

- Influences from the developing Transport Strategy
- Importance of streets in relation to the PRIF ‘Vision’

The diagram termed ‘Image of The Town’ classifies the main townscape character areas and regulates the important streets and gateways within the town centre. Streets have been rationalised in relation to their character, scale, function and relationship with other spaces, with their relative importance in mind.

This rationale will help to set out a strong framework for the Public Realm Strategy, identifying principal streets, influencing phasing, levels of quality and cost, and responses to character areas.

Whilst it is now widely regarded that natural stone is the best investment over the long term, when there are funding constraints it is acknowledged that the use of lower quality materials are unavoidable.

Therefore as a general principle, the Public Realm Design Strategy or what
we have termed the ‘Implementation Framework Plan’ will look to focus on a phased approach whereby priority streets are targeted for the use of a primary palette, and streets of lower importance are constructed in a way that still highlights the use of a primary palette for key elements such as kerbs and channels, but with a secondary palette for larger areas such as reconstituted stone for footways and asphalt for carriageways. Dependant on funding a basic palette could be upgraded to a primary palette at a later date, whilst retaining the kerbs and channels already laid. If a lower quality material is used then it should meet the same performance standards, and have a similar scale, colour and texture of a primary material.

The ‘Implementation Framework Plan’ will begin to set a spatial order or hierarchy that identifies the quality and importance of the streets within the public realm.

The Implementation Framework Plan

The Framework Plan provides an overall design approach for the public realm, including all streetscape elements ranging from surfacing, to details of planting and street furniture.

Encompassed within this framework will be an aspiration to use high quality, complimentary, natural, vernacular materials which will enhance the local character, and provide consistency throughout the town.

The Framework Plan sets out a classification of street types, based on a town-wide street hierarchy. This hierarchy has been developed with the information gathered throughout the baseline (eg. identification of important streets, character areas, gateways, footfall and function of streets, size and scale ratio and heritage value). Whilst retaining a consistent theme for the public realm, the street hierarchy introduces the flexibility to draw out the idiosynchatic details of individual street types bringing variety and interest into the design and application of the street scene.

The creation of a street hierarchy, in which streets are identified within clear groups will bring a sense of identity and order to the streetscape and improve the legibility of the town.

The following section of the report will develop the Implementation Framework Plan further, and provide detailed guidance on how the vision can be realised. It will set out the design approach for the different street types including material choices, street furniture application and the approach to public art and lighting.

The key objectives (set out at the start of this Section) will remain at the heart of design development. Northampton has a unique ‘sense of place’ and it will be the aspiration of the PRIF to develop this strength through the renaissance of its streets and spaces.

The ‘Implementation Framework Plan’ is described overleaf.
The Implementation Framework Plan

- External boulevards
- Living streets
- Residential streets
- The Cross: Secondary streets
- Historic boulevards
- Historic streets
- Historic alleys
- Primary retail street
- Retail arcades
- Access & service roads
- Principal Georgian boulevard
- Georgian residential
- Internal boulevards
- Residential streets
- Historic streets (Priority Streets)
- Primary retail street (Priority Street)
- Market square
- Influential public realm space (existing)
- The Cross: Principal streets (Priority streets)
The Implementation Framework Plan

The Cross: Principal streets
The dominant cross roads converging at the Market Square in the centre of the historic core. This reinforces the two historical spines from which the urban grain of Northampton is built upon.

The Cross: Secondary streets
Outside the primary areas, these arms of the cross will continue the theme within a palette that is secondary to the principal streets.

Historic streets
These streets retain the strong heritage characteristics defined by existing surfaces, location, use or impact upon by street facades of the built form. These streets tend to follow a width varying between 5 and 12 metres.

Historic alleys
This network of narrow lanes and alleys, many of which still have original traditional materials are key to providing a strong sense of connectivity throughout the town. Technically these tend not to exceed a width of 5 metres.

Primary retail street
Abington Street is unique within the town, in that it needs to follow its own agenda in terms of design, function and response to scale ratio. The street is the principal external, pedestrianised shopping corridor and varies in width between 14 to 27 metres. This retail environment will extend beyond the ‘ring road’ linking Abington Square more closely with the town.

Retail arcades
These are internal, covered or semi-covered streets linking the main shopping circuits. These are important interfaces with the external environment and provide critical connections with forming the retail circuits around Northampton.

Access and service roads
These streets act as secondary circulatory routes within Northampton providing access to rear properties for servicing, and access into the car parks around the town.

Principal georgian boulevard
Derngate provides an arterial link, through the Georgian Residential District, into the heart of the town from the junction of Victoria Promenade and Bedford Road.

Georgian residential
These streets are defined by the residential properties found within the distinctly Georgian Character District. Many are branched from Derngate the main arterial spine.

Living streets
These connecting streets within Spring Boroughs Residential District branch out into neighbouring districts across key routes, creating gateway crossings and entrances and directional clarity.

Residential streets
These are contemporary streets that relate specifically to the neighbourhood they serve. These should be safe, shared use environments that residents have a sense of ownership with.

Internal boulevards
These routes have been identified as important linking elements in the town. The width of these routes will allow for lines of tree planting to evoke a strong sense of ‘greening the town’.

External boulevards
These roads will support the greatest volume of traffic. They also act as the main approach corridors and therefore their image is important. These corridors will be lined with trees to enhance their character.