



Cabinet Member Report for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning

Northampton Borough Council

8th December 2014

Town Centre Operations

In the lead up to the Christmas starting from 20th November, all Borough Council car parks will be offering additional free parking from 3pm on Thursdays to help shoppers take advantage of late night shopping evenings and support local traders.

The free parking offers have helped to bring more people into our town. In the three months between April and July, 23,000 more cars parked in the Council's multi-storey car parks on Saturdays, a jump of almost 40% compared to the number of people parking during the same period in 2013.

With so many more shoppers coming into the Town Centre, motorists are being reminded that some car parks fill up very quickly, particularly the Grosvenor, Mayorhold and St Johns multi-storey car parks. Other car parks are likely to be less busy but equally close to the Town Centre. Shoppers can make their journey simpler by planning ahead and checking the locations of other Council car parks including the Upper Mounts car park, Commercial Street and Midsummer Meadow car parks. The Council's parking team will be providing extra coverage in the multi storey car parks on Saturdays to assist drivers to find spaces and ensure everything runs smoothly.

This year Christmas in Northampton is bigger and brighter with seasonal decorations being extended along the Wellingborough Road with festive lights and 44 Christmas trees giving the area a seasonal feel. Wellingborough Road is an important gateway to the Town Centre, and we do all we can to support the many independent shops, businesses, restaurants and bars in the area and work with them to understand how we can improve the trading environment for everyone. We hope this will give a boost to this part of the town during this important trading period.

Regeneration

Work on the new £20m Castle Station is nearing completion and phase two will begin immediately afterwards. This will involve demolition of the old station buildings and construction of a new multi-storey car park, making way for development of the rest of the station site.

The new car park will have at least 1,300 spaces, around 350 more than are currently available, and there will also be a lift and bridge, offering passengers direct access to the ticket floor of the station. Once this is complete, the old car park will be removed ready for start on phase three, which will see construction of commercial and light industrial properties.

The new station is vital for first impressions of our town. There is so much potential on the rest of the site, and we are now gearing up to unlock that, while creating excellent new parking facilities to complement our new station. Our discussions with Network Rail are well advanced, and we should be in a position to start construction in 2015.

The old Greyfriars bus station and office building will be demolished in a controlled initiated collapse by the end of March 2015. The contractor working for the Borough Council, DSM Ltd, has been working in the building since August carrying out preparatory work to establish the safest and quickest way to bring it down.

Their investigations have shown that the most effective way to demolish Greyfriars is using a method called controlled initiated collapse. This is a widely-used process within the construction industry, and will bring down the building within its own footprint in a matter of seconds. After the demolition, teams of specialist cleaners will immediately move in to clean up the resulting dust so that roads, businesses and homes near to the demolition site can return to normal as soon as possible.

Detailed plans are now being put into place for the collapse. Both the Health and Safety Executive and Northamptonshire Police will be involved in the planning process, which will include arrangements for road closures and for the temporary relocation of people from homes and businesses near the site when the controlled initiated collapse takes place. Nearby residents and owners of local businesses will be kept informed throughout the process of planning the demolition. Once the old Greyfriars building has been brought down, the site will be left ready for development for retail and leisure uses, with some public transport facilities.

Following the Cabinet decision on 12th November the Borough Council will now proceed with a plan to buy Albion House, an office building adjacent to St John's on Victoria Promenade, because of its key location between the Town Centre, the Cultural Quarter, the planned new University of Northampton Waterside Campus and the Enterprise Zone.

Purchasing the site will give the Borough Council the ability to develop it for uses that would help to enhance the Town Centre and the Enterprise Zone, and it would also provide an opportunity to extend St John's multi-storey car park. The site could provide 350 new spaces, to add to the existing 485 spaces in St John's car park.

On 12th November the Cabinet agreed to investigate the potential benefits and opportunities that could come from selling part of the Council's Westbridge Depot to a company that could build a new power station. Through a waste-to-energy initiative, Northampton could be generating its own electricity and heat for the first time since 1975. The proposed new plant would be fuelled by the non-recyclable proportion of household waste that would otherwise be sent to land fill at a saving to council taxpayers. This is exactly the sort of initiative we should be exploring as we look to give our town a bright future. But first we must assess whether this is the right option for Northampton and what the potential benefits are for our town.

As the Enterprise Zone develops we are seeing more demand for hotel space from business people looking to stay a few nights in our town. We regularly see West End quality productions at the Royal & Derngate and can boast regionally important attractions such as 78 Derngate and the Northampton Museum and Art Gallery. We also have three professional sports teams that bring people to our town from across Europe.

Work has started on an exciting new development that will bring a major new hotel and restaurant into the Town Centre. Based in the Cultural Quarter, a new 104 bedroom Premier Inn hotel with restaurant is being constructed on the former Albion Place car park. The work will also see a number of poor quality buildings removed as the hotel takes shape. The £8 million Northampton Alive project will create around 50 jobs and give visitors to Northampton easy access to the Town Centre and the attractions of the Cultural Quarter. Work on the new hotel and restaurant will be completed by Reef Estates and open before the end of 2015.

The improved Guildhall Road has now reopened, providing an enhanced environment for the Cultural Quarter and its occupants. The wider pavements will enable a number of daytime and evening uses and activities.

Councillor Tim Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning