

NORTHAMPTON
CENTRAL AREA ACTION PLAN

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
STATEMENT

MATTER 2: SPATIAL STRATEGY AND
RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER AREAS

Planning Policy Team
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2.1 Are there any differences of emphasis between the AAP and the Core Strategy?

- 2.1.1 Both documents have been prepared in conformity with the broad development strategy provided by the extant East Midlands Regional Plan (RSS8) (CAAP/007). The AAP and the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) set out a long-term vision for Northampton up to 2026. There has been clear dialogue with the Local Strategic Partnerships on the need to articulate future aspirations.
- 2.1.2 The vision and objectives set out in Chapter 3 of the AAP reflect the aspiration and broad objectives of the JCS as well as the Borough's Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 2.1.3 The JCS provides a clear strategic framework in its places based policy section, delivering strategic development policies designed to see Northampton town centre provide a focus for office, leisure, retail and service development, providing high quality urban design and public realm, whilst protecting its heritage assets and historic character through managed change.
- 2.1.4 The strategic objectives of the two documents show close synergy, with the JCS focusing on the need for regeneration within the central area, making it the focus of high quality development. The AAP echoes this through its strategic objectives seeking to deliver development allocations with emphasis on design and the environment.
- 2.1.5 The JCS recognises the trend of previous development that has contributed to a decentralisation of not only retailing, but also of economic activities, which has led to the need to re-focus on consolidating Northampton Central Area as the principal centre for Northamptonshire.
- 2.1.6 Both documents provide for the renewed focus on Northampton as the key economic driver for the region, with new office development focused in the central area. Key sites are identified for office development in the AAP to deliver this objective as referenced in Policy 15.
- 2.1.7 In terms of retail provision, the JCS directs that there should be town centre first approach i.e that it be accommodated firstly in Northampton town centre, and then within the central area. The AAP provides detailed policies designed to define and strengthen Northampton's Primary Shopping Area as well as allocating specific sites to deliver future retail requirements. The floorspace targets within the AAP are in general conformity with the targets set in the JCS.
- 2.1.8 Beyond the delivery of floorspace to provide for future requirements, there is further recognition in both plans of the need for investment and regeneration within the central area. The commitment to major capital projects is emphasised within the Council's evidence and particularly through the site-specific policies of the AAP. Further synergy is provided through the AAP taking forward the key principles of the Regeneration Priority Areas outlined in the JCS, for example implementing the regeneration of Spring Boroughs using new powers within the Localism Act to produce a Neighbourhood Plan for the area.

2.1.9 In relation to climate change and sustainable development principles, both documents seek to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. The JCS makes clear reference to the fact that sustainable development, including climate change, runs across all areas of policy and that all new development will need to take account of the sustainable development principles referenced in Policy S10 of the JCS. The AAP provides more detailed policy guidance, building on the principles of the JCS articulating a wide range of requirements to ensure commitment to, for example, the provision of green infrastructure, flood risk and water management, promoting design excellence as well as addressing movement frameworks around the central area.

2.1.10 In conclusion there is clear synergy between the two documents, the timescale in preparation has ensured that national policy objectives and evidence base studies have been able to provide consistency in terms of informing the development strategy for Northampton which is reflected in the outcomes of the future vision.

2.2 *How robust are the **strategic objectives**?*

2.2.1 The Strategic Objectives provide a clear mechanism to deliver the overall vision for the AAP. They also provide further overarching guidance for development proposals in the Central Area in terms of the developments the Council is seeking to deliver both individually and collectively. The Strategic Objectives run through the AAP and as identified in Table 7.2 Schedule 1 of the AAP are underpinned by and related to all of the AAP policies.

2.2.2 These strategic objectives are robust because:

- a) They have evolved through the consultation process. Themes for the AAP Vision and Strategic Objectives stem from the strategic direction contained in the East Midlands Regional Plan and the JCS. They were tested through the consultation process from the beginning of the plan preparation process in 2007 (Regulation 25 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 – amended 2008)
- b) The Regulation 25 exercise also highlighted a number of issues which members of the public and key stakeholders considered required addressing. A list of these issues is included in Chapter 2 of the Submission CAAP (page 22). These, together with the strategic direction presented, led to the evolution of the Strategic Objectives which have been set out in the AAP
- c) There has not been any significant or fundamental objection to the Strategic Objectives. Over the course of the plan preparation process, including the pre-submission stage in November 2011, key stakeholders like English Heritage and members of the public, have contributed to the shape of the wording of the Strategic Objectives to improve their robustness.
- d) Careful consideration has been given to the policies that support the delivery of the strategic policies to ensure that they meet the test of soundness.

2.2.3 In conclusion, the Strategic Objectives continue to reflect the aspirations and ambitions of the Council, key stakeholders and the public; they have developed through a substantial evidence base and extensive community

engagement. The Objectives provide clear direction as to how Northampton should develop and what the community values. They are considered robust.

2.3 *Neighbouring plans and strategies: How does the AAP relate to the plans and strategies of the remainder of the borough and other neighbouring planning authorities?*

2.3.1 The statutory planning context for Northampton is provided by the following plans:

- a) Northampton Local Plan (1997)
- b) West Northants Joint Core Strategy (Pre submission 2012)
- c) East Midlands Regional Plan (2009)

2.3.2 The adjoining plan of North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy covers the area of Wellingborough, which is the only adjoining council area to Northampton not covered by the JCS. This makes very little reference to Northampton and its impacts on the policy content of the plan in relation North Northamptonshire. Where mentioned, this is in relation to strategic green infrastructure networks and transport infrastructure. The AAP takes account of and positively addresses the strategic green infrastructure network related to the River Nene valley

2.3.3 The AAP has been prepared to provide clarity with the policy direction and requirements outlined in the Regional Plan. It will further the broad objectives of the Regional Plan by providing detailed sustainable development policies.

2.3.4 Examples of conformity with the regional core objectives include:

- a) Ensuring that both existing and new housing provision address need and reduce social exclusion (through promoting housing sites and seeking the regeneration of Spring Boroughs)
- b) Improving accessibility to jobs, homes and services (through Policy 9 promoting the pedestrian and cycle movement framework, also Policy 7 creating a high quality public transport interchange)
- c) Enhancing the environmental quality of urban settlements, through Policy 1)

2.3.5 The AAP also seeks to address the specific priorities identified in Policy MKSM SRS 3 by providing policies that:

- a) develop the area around and including the railway station as an attractive gateway and focus for development; (Policy 19, 26 & 27))
- b) improve the range and quality of retail provision by increasing comparison and convenience floorspace, (Policy 14) linking this into a revitalisation of the rest of central area incorporating attractive links to railway station and waterfront area (Policy 1 & 6)
- c) make the central area a focus for a range of employment opportunities with a particular emphasis on offices (Policy 12, 14 & 16)
- d) develop the existing and cultural heritage facilities and attractions and provision of new facilities (Policy 21 & 22)

- e) increase the range of centrally located overnight accommodation. (Policy 20,21 &28)
- 2.3.6 In doing so, the AAP provides synergy with the spatial vision for Northampton referenced in the JCS. It recognises the role of Northampton, as a Principal Urban Area within Northamptonshire, and seeks to deliver investment through a series of policies and capital projects, which will enhance the town's role so that by 2026, it performs a regional centre role. In doing so,
- 2.3.7 The Northampton Local Plan incorporates a number of saved policies, which although dated, continue to provide guidance for planning applications. The AAP will replace a significant number of these policies, which are clearly referred to in Appendix J of the AAP. The intention is to replace any remaining policies through the future adoption of the JCS and the Northampton Related Development Area Local Plan, which will provide policy direction for the remainder of the Borough.
- 2.3.8 All neighbouring authorities were consulted at each formal stage of plan preparation. Further close partnership working has been undertaken in West Northamptonshire, co-ordinated through the JPU, with the County Council, Daventry District, South Northamptonshire Council and WNDC, both in terms of producing the AAP and the JCS.
- 2.3.9 As well as having regard to statutory plans the AAP has taken into account a wide range of strategies. In particular;
- a) Northampton Sustainable Community Strategy: provides a vision up to 2031, which the AAP has been prepared in conformity with. The AAP also provides synergy with the Corporate Plan, which recognises the importance that investment and growth in local business and jobs will have on the long term prospects for Northampton ("Your town"). It acknowledges significant challenges relating to the current economic climate, highlighting the need for creating empowered communities and, providing better homes, both of which are key delivery initiatives in the AAP.
 - b) More specifically, in respect of the public realm, the Council has worked in partnership with the County Council and WNDC within the Central Area to produce a Public Realm Implementation Framework (PRIF). The AAP articulates the requirements of the PRIF through Policy 3 and Appendix C, which summarises public realm typologies and lists a series of public realm "palette zones".
 - c) The site-specific policies of the AAP reflect the aspirations of Masterplans and Framework Principles produced jointly with partner organisations (WNDC, County Council, HCA) and provide guidance for future site delivery at Castle Station, Waterside, Angel Street and St Johns.
- 2.3.10 To reflect wider strategy aspirations of key partner organisations across the Borough, the Council has made it clear that it will work in partnership to ensure that its vision for the Central Area is met (paragraph 7.0.3 refers).
- 2.4 *How far has the plan taken on board the **plans and programme of statutory providers and regulatory agencies**, such as transport*

*companies, the Environment Agency, the utility companies, and **local businesses and community groups and agencies?***

2.4.1 Throughout the plan production process, groups and agencies such as: WNDC, Northamptonshire County Council, Environment Agency, Anglian Water, community groups and residents' associations have been consulted on a formal basis as part of the statutory consultation periods. Following the submission of representations, the Council has sought meetings with a range of organisations to explain how their plans and programmes have been taken into account in policy formulation and resolve any outstanding concerns the organisation may have. The Council has also engaged with these organisations to ensure that their plans and programmes take account of the AAP.

2.4.2 Some examples of this include close work with:

- a) Stagecoach and the other bus operators, to ensure that a suitable replacement of the existing bus station is delivered, both in supporting Stagecoach to purchase new premises for bus storage/maintenance and the operators in settling on the size and specification of the proposed Bus Interchange – see Policy 7
- b) Network Rail, to take forward plans for the regeneration of Castle Station and also in resolving the future decommissioning of the disused railway line between Castle Station and Brackmills, to ensure a truly comprehensive / fully integrated regeneration of the Avon / Nunn Mills / Ransome Road areas – see Policy 9 & 19
- c) Environment Agency / Anglian Water, to address identified surface water / waste water conveyance capacity issues through joint commissioning / working on the evidence base – see Policy 5
- d) HSE and National Grid in seeking to positively address the adverse impact caused by the PADHI blast exclusion zones around gasholders and seeking to address the long term future of the gasholders – See Policy 27 and Enterprise Zone LDO work
- e) WNDC, working closely with Central Networks to resolve electricity supply issues as they relate to specific sites, e.g. former Nunn Mills Power Station and the need for improved transformers/switch gear and more localised power solutions required in the Central Area – see Policy 28
- f) Residents Associations / Community Groups in Spring Boroughs, in seeking to take forward regeneration and the desire of the local community to produce a Neighbourhood Plan – the Council has supported the frontrunner bid and amended the Plan to take account of this process – see Policy 24.

2.4.3 These issues have helped shape and have been shaped by the contents of the AAP. There will be continued dialogue with these groups and organisations that will continue to shape plans and development in the future.

2.5 ***Beyond the boundaries: Is there a strong contextual relationship between the town centre and neighbouring areas?***

2.5.1 The contextual relationship can be viewed at three levels: the town centre and its immediate neighbouring areas, the town centre and Northampton as a whole and then, in relation to the wider Northampton 'sphere of influence'.

Town Centre and its immediate neighbouring areas

- 2.5.2 Northampton centre and its immediate neighbouring areas is the product of centuries of incremental growth. As such, for the most part, the town centre is in close proximity to adjoining mixed use / predominantly residential areas. At one time, the links would have been almost seamless, apart from to the west and south where the intervention of the significant natural asset of the Nene Valley provided a barrier, over which development 'leapt'. As with all towns, a series of strong radial routes provided contact with areas further away and the town incrementally grew along these routes. Therefore, for the majority of the town, there is strong direct linkage to the town centre along historic main roads to the centre. For the most part these form the basis of strong public transport routes that converge on the town centre. The town centre historically has performed the civic and commercial role associated with the county market town, including the main offices for the County Council, Borough Council, hospital provision, law courts, theatres, museums, livestock trade, main railway and bus stations, retailing and office.
- 2.5.3 The relationship of the town centre to its immediate environs is still strong, although the intervention of large highways 'improvements' has undermined the link in terms of perception of place and pedestrian movement. This has also weakened the links / relationship of the town to the river and some of its adjoining primarily residential areas, such as the Mounts. This has been compounded in part by the remodelling of significant parts of the northern part of the town centre, creating 'dead' or uninviting space. Where opportunities for new development / linkages with formerly poorly accessed areas, e.g south of the river along the 'new' Towcester Road have been provided, these have been dominated by highways and big box retail shed development creating a poor sense of place. More recent developments have, in some cases, sought to have a more positive relationship with the river.

Town Centre and Northampton as a whole

- 2.5.4 Due to the radial routes into and out of the town centre, there are good transportation links to the centre. However, the town centre over the last three decades has not taken advantage of the opportunities that have been presented by the rapid increase in population and associated economic activity. The role and significance of the town centre to the expansion areas supported by the Northampton Development Corporation (NDC) and its successors has been weaker. The investment of NDC was primarily focussed out of centre. These areas were often provided with their own facilities e.g. Weston Favell Centre (12,000 sq.m. retail) and extensive employment land designations, (Brackmills 300 hectares, Moulton Park 115 hectares, Round Spinney 49 hectares) many of which provided significant competition to the town centre for main town centre uses, were car orientated in their layout and adjacent to trunk road infrastructure. These have been supplemented by recent local plan allocations at Swan Valley and Pineham (140 hectares)
- 2.5.5 For some of these newer areas, this has meant that residents no longer look primarily to the town centre for their convenience and comparison shopping or leisure needs. This along with national trends of decentralisation supported by previous planning policy, including the current Northampton Local Plan,

has also meant that they also do not look to the town centre as the main source of employment.

- 2.5.6 In this context, the physical links with the town as a whole are generally good, but the functional aspects in terms of its day-to-day relevance, be that in relation to shopping or employment, have diminished.

Town centre and the wider Northampton 'sphere of influence'

- 2.5.7 Historically, because of its 'county town' status, the town centre was important, both to its rural hinterland, but also the towns such as Wellingborough and Daventry. Whilst it still performs relatively strongly for some of these areas in terms of its comparison retail draw, the growth of these towns and the development of substantial new settlements such as Milton Keynes, has undoubtedly impacted on the importance of the town centre to these communities. For example, areas such as Towcester (to the south) are now more inclined to regard Milton Keynes as their main service centre; villages to the north such as Brixworth are more likely to look to Market Harborough; whilst villages to the west (Ecton, etc), might regard Riverside Retail Park and Weston Favell centre as more attractive for most shopping / associated trips than Northampton centre.
- 2.5.8 In summary, the relationship between the town centre and its neighbouring areas has perhaps weakened, both in terms of form and function. The AAP in association with the JCS and the investment and actions of partners seeks to deal with these issues and re-introduce the links and relevance of the centre to its surrounding populace.