Review of Boundaries in Corby Town Centre

Part 2 Local Plan for Corby Background Paper

July 2016
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1. Purpose of the Background Paper

1.1 During the process of preparing the Part 2 Local Plan for Corby a number of background papers have been prepared that provide further information relating to certain policy areas. This is one such paper and it is concerned with defining the Town Centre boundary, primary shopping area (PSA) and primary and secondary retail frontages within Corby Town Centre. This paper was initially prepared in December 2008 (see paragraph 5.1 below) to inform the emerging Site Specific Allocations Development Plan Document and subsequently refreshed in February 2015 in order to reflect updated circumstances, evidence base documents prepared and changes to national planning policy. This latest update takes into account the changes which have occurred since February 2015 and applies a Town Centre Boundary in addition to the PSA and retail frontages.

2. Introduction

2.1 Major regeneration projects over the last decade have transformed Corby Town Centre into a vibrant and exciting place. The town centre now boasts the iconic Corby Cube, international sized swimming pool, Willow Place shopping centre, brand new multiplex cinema and land has been cleared to make way for further redevelopment opportunities. A retail report published in February 2011 confirms that Corby Town Centre is healthy and performing well. In particular the positive influence of Willow Place Shopping Centre is observed. Further expansion of attractions and the retail offer continue to be promoted by the Council to capitalise on improvements and support the vitality and economy of the town.

2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) encourages local planning authorities to pursue town centre policies which support their vitality and viability. Paragraph 23 of the National Framework states that planning policies should be positive, promote competitive town centre environments and set out policies for the management of centres over the plan period.

2.3 Paragraph 23 also states that in drawing up Local Plans, Local Planning Authorities should:

‘Define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, based on a clear definition of primary and secondary frontages in designated centres, and set policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in such locations’.

3. Policy Context

3.1 This report should be read alongside the ‘Assessment of Retail Network and Hierarchy’ report prepared by Corby Borough Council in June 2016 available at http://www.corby.gov.uk/home/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/planning-
policy-consultations. This identifies and describes the Town’s current (and proposed) retail centres outside of the main Town Centre and places the higher order centres within Corby’s strategic retail hierarchy. The report includes an assessment of current town centre and retail policies within the NPPF and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), and looks at a number of other national publications including the Portas Review. A review of the local and strategic retail policies - including the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (ICS) which was adopted in July 2016 - is also included in the Assessment. Therefore this report makes no attempt to repeat information which can read elsewhere.


4.1 Saved Local Plan policies P3(S) and P4(S) set out the current extent of the ‘primary shopping core area’ and ‘secondary shopping area’ within the Corby Town Centre boundary. The Local Plan did not define separate primary and secondary frontages. The retailing chapter of the Local Plan can be viewed on the Council’s website by using the following link http://www.corby.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/planning-making/saved-local-plan-policies/corby-borough

5. Current Situation and Changing Circumstances

5.1 To support the production of a replacement Local Plan which commenced in 2006 (subsequently abandoned), analysis of the retail areas in the town centre was undertaken and the details reported in the ‘Retail Background Paper: Redefining the Primary Shopping Area and shopping frontage designations’4. The background paper set out the boundary for the primary shopping area and primary shopping (retail) frontage based on analysis of the town centre in October 2008. Significantly, the background paper extended the primary shopping area along Willow Place towards Westcott Way on the assumption that the approved planning permission for ‘Evolution Corby’ - a comprehensive redevelopment following the completion of Willow Place that was to provide a large increase in premium retail floorspace including a flagship store, residential accommodation, leisure facilities, car parking and extensive public realm improvements - would provide a high proportion of retail uses.

5.2 The ownership of the town centre has changed hands twice since the 2008 background paper was prepared. Helical Bar, who acquired it in October 2011, confirmed during their tenure that the ‘Evolution Corby’ project would not be taking place. A planning application was subsequently submitted on that location for a multi screen cinema and restaurants.

5.3 In February 2015 Helical Bar sold 700,000 sq ft of land including Corporation Street, Oasis Retail Park and Willow Place and the multi-storey car park to Europa Capital Partners and Sovereign Land.

5.4 The Government introduced new Permitted Development rights in May 2013, allowing main town centre uses below a certain size to change temporarily to a flexible retail or office use for a period of two years. This too has had an impact on the retail environment in Corby Town Centre.

4 ‘Retail Background Paper: Redefining the Primary Shopping Area and shopping frontage designations’ is available at http://www.corby.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Retail%20background%20Paper%20Appendix%201.pdf
6. Objectives

6.1 Retail designations in the saved Local Plan are nearly twenty years old. Furthermore there have been significant changes to the town centre and national planning policy since the publication of the 2008 Retail Background Paper. In this context the objectives for this background paper are threefold:

- Define the options for the extent of the Town Centre boundary;
- Review and define options for the extent of the Primary Shopping Area (PSA); and
- Review and define options for the extent of the primary and secondary retail frontage designations.

6.2 This background paper will inform the preparation of the Part 2 Local Plan for Corby.

7. Methodology

7.1 It is critical when investigating and defining the retail designations that a consistent and transparent approach is adopted. A survey was undertaken of the town centre to ascertain the extent and use class of the existing and proposed units. This has allowed the Council to map and identify where the higher concentrations of shops can be found, signifying the core retail areas of the centre.

7.2 A review of relevant planning guidance and applications allowed the most up to date data to be used when the survey was conducted in July 2016. Furthermore, the consideration of representations made during the Local Plan process will allow public opinion and stakeholders to contribute to the further development of this background paper.

7.3 The National Framework defines the Town Centre, Primary Shopping Area (PSA), Primary and Secondary Retail Frontages in ‘Annex 2: Glossary’:

Town centres: Area defined on the local authority’s proposal map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. References to town centres or centres apply to city centres, town centres, district centres and local centres but exclude small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significant. Unless they are identified as centres in Local Plans, existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses, do not constitute town centres.

Primary Shopping Area: Defined area where retail development is concentrated (generally comprising the primary and those secondary frontages which are adjoining and closely related to the primary shopping frontage).

Primary and secondary frontages: Primary frontages are likely to include a high proportion of retail uses which may include food, drinks, clothing and household goods. Secondary frontages provide greater opportunities for a diversity of uses such as restaurants, cinemas and businesses.
8. **Town Centre Boundary**

8.1 As noted above the NPPF defines a town centre as including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. Annex 2 of the NPPF defines main town centre uses as:

*Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment facilities, the more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, night-clubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres, and bingo halls); offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities).*

8.2 Once the PSA boundary has been set (see paragraph 10), the options for the approach to defining Corby Town Centre’s boundary were considered as follows:

1) Assume that the Town Centre boundary will be no larger than the primary and secondary retail frontages and PSA boundaries and therefore a new boundary definition is not provided; or

2) Assume that the town centre boundary is larger/different than the primary and secondary frontages and PSA boundaries and, therefore, provide a new distinct separate boundary by undertaking a bespoke assessment to understand whether the secondary frontage boundary is applicable or whether a separate boundary is required.

8.3 It is considered that a bespoke assessment should be undertaken for Corby Town Centre (option 2). Option 1 is likely to be more appropriate to centres whose secondary retail frontage includes all of the main town centre uses outlines above. These are likely to be smaller centres which do not possess uses such as offices and leisure/art/cultural facilities. In contrast, within the larger centre of Corby, office, leisure and cultural facilities are present outside of the main retail area. Moreover, even if the town centre boundary is demonstrated to match the secondary frontages area, a town centre boundary definition must still be shown in order to respond to paragraph 23 of the NPPF.

8.4 The approach to delineating town centre boundaries used in the ‘Assessment of Retail Network and Hierarchy’ report has been adopted by the Council in taking forward option 2. Briefly this seeks to define the Town Centre Boundary based around Corby’s PSA boundary and other main town centre uses which relate strongly to the PSA. A plan showing the proposed Town Centre boundary is set out in Appendix 1.

9. **Primary Shopping Area**

9.1 Corby had a longstanding clearly identifiable PSA where retail development was concentrated with little in the way of intermediate areas. The retail background paper published in December 2008 defined the PSA as the land bounded by George Street, Alexandra Road, Elizabeth Street and Westcott Way. Development which has taken place since 2008 such as the Cube, swimming pool and cinema, could arguably now be considered to fall within the PSA (in addition to the wider Town Centre Boundary) under the NPPF definition of *secondary retail frontage* – which gives a specific examples including restaurants and cinemas – and a PSA definition which can include secondary frontages ‘which are adjoining and closely related to the primary shopping frontage’.
Options:

1) Retain the primary shopping area used in the 2008 ‘Retail Background Paper: Redefining the Primary Shopping Area and shopping frontage designations’ as shown in Appendix 2 of this report; or

2) Include all of the primary frontage area plus part or all of the secondary frontage area, based on the assessment of Corby Town Centre. This option is consistent with the Joint Core Strategy and the National Framework; or

3) Retain the existing ‘Primary Shopping Core Area’ as identified in the 1997 Local Plan. This option is not considered reasonable because the Willow Place Shopping Centre falls outside the designation; or

4) No defined retail boundaries and policy. This is not considered a reasonable option as it would be contrary to the National Framework and would remove the Council’s ability to protect the retail function of Corby Town Centre.

9.2 Given the significant changes that have taken place in Corby Town Centre in recent years the Council feels that only an up-to-date bespoke assessment of the Town Centre (option 2) would provide a robust PSA boundary which could be used to help inform future town centre policies. The assessment will highlight those parts of the defined secondary frontages which adjoin and are closely related to the primary frontages. This will examine the physical relationship of the two sets of frontages, including whether there is a seamless physical relationship between part or all of the two frontages or whether there is physical separation (via roads or non-town centre uses) and whether there is a distinct change in the retail character in the secondary area which prompts a distinction to be made. Option 2 therefore allows the local circumstances of Corby Town Centre to be taken into account, in particular allowing for a distinction to be made between a retail area which contains a varied and valuable mix of uses which contribute to town centre health and attractiveness but which are not dominated by A1 uses and those areas where A1 retailing remains the most important use.

9.3 The approach to delineating the Primary Shopping Area used in the ‘Assessment of Retail Network and Hierarchy’ report has been adopted by the Council in taking forward option 2. Briefly this seeks to define the Primary Shopping Area based on the characteristics and relationship of the primary frontage area and secondary frontage area. A plan showing the proposed Primary Shopping Area is set out in Appendix 2.

10. Primary and Secondary Retail Frontages

10.1 To ascertain where the primary and secondary frontages should be drawn, a plan of the Town Centre was created showing the mix of uses following completion of a retail survey undertaken in July 2016. This demonstrated the proportion of retail uses across the Town Centre, and identified where the higher concentrations of shops could be found.

10.2 The survey demonstrated the greatest concentration of A1 retail uses were clustered together within the central part of Corporation Street and Willow Place. Spencer Court and Queen’s Square relate well to both concentrations and contain a high proportion of A1 retail uses themselves. It is important to maintain a high concentration of A1 retail uses in order to establish connectivity between the two greatest concentrations and therefore prevent segregation. A copy of the plan showing the Town Centre use classes as at July 2016 is attached at Appendix 4.
10.3 This process provided preliminary indications to where the frontage boundaries might be drawn. Higher proportions of retail uses will be identifiable (suggesting a primary retail frontage) compared to the areas with a higher diversity of uses (signifying a potential secondary retail frontage).

Options:

1) Due to the designation of a primary shopping area within the Town Centre it could be argued that the inclusion of secondary retail frontages is unnecessary. The primary shopping area encourages a concentration of retail uses but allows for the diversity and mix of uses, which is the same flexibility that designating secondary retail frontages would bring. Therefore this option only identifies primary retail frontages within the primary shopping area.

2) Define primary and secondary retail frontages. The map at Appendix 4 shows a clear distinction between the areas of high A1 retail uses to those with a mix of non-A1 retail. These areas of mixed uses can be identified as including the two blocks fronting both Corporation Street and George Street, and the blocks fronting onto New Post Office Square. The NPPF states that secondary frontages provide greater opportunity for a diversity of uses such as restaurants, cinemas and businesses. This option therefore supplements the PSA designation to allow for a variety of uses within the town centre and respond more quickly to changes in the retail sector. These separate classifications and focus on the primary retail frontages will help to ensure that a high proportion of retail uses will remain at the key locations across the Town Centre.

3) No frontage designations. This option is not considered a reasonable alternative because it is contrary to the NPPF and the Joint Core Strategy. It was also not taken forward due to the importance of frontage designations in maintaining Corby’s attractiveness as a shopping destination, as a concentration of retail facilities contributes strongly to the vitality and viability of any centre.

10.4 The approach to delineating the primary and secondary retail frontages used in the ‘Assessment of Retail Network and Hierarchy’ report has been adopted by the Council in taking forward option 2. Briefly this seeks to define the primary retail frontage on the basis of the distribution of town centre uses. A plan showing the proposed primary and secondary retail frontages is set out in Appendix 3.

11. Feedback

11.1 This updated retail hierarchy and network assessment provides part of the evidence base to inform the consultation on the issues and options document which is the first formal stage in the production of the Part 2 Local Plan for Corby. At this stage of consultation we will be seeking views as to what the Local Plan should contain in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

11.2 We have attempted to be as comprehensive as possible and identify all the important issues which need to be considered in determining retail boundaries for Corby Town Centre that need to be addressed in preparing the Part 2 Plan for Corby. Further information on Town Centre and retail issues in Corby is also available in the Issues and Options document. You may, however, feel something important has been missed. If this is the case, please let us know what the issue is in as much detail as possible. It should be noted that it is not necessary to simply repeat policies in the Joint Core Strategy or National Planning Policy Framework. The policies and proposals that are included in the Part 2 Plan for Corby should add some local value that is particular to the Borough.
Existing research and evidence, including consultation with the public and stakeholders over the last few years, has been used to identify the planning issues and options within this consultation document that we think should be addressed in the Part 2 Plan for Corby.

There are a number of ways you can respond:

**Email:** [Localplans.consultation@corby.gov.uk](mailto:Localplans.consultation@corby.gov.uk)

**Post:** Part 2 Local Plan for Corby consultation
Local Plans
Corby Borough Council
Deene House, New Post Office Square
Corby
Northamptonshire
NN17 1GD

All representations must be received by 5pm on Tuesday 20th December 2016.

The consultation will be undertaken in accordance with the North Northamptonshire Statement of Community Involvement. This will involve:

- Copies being made available for public viewing at the Corby Cube, mobile library and the Council’s website;
- Email to stakeholders informing them of the document and publicity on social media; and
- A series of public consultation events.

All comments received during the six week period of consultation will be considered carefully by the Council and used to inform the next stage in the process which will be the publication of refined options. This will be subject to public consultation in 2017. This will lead to the development of a Draft Plan which will be subject to a period of representations in 2018. The finalised document will be submitted to the Secretary of State for examination by an independent Planning Inspector.

**Data Protection**

All comments received will be used in the plan making process. Please note that responses cannot be treated as confidential and will be made available for public inspection. All responses will be able to be viewed at the Council’s offices and online. By sending the Council your details you will automatically be informed of future consultations on planning policy documents unless you indicate otherwise.
Appendix 1 – Proposed Town Centre Boundary
Appendix 2 – Proposed Primary Shopping Area
Appendix 3 – Proposed Primary and Secondary Retail Frontages
Appendix 4 – Town Centre Use Classes (at July 2016)