



WNDC Board Report

Report by Director Planning Services

Paper Reference: 2010-08-08-02

Agenda Item: 8

7 December 2010

Subject: Northampton Central Area Action Plan (CAAP) – Pre-submission draft

Advice: That the Board:

1. Approve the paper as set out as WNDC's formal response on the CAAP – Pre-submission draft.

Summary:

WNDC support for the overall Strategy of the CAAP and the key issues to be addressed.

- School provision and management of the private car.
- The “regeneration” strategic objective should include the role that residential development can play in regeneration.
- The “destination of choice” strategic objective should make reference to the role of the Waterside.
- Design codes should be prepared for key sites within the town centre.
- Heavy rail should not be the preferred use for the corridor between Brackmills and Castle Station.
- The approach to parking should not act as a barrier to attracting office development on the key town centre sites.

- Broad support for office and retail development proposals across the town centre.
- Need for flexibility to recognise potential changes in economic circumstance.
- Need to make reference to Regional Growth Funding, European Funding and Tax Incremental Financing.

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The following report provides an update for members on the current position with regard to the Northampton Central Area Action Plan. The report sets out officer comments on the key issues relating to the pre-submission version of the document.

2. Background

2.1 The CAAP sets out a framework outlining how Northampton's Central Area will develop up until 2026. The document is part of the Local Development Framework which will replace the existing Local Plan documents and set the planning context for West Northamptonshire up to 2026.

2.2 The purpose of Area Action Plans is to set the framework for future development, in areas where significant change and regeneration is expected, as is the case with Northampton's Central Area.

2.3 The CAAP has now reached its pre-submission stage. This document contains policies and proposals which the Council intends to submit to the Secretary of State. This document is published for a six-week period to enable persons to make formal representations on its contents. The Council will then consider the representations received, and decide whether it should make any changes. The finalised Plan will then be examined by an independent Planning Inspector. The examination hearings will be held in public, following which the Planning Inspector will issue a report. The Council will then amend the Plan to reflect any changes made by the Inspector and subsequently adopt it. Therefore this is likely to be last opportunity for the Corporation to formally raise any issues that it may have.

3. Comments upon the Pre-submission draft of the CAAP

3.1 In September 2010 the coalition government set out that it expects the Corporation to focus on using its specialist development powers to transform Northampton town centre. This includes supporting the redevelopment of the Grosvenor Centre, Northampton waterside, Castle Station, the Avon/ Nunn Mills area, and the St John's/Angel St project. The government recognises the role that the Corporation should play in increasing private-sector confidence. Therefore within the context of the Corporation's revised mandate the CAAP will play a key role.

3.2 Officers from the Corporation have been involved in the development of the CAAP. The opportunity to work alongside colleagues from the Borough Council has been welcomed. This has resulted in a document that is broadly supported by the Corporation. The CAAP is structured to cover the following areas –

- Northampton Central Area: Spatial Portrait
- Policy Context, Northampton Central Area Vision and Objectives
- Sustainable Spatial Strategy
- Accessibility and Movement
- Spatial Development Strategy
- Infrastructure, Delivery and Monitoring

Outlined below are the comments on each chapter that will form the basis of the Corporation's response.

Northampton Central Area: Spatial Portrait

3.3 The Spatial Portrait that has been developed for the Central Area is broadly supported. Under the key areas to address reference should be made to improving the school provision within the centre of Northampton. Within the wider chapter reference is made to Spring Lane and Castle schools being at capacity this should be followed through into the key issues to be addressed.

3.4 From an economic development perspective there needs to be reference to how the private car will be managed. Currently the need to improve public transport, cycling and walking is addressed without referencing the need to specifically

address car parking and having a structured approach to private car movements. There will be a need as the centre grows to consider the role of park and ride.

Policy Context, Northampton Central Area Vision and Objectives

3.5 A vision has been developed for the Central Area and is broadly supported although we have the following observations on the following strategic objectives:

SO1 - Regeneration: Expanding retail, town centre facilities and the scale of employment opportunities in the centre to match Northampton's future role as a City at the heart of its sub-region, maximising the use of previously developed land. As well as retail and employment opportunities the role of expanding the residential offer within the town centre is key to regeneration as this will support the retail and commercial development.

SO3 - A destination of choice: Revitalising the Market Square at the heart of the new City and create and develop cultural initiatives based around St John's and the Derngate Theatre area. This objective should consider the role of leisure in terms of the Waterside, as a destination of choice as this will bring the potential for linked trips with the improved marina facilities.

Sustainable Spatial Strategy

3.6 Within the "Sustainable Spatial Strategy" there is a policy (policy 2 pg 36) covering "Promoting Design Excellence". This section should set out those key development sites for which design codes should be provided. Further information on the relevant thresholds can be found in the West Northamptonshire Design Code Manual published by the Corporation.

Accessibility and Movement

3.7 In the "Accessibility and Movement" chapter reference is made to the rail route that runs through the Avon/Nunn Mills and Ransome Road site (policy 9 pg 48). The safeguarding of this route between Brackmills and Castle Station for public transport, cycle and walking route is supported subject to clarification being provided on the public transport element. The policy should clarify that the

reference to public transport means bus transport otherwise there is a danger that this will prejudice any potential process to downgrade the role of this route for heavy rail. Currently the position regarding the heavy rail status is having a severe negative impact on viability on the Avon/Nunn Mills and Ransome Road site.

- 3.8 The need to manage the amount of parking within the town centre is recognised (policy 11 page 53). In terms of the policy on parking we have the following observations. There is some concern regarding the first bullet point that states “*Within the Town Centre Boundary as defined on the Figure 8.1 “Proposals Map”, no additional private car parking for non-residential development will be permitted.*”. There are some significant proposals for office development within the town centre boundary notably Angel Street and St Johns. The town centre should rightly be the focus for office development in line with national policy. The no additional private car parking would be a barrier to get property let to a high-end user. Whilst it is accepted that the parking would be at a significantly lower level than that required for out-of-centre development it needs to be recognised that parking close to buildings will be required for customers and for limited staff parking. Failure to address this point will increase further the attractiveness of out of centre sites. But most importantly, it will have a significant impact on the ability to attract investment into the centre of the town and constrain regeneration. The car parking policy needs to be a phased approach taking account of the regeneration agenda.

Spatial Development Strategy

- 3.9 The Spatial Development Strategy sets out the following as development proposals within key priority areas for office and retail development. These include -

Retail 2016-2021

- *Grosvenor Centre Redevelopment Site – up to 37,000 square metres (as per Policy 18 “Grosvenor Centre Redevelopment”)*

2021-2026

- *Former Fish Market and adjacent buildings – 6,000 square metres (as per Policy 19 “Former Fish Market and Adjoining Buildings”)*
- *Buildings and land on Drapery and College Street – 17,000 square metres Office*

Up to 2016

- *St Johns and Angel Street (up to 37,000 square metres)*
- *Avon/Nunn Mills/Ransome Road (minimum 16,000 square metres)*
- *Freeschool Street (minimum 2,500 square metres)*
- *The Waterside: St Peters Way (Up to 43,000 square metres) (Start on site – unlikely to be completed)*

2016-2026

- *Castle Station (up to 26,000 square metres)*
- *Bridge Street (up to 8,000 square metres)*
- *Spring Boroughs (amount to be determined through future master planning process)*
- *The Waterside: St Peter’s Way (balance of remaining 43,000 square metres)*

3.10 The strategic site selection is supported as they are consistent with the Corporation’s key development sites. These are followed through in detailed policies, it needs to be recognised that there will need to be flexibility in terms of how the detailed masterplans are brought forward for each of the key development sites. The Corporation is keen to work with Borough Council in the development of supplementary planning documents that cover masterplans for these sites. In terms of detailed comments on the site specific policies, the policy for Avon Nunn Mills/Ransome Road outlines the site should contain a key element of commercial building. However the approximate level of 16,000 square metres of commercial floor space is likely to be a conservative estimate. This is based on the discussions between the Corporation and the Borough Council. It is recommended in the policy rather than using the phrase “approximately” it should be “minimum”.

Infrastructure, Delivery and Monitoring

- 3.11 The approach taken within the chapter is broadly supported. The only changes that is suggested to (policy 37 pg 62) on infrastructure delivery is wider reference to other forms of financing. In terms of the delivery of the key regeneration sites within the CAAP, reference should be made to the role that Regional Growth Funding and European finding could play in delivery. In addition there is no reference made within the section to the role that Tax Incremental Financing could play in the delivery of projects. In terms of the policy on infrastructure delivery if a site does not create a residual land value which is the case in many regeneration projects the approach to funding infrastructure is unlikely to be successful without a flexible approach to delivery.