

**NORTHAMPTON**  
**CENTRAL AREA ACTION PLAN**

**NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**STATEMENT**

**MATTER 7: KEY DEVELOPMENT SITES**

Planning Policy Team  
August 2012

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7.1 *Are the designated sites in the AAP to accommodate the principal increases in comparison retail floorspace, ie at the **Grosvenor Centre** (Policy 17), **Abington Street East** (Policy 18) and on the **Drapery** (Policy 32), in the most appropriate locations in relation to realistic alternative sites?*

7.1.1 It is considered that the designated sites are in the most appropriate locations in relation to realistic alternatives for the following reasons:

a. **Primary Shopping Area**

7.1.1.1 These sites are located within the Primary Shopping Area, which is recommended by national guidance to be, sequentially, the most appropriate location for providing additional retail provision. The Primary Shopping Area was defined through:

A) Recommendations provided by the Town Centre Health Check, 2009 (R/005/6)

B) Conclusions resulting from a workshop on Town Centre frontages and Primary Shopping Area undertaken in March 2010 (R/005/9)

b. **Viable and Deliverable**

7.1.1.2 The sites were also selected because there is partnership arrangement already in place, aimed to ensure delivery, and/or discussions with stakeholders have indicated that they will be made available.

### **Grosvenor Centre**

7.1.2 The owners of the Grosvenor Centre, Legal and General (L&G) and the Borough Council signed a Development Agreement (DA) in December 2009, confirming commitment to the delivery of the redevelopment of the Grosvenor Centre.

7.1.3 Consultants have been engaged by L&G to bring forward the scheme. Work has progressed through pre-application discussions reflecting issues prevalent in a complex development, which covers a substantial area. Progress on the current scheme is pending the outcome of a market/scheme re-appraisal to ensure it is fit for purpose. Legal & General have confirmed that they remain committed to the delivery of the project and are actively working with the Borough Council, consistent with the contents of the DA.

### **Abington Street East and Drapery**

7.1.4 The Central Area Sites Feasibility Studies (R/005/2 and R/005/3) concluded that the Drapery and Abington Street East sites were both viable and deliverable. It is likely that some of the retail units within the Drapery will be moving into the larger and redeveloped Grosvenor Centre. This will enable opportunities to regenerate existing retail units along the Drapery, to provide opportunities consistent with modern retail requirements.

7.1.5 For Abington Street East, discussions with Northamptonshire County Council confirm that there is future likelihood of library services being consolidated. A

similar discussion was also held with NHS Foundation Trust / Primary Care Trust. As part of the latest Government initiative, health care services will be reviewed with the option of consolidating services to improve people to access to health care. This provides a good opportunity that both the library building and clinic will be likely to become available for future site regeneration.

- 7.1.6 For both sites the opportunity arises for development to be undertaken in a comprehensive manner. Thus ensuring that the areas can adapt to changing circumstances, rather than suffering the threat of long term vacancy. Both sites have Grade II listed buildings and are located within conservation areas. Rather than a constraint, this is seen as an opportunity to provide for comprehensive regeneration that takes account of, and capitalises on the heritage assets and their settings. The proposed modifications to policies 18 and 32 occurred as a result of consultation, and aim to ensure that the heritage assets within the sites would be appropriately considered.

### **Other alternative sites**

- 7.1.7 The RTP 2010 /2011 Feasibility Study (R/005/2 and 3) assessed other sites, some of which were taken forward in the Plan, and others that were rejected / deselected. It reached the following conclusions:

#### **Former Fishmarket site:**

- 7.1.8 This site was considered available and deliverable primarily due to the fact that the majority of the land is within the Borough Council's ownership. It is also located within an area proposed for an extension to the Primary Shopping Area. It is situated close to the Grosvenor Centre and considered suitable for additional retail provision. This site was allocated for retail in the pre-submission draft CAAP in November 2010.
- 7.1.9 However, following progress made to the Grosvenor Centre and Bus Interchange projects, this site was re-allocated for a new bus interchange facility (to replace the Grosvenor Greyfriars bus station). An independent study, the Northampton Bus Interchange Appraisal Report, 2011 (SS/008/5) assessed several town centre sites and concluded that the Fishmarket site was the best location for the replacement bus station in terms of availability, deliverability and contribution towards environmental, social and economic objectives. The report concluded that a range of sites within the boundary of Policy 17 Grosvenor Centre Redevelopment, including the current location of the bus station, were essentially undeliverable when the constraints of delivery phasing, funding and operational requirements were taken into account. In terms of viability, the alternatives to the Fishmarket would have required a temporary solution. The financial costs associated with this temporary measure made for an untenable proposition financially. In addition a temporary solution would be likely to have significant adverse impact on passenger patronage due to the lower quality, temporary nature of the facility. Any solution to the north of the Grosvenor Centre site (necessary as realistically the shopping centre extension would be accommodated in the southern part) would also face a physical barrier between the Interchange and the rest of the shopping area provided by the extensive construction

project. This would be anticipated to lead to a significant diversion of pedestrians.

- 7.1.10 As the delivery of the Bus Interchange has a critical path element in the progression of redevelopment of the Grosvenor Centre, the change in allocation within the AAP for the Fishmarket site from retail to Bus Interchange was considered necessary.

**Notre Dame:**

- 7.1.11 This site is within the Primary Shopping Area and was assessed as viable. However, it was not deliverable primarily because of the physical and legal constraints that exist on site. The site accommodates a range of uses, including a religious facility (the Grade II listed Northampton Quaker Meeting House in Wellington Street). There are also 2 burial grounds on site, the first being associated with the Quaker Friends Meeting House. Gravestones located within the site are protected by the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Area Act) 1990. The second burial ground represents last remaining piece of physical evidence that the now demolished St Joseph's Convent existed here.

- 7.1.12 Properties fronting Abington Street are still operational, the likelihood of these being delivered as part of a wider comparison retail redevelopment is considered to be limited due to current occupancy levels.

**St Peter's Way:**

- 7.1.13 The site is available and within Borough Council ownership. However, it is not located within the Primary Shopping Area. Allocating additional comparison retailing on this site could increase its attractiveness as a separate retail destination rather than promote it as a complementary retail provision for the town centre. The Town Centre Health Check, 2009 (R/005/5) concluded that just over half of the people surveyed in St Peter's Way stated that they would consider visiting other areas of the town to shop, eat and drink. This percentage is small considering the site's proximity to the Drapery, the Grosvenor Centre and Abington Street. Since less than half the visitors do not undertake linked trips, it was concluded that the site performed poorly in terms of contributing to the vitality and viability.

**Broad Street:**

- 7.1.14 The site is located to the north west of the Grosvenor Centre and is severed by Lady's Lane. Although it is available and viable, designating this site for retail could jeopardise the survival of established retail units along Abington Street.
- 7.1.15 The Feasibility Study also found both Market Place and properties south of Abington Street / north of Dychurch Lane unviable due to significant acquisition costs.

## 7.2 *Should the AAP be providing more detailed provision in relation to convenience shopping?*

7.2.1 Retail studies have highlighted the potential for the Central Area to accommodate more convenience floorspace. Sequentially, the preferred location for this would be located within the primary shopping area or close to it.

7.2.2 The AAP's policy in relation to convenience shopping is aimed at providing positive, flexible and non-prescriptive guidance. Further detailed provision is not considered necessary due to the following:

- Evidence shows that the town centre faces more threat from comparison shopping than from convenience shopping (further details below). It is essential that the CAAP identifies sites for comparison retailing to sustain competition from out-of-town retail parks, thereby assisting the regeneration of the town centre and meeting the CAAP vision for Northampton's town centre to be firmly established as the economic centre for Northamptonshire,
- The CAAP adopts a flexible and positive approach towards convenience shopping. The Central Area currently accommodates a variety of convenience retail provision, (ranging from the larger Morrisons supermarket in Victoria Promenade to Tesco Express in Abington Street, and the Sainsburys supermarket in the Grosvenor Centre). It is considered that developers with an interest in convenience retailing will continue to come forward in the town centre, and that there is no requirement to designate sites for this purpose

7.2.3 Northampton town centre faces a greater degree of comparison shopping competition from out-of-town retail parks. The West Northamptonshire Retail Study update, 2011 (R/005/10) confirmed that "a major feature of the local comparison goods shopping pattern in Northampton is the dominance of out-of-centre retail parks, which results in an imbalance between the retail provision in Northampton town centre (and a lesser extent the district and local centres) and the provision in the retail parks. This is a qualitative deficiency in Northampton town centre as, to some extent, there is more choice for comparison goods shopping in out-of-centre destinations than those provided within the town centre itself" (pg 68).

7.2.4 The study identified that the turnover of the 6 most popular out-of-centre destinations in Northampton combined, exceeds that of the town centre by approximately £53m (pg 35). To address this, the consultants recommended that the amount of comparison floorspace

developed outside Northampton town centre be limited, to ensure that investment in the town centre is not jeopardised (pg 83).

7.2.5 To conclude, the approach for identifying sites for comparison floorspace stems from the requirement to create a competitive retail environment for Northampton town centre.

7.2.6 It was considered that the approach to the convenience retail sector should be more flexible and less prescriptive due to the following:

- Development Agreement was signed between the Council and Legal & General in December 2009, confirming the commitment to the delivery of additional comparison floorspace. The redevelopment of the Grosvenor Centre was planned to include consideration for a supermarket, either a straightforward replacement of the existing Sainsburys supermarket currently occupying the Grosvenor Centre or the development of a larger supermarket as part of the overall scheme
- Convenience shopping provision within the Central Area has continued to come forward over the duration of the plan preparation period (ie Tesco Express (100sq.m net) and the Mini Supermarket within the post office). A planning application for a supermarket on the former Royal Mail site in Barrack Road was approved on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012 (R/005/16), which may address this requirement (net sales area of just over 5,000 sq.m of which 65% is expected to be for convenience)
- The market for convenience shopping remains healthy and is reflected in the ongoing approvals for supermarket schemes out of town such as Aldi in Wellingborough Road (completed), Sainsbury's extension (under construction) at Sixfields, Asda extension at Far Cotton (completed) and Waitrose at Wootton (not started).

7.3 *Are the policies covering the **remaining sites** for development and the enhancement of the Waterside areas (policies 25 – 30) justified and effective?*

#### **Policy 19 (Castle Station)**

7.3.1 Policy 19 seeks to implement the strategic direction set out in MKSM SMS Northamptonshire 3, enhancing the train station. The station is expected to reach capacity this year and needs to be redeveloped to meet the requirements of the projected population increase. There is opportunity there to modernise and expand the station, whilst promoting commercial and residential. WNDK and the Council have worked closely with Network Rail and the franchise holder London Midland to develop a masterplan for the station site.

7.3.2 There is ongoing commitment from key partners towards delivery, most importantly including Network Rail. The project has already succeeded in completing GRIP 4 (Guidance for Rail Investment projects) in relation to

design and the single option development. "Prior approval" was granted in 2011. In May 2012, the Government also agreed to fund £10 million towards the development costs of the station. Further information is provided in the Delivery Strategy.

### **Policies 20 (St John's), 21 (Angel Street) and 22 (Bridge Street)**

- 7.3.3 Policies 20, 21, 22, are site specific, promoting mixed use development, related to a master planning exercise (SS/008/10) undertaken by the Borough Council, County Council and WNDC. These policies are justified for a combination of reasons. They are located on sites, which are vacant or underused and have the commitment of significant landowners (the Borough and County Council) to bring them back into use. They support the AAP's Strategic Objectives, primarily in relation to providing additional vitality and viability to the town centre through additional floorspace of town centre uses (offices/leisure) and consolidation of the cultural offer within the town centre. The office provision in particular can be justified on the Angel Street site as the County Council are looking to consolidate services within the town centre.
- 7.3.4 The Borough and County Councils predominantly own areas within St John's and Angel Street. Progress can be demonstrated in relation to the sites. The County Council are taking forward a business case for consolidation and have engaged in pre-application discussions with the Borough and relevant partners in developing a scheme. Planning permission for student accommodation has been approved and development is underway on St Johns. The Council has drawn up a land deal with a hotel operator for part of the remaining site. The Plan is clear that Bridge Street is a longer term proposal, which will gain public sector support after the initial priority projects have been delivered.

### **Policy 23 Upper Mounts/Great Russell Street**

- 7.3.5 Policy 23 is considered justified due to the low level of activity / under use of the site and the known likelihood of disposal on the part of a significant landowner (Johnstone Press). The Council has sought to work with adjacent landowners to plan comprehensively.
- 7.3.6 The design principles set out the key place making principles, taking account of the site's characteristics, whilst the uses allowed are varied and should provide for flexibility in delivering future development. The emphasis placed on a comprehensive framework approach should assist in overcoming issues that may arise incrementally from different landowners.

### **Policy 24 Spring Boroughs**

- 7.3.7 The regeneration of Spring Boroughs is required to improve the environment and living conditions of its residents, and enhance accessibility between the town centre and Castle Station. Spring Boroughs is one of the most deprived areas in the country, falling within the top 5% of the Index of Multiple Deprivation.
- 7.3.8 The Policy is effective for 2 reasons. The Borough Council is the landlord of over 83% of the homes, which will assist delivery.. The Council was successful in securing frontrunner status for Neighbourhood Planning in early



2012, which will support the community of Spring Boroughs in democratically informing the regeneration of the area. There are minimal land ownership constraints to address, there is funding available to prioritise and progress the Policy.

### **Policy 31 Market Square**

- 7.3.9 Evidence, including the Town Centre Health Check (R/005/6), concluded that Northampton's town centre does not provide sufficient leisure provision. Existing food and drink venues are dispersed around the town centre and lack the ability to form a destination quarter, unlike out-of-town places like Sixfields – which has both a cluster of restaurants, pubs and cafes and also a large cinema. In addition, the study observed that the Market Square felt unsafe because of its very large size and limited activity in the evenings. Finally, the study stated that when compared with other similar sized markets, other towns have more stalls and operators. The Policy provides an opportunity to improve the public and business perception of the Market Square, and encourage the creation of a cluster of restaurants.
- 7.3.10 Implementation of the Policy will rely to a large extent on the input of others such as the recently formed Town Centre Business Improvement District and the Town Centre Operations Team of the Council in managing the market, the square and the promotion of supportive events. The Council's regeneration section will require continuing bidding for funding streams to support regeneration of the Square

### **Policy 33 Freeschool Street**

- 7.3.11 Evidence, including the West Northamptonshire Employment Land Study (E/006/1) highlights the opportunity that this site provides in adding to the employment offer within the town centre. An assessment of the opportunities and constraints that the site offers has resulted in shaping policy content and the design principles drawing. (Figure 6.15).
- 7.3.12 In terms of policy delivery, this has been assisted by the inclusion of the area within the Waterside Enterprise Zone. The Council as a large landowner has a significant role in bringing forward the development of the site, and work is progressing on a delivery strategy for the Enterprise Zone.

### **Policy 34 Former Royal Mail Sorting Office**

- 7.3.13 The sorting office has been vacant for some time and the policy to encourage its reuse is considered justified. The range of uses within the Policy reflects interest in its use in the past (residential approval in principle) and the contents of WNELS. The Policy criteria reflect an assessment of the site and its surrounding area. The site also benefits from an approval in principle for convenience retail.

### **Policy 36 Telephone Exchange**

- 7.3.14 British Telecom (BT) has indicated that the exchange is likely to become surplus to requirements over the lifetime of the Plan. The Policy allows for a

range of town centre uses and takes account of the site's opportunities and constraints. It provides flexibility in terms of mixed uses

### **Waterside Policies (Policy 25-30)**

7.3.15 Development to date has not capitalised on the River Nene and its tributaries. The town has historically neglected its relationship with the River and canal. Nor has the area been planned in a comprehensive manner. Policies relating to the Waterside are justified by a wide evidence base including technical studies and more detailed development framework / master plans. The policies promote the Waterside as an environmental asset, capable of providing sustainable opportunities for business / commercial floorspace, leisure, recreation, tourism and ecology.

7.3.16 **The policies for the Waterside areas are effective because:**

#### **Delivery Commitment**

7.3.17 Key to the delivery of these projects are:

- a) Funding and delivery mechanism provided by West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC), the delivery vehicle selected to accelerate growth in Northampton,
- b) The designation of an Enterprise Zone in 2011, which means that Local Development Orders can be prepared to simplify planning rules and address constraints
- c) Ongoing dialogue with public sector agencies and educational establishments such as the Homes and Communities Agency and the University of Northampton demonstrate commitment to site delivery.

#### **Delivery progress**

7.3.18 Some of the projects covered by the policies have either commenced or are complete. For example:

- a) Becket's Park (Policy 29): completed in March 2011
- b) Nene Meadows (Policy 30): a new skate park was built and subsequently opened in July 2012, work is already underway to ensure that this area becomes a strategic leisure and recreation destination close to the heart of the town centre
- c) Strategic land acquisitions have been undertaken by WNDC on Avon Nunn Mills and at St Peter's Way

7.3.19 In addition:

- a) St Peter's Way (Policy 26): permission was granted in March 2012 for the development of a 3,700 sq.m Innovation Centre at the eastern end of the St Peter's Way Waterside policy area. The University of Northampton is committed to develop and occupy this building, which

is anticipated will have positive impacts in creating demand for additional office space adjacent.

- b) Progress has been made on Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) for sites within St Peter's Way (Policy 26) and Avon Nunn Mills Ransome Road (Policy 28). The CPOs relate to land required for delivery that the Corporation has been unable to be acquire by agreement. Public Inquiries will be held in October 2012
- c) Progress has been made in procuring a development partner to deliver the comprehensive regeneration of the Avon Nunn Mills site It is anticipated that a development partner will be appointed by May 2013
- d) On Ransome Road the Housing and Communities Agency (HCA) has chosen a development partner, who will be working up a revised planning application with a view to start delivering housing on site within the next two years.
- e) In addition, the University of Northampton has identified the Avon Nunn Mills site as their preferred location for relocating the University. The compulsory acquisition of the Avon Nunn Mills site is being progressed to facilitate either a mixed-use scheme as set out in the CAAP or a scheme incorporating a relocated university.
- f) There appears to be positive movement from Network Rail in taking forward the decommissioning of the operational railway line dividing the Avon/Nunn Mills/Ransome Road site. (See Matter 4).
- g) National Grid has confirmed that they are reviewing the operational status of the gasholders and will bring forward development that is financially viable. In liaison with WNDG, options are being assessed that can support the aim and vision for St Peter's Waterside as set out in the AAP, whilst providing the necessary returns to ensure National Grid are encouraged to bring their land forward for development.

## Appendix 1

Suggested Amendment to Policy 14 Meeting Retail Capacity.

Additions are underlined and removals are shown in ~~striketrough~~.

The policy has been amended to correct mistakes in relation to gross to net conversions. It also takes account of the potential uncertainty around the availability of the library and adds the words 'up to' to provide the flexibility for inclusion or not within the floorspace figure from this source.

### Policy 14

#### Meeting Retail Capacity

The Council will plan to accommodate 61,000 square metres (gross) / ~~45,000~~ 40,700 square metres (net) of comparison retail floor space and 4,500 square metres (gross) / 3000 square meters (net) of convenience retail floor space in the Town Centre in the period to 2026. The majority of this will be delivered at:

#### Comparison

2016-2021

- Grosvenor Centre Redevelopment Site – up to 37,000 square metres gross / ~~24,000~~ 24,700 square metres net

2021-2026

- Abington Street East – up to 9000 square metres gross / 6000 square metres net
- Buildings and land on Drapery and College Street – 17,000 square metres gross / 11,300 square metres net