

City Centre Action Plan

St Mary Street & Northam Road Background Paper

August 2013



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This background document accompanies the Submission Document and outlines some background in relation to the section on St Mary Street and Northam Road. This document is not on deposit for consultation and is background evidence.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the document

1.1.1 Policy AP 37 in the City Centre Action Plan covers St Mary Street and Northam Road. This paper provides evidence to support the approach to this part of the city centre.

1.2 Structure of the document

1.2.1 The paper is set out as follows:

- The National Planning Policy Framework
- Core Strategy & Local Plan Review
- Regeneration strategies
- Background evidence
- How the policy has emerged
- Justification of the approach:
 - Approach to Northam Road
 - Reduction in protected retail area in St Mary Street

1.2.2 This document is a background document to the LDF City Centre Action Plan.

2. The policy framework

2.1 National guidance

2.1.1 National guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recognises the need to plan for town centres (applying to all centres apart from small parades of shops). Paragraph 23 states that local authorities should 'set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the plan period' and, where town centres are in decline, 'should plan positively for their future to encourage economic activity'. Policies should be based on evidence including the role and function of town centres and the relationship between them, considering trends in the performance of centres (paragraph 161).

2.1.2 Paragraph 56 in the NPPF recognises the importance of good design as a key aspect of sustainable development and making places better for people.

2.2 Core Strategy & Local Plan Review

2.2.1 Policy REI 6 in the Local Plan Review identifies St Mary Street as a local centre. It states that local centres provide for the day to day needs of local residents and the policy sought to consolidate and enhance the existing retail provision and integrate new development. There was flexibility in the policy on the uses appropriate which included retail and food and drink uses (A1-A5), leisure, social, community or employment uses and residential above ground floor.

2.2.2 Policy MSA 12 in the Local Plan Review divided the St Mary's area into four subsections and set out what development proposals were expected to deliver for these areas:

- a. Northam Road shopping area;
- b. St Mary Street local centre;
- c. Land bounded by Ascupart Street, Golden Grove, Clifford Street and St Mary Street (extending beyond the local centre boundary);

- d. Land bounded by Kingsland Square, St Mary's Place. St Mary Street and 53 St Mary Street (extending beyond the local centre boundary).
- 2.2.3 Existing commercial frontages were protected in Northam Road and St Mary Street local centre (a. and b. above) with only shops and offices permitted on the ground floor at Northam Road. A wider mix of uses including residential at ground floor (outside the local centre designation) is permitted in the other two sub areas. In addition to the policy affecting these subareas, policy MSA 12 seeks improvements to the local environment and improved linkages to the city centre and surrounding areas.
- 2.2.4 Policy CS 3 in the Core Strategy updates the policy on centres. It sets out a hierarchy of centres in Southampton from the city centre to a network of local centres. St Mary Street is no longer identified as a local centre as it is now within the extended city centre boundary (and the city centre designation supersedes the local centre designation). Although St Marys is now part of the city centre, it is protected from large scale developments as policy CS 3 states that new development must be at a scale appropriate to the size and role of the centre.

2.3 Regeneration strategies and programmes

- 2.3.1 The St Marys area is part of the Bevois and Bargate area which received £26m Single Regeneration Budget Round (SRB) 2 grant funding from the government in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This delivered hundreds to new homes, jobs and investment including the Bellway housing development of 83 homes and a new doctors surgery and Voluntary Action Centre in St Mary Street and public realm improvements and the restoration of shops and flats on Northam Road.
- 2.3.2 The City Council's Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (2006-2010) identified 11 priority neighbourhoods where disadvantage was concentrated including Bevois and Bargate. The strategy committed to target these areas and the accompanying Bevois and Bargate Action Plan (2006) set out the actions needed to address local issues in the area and build on the success of the SRB 2 programme.

3. Background evidence

3.1 St Marys Study (Savills, 2009)

- 3.1.1 In order to inform the CCAP, Savills produced a study on the future of St Mary Street / Northam Road. This study split St Mary Street / Northam Road into 4 areas and suggested:
- A St Marys Street Northern Quarter (north of Kingsland and Jonas Nichols squares) - 'Local centre' type protection with residential only permitted on upper floors
 - B St Marys Street Southern Quarter (from Kingsland and Jonas Nichols squares south to St Marys churchyard) – wider mix of uses including limited high quality ground floor residential
 - C St Marys Street St Marys Church (south of City College) - residential development and facilities supporting City College
 - D Northam Road - wider range of uses; A1-A3 retail and cafes / restaurants, B1 office uses and limited residential uses at ground floor level

3.2 Land use survey (2010)

- 3.2.1 Land use surveys were undertaken for St Mary Street and Northam Road in July 2010. These were conducted by planning policy officers visiting the streets and noting the uses they saw. Both the streets had a high vacancy rate with 16% of units vacant in St Mary Street. These vacant units were primarily retail units. Of the occupied units, St Mary Street had a range of A1 units largely serving a local need such as hairdressers, convenience stores and local services. Over one quarter of the units surveyed were food and drink uses including a large number of takeaways. Although the survey was conducted within the previously designated Local Centre, four ground floor residential units were recorded.
- 3.2.2 Northam Road had less mixed land uses than St Mary Street with assorted A1 shops, a public house, a restaurant and office units. The shops included a small number of hairdressers and specialist shops connected to collectables and antiques. Over half of all units in Northam Road were vacant (or demolished).

4. **Emerging CCAP, SEA/SA and comments received**

4.1 Early stages of CCAP

- 4.1.1 The Issues and Options (April 2007) version of the CCAP identified the area between Kingsway and the River Itchen as the Eastern Regeneration Quarter. This large area included a diverse range of sites in St Marys, Chapel, Northam and on the Itchen Waterfront. It included sites at City College, the Deanery North and at the southern end of St Mary Street that have subsequently been developed since 2007.
- 4.1.2 For St Mary Street and Northam Road, two options were presented; introducing greater flexibility in the ground floor commercial uses acceptable there whilst continuing to reject ground floor residential uses; or alternatively removing restrictions on appropriate uses to allow ground floor residential uses.
- 4.1.3 The responses received to the Issues & Options paper highlighted the character of the area which should be celebrated, promoted and protected. Respondents identified the need for active frontages in St Mary Street and Northam Road and for environmental improvements throughout the area.
- 4.1.4 A number of meetings and events were held to inform the Preferred Approach paper. Comments from these generally focused on issues of connectivity. These included the severance effect of the Kingsway; the need to open up the East Street Centre into St Marys; and poor routes from the city centre core to the Holyrood estate and City College / St Marys. A St Mary's railway station was suggested to help address these issues.
- 4.1.5 The need for mixed communities and a good community offer including squares and meeting places, attractive to the wider community was raised in the Southampton Partnership event. An officer group recognised that St Marys is an area of acute poverty. However opportunities were noted due to the mix of ethnic minority shops, restaurants and cutting edge student enterprises, the potential draw of the ice rink (no longer progressing) and the underutilised Kingsland Place.
- 4.1.6 The Preferred Approach paper did not take forward the Eastern Regeneration Quarter but identified St Marys as a quarter with St Mary Street and Northam Road as a specific site (policy 37). The preferred approach was to require

proposals to respect the character of the street and encourage retail uses but allow ground floor residential uses. In St Mary Street, it was proposed that a smaller shopping area (than the local centre) was protected and designated as a secondary retail area. This provides the same protection as the East Street shopping centre and shops on the eastern end of East Street.

- 4.1.7 There was a focus on character and environmental improvements. The policy for Northam Road was to respect the character of street and encourage retail uses and those that offer a direct service to the public. The supporting text allowed ground floor residential uses.
- 4.1.8 As part of the consultation on the CCAP Preferred Approach, Planning Aid led two events in St Marys in February 2012; a workshop with invited participants and a drop-in event open to all, both held in the evening at City College. Issues raised during the workshop included the isolation felt in the area and the transport improvements required to address this; the vibrancy of the area; and the need for better promotion of the area. It was commented that St Mary Street should be maintained as shops with less residential development and that policy on Northam Road should reflect the concept of an antiques quarter with an auction house as Grays who own many of the properties are talking with the council. More details on the responses are set out in appendix 1.
- 4.1.9 A number of responses were received during the formal consultation on the Preferred Approach paper. Concerns were expressed over the impact of the proposed reduction in size of the protected shopping area in St Mary Street, the lack of guidance on smaller scale development (throughout the plan) and the description of decline in the area. Reference was also made to the long history of regeneration in the area and the council ignoring residents' views. There were requests to tackle parking problems and address transport issues including the severance effect of Kingsway and the Six Dials junction.
- 4.1.10 Following representations on the Preferred Approach paper and further investment secured for Northam Road, the Proposed Submission has revised the policy for Northam Road. Policy AP 37 states that ground floor residential uses will not be permitted in Northam Road. The supporting text has also been redrafted to reflect recent progress on Northam Road. Retail uses and those that offer a direct service to the public will be also 'supported' (instead of 'encouraged').

5. Justification for the policy

5.1 Approach to Northam Road

- 5.1.1 The Preferred Approach paper set out the approach to Northam Road. This was based on evidence in the St Marys Study (Savills, 2009), the land use survey (2010) and site visits to the area.
- 5.1.2 The Local Plan Review had included a restrictive policy to help deliver the vision for the regeneration of Northam Road as a centre for the antiques trade (paragraph 11.36). Despite this policy, when the Preferred Approach was drafted, Northam Road appeared to be declining with a large number of vacant properties and a decline of the fabric of buildings. The land use survey reported that over half of all units in Northam Road were either vacant or demolished. Although a planning application for the antiques centre had been approved, development had not commenced.

- 5.1.3 Responses were received during the consultation on the Preferred Approach which questioned the summary of the health of the area and suggested that the more flexibility proposed in the policy would harm the regeneration of the road. A dialogue was subsequently established between the major landowner (Grays) and planning officers. This confirmed that the landowners had plans for the area to be announced when funding was finalised with council.
- 5.1.4 In 2012 funding of £138,000 was approved for the restoration of the derelict buildings on Northam Road in a number of phases with Grays Developments committing to invest an additional £1.4m. This will deliver refurbished retail space, with a focus on antique and specialist retailing, and residential uses. This work has begun and planning permission has recently been granted for a three-storey extension to the rear of 10-10a Northam Road (a derelict building) in order to stabilise the building.
- 5.1.5 In addition to the council funding, in May 2013 Northam Road has received a High Street Renewal Award of £88,657. This is a national award split between seven areas to support progress on revitalising their high streets. Northam Road is the only award in the south of England.
- 5.1.6 After a long period of decline, the improvements to Northam Road are welcomed. The increased flexibility proposed in the Preferred Approach paper is not therefore taken forward and the policy will continue the approach and restrictions on non-retail uses of the Local Plan Review. This is in accordance with the approach of the NPPF to plan positively and encourage economic activity.

5.2 Changes in protected retail area in St Mary Street

- 5.2.1 St Mary Street and Northam Road were previously outside the city centre boundary. The character and uses on the streets were protected by Local Plan Review policies REI 6, which restricted uses within the local centre, and MSA 12 which sought to protect their character by further restricting ground floor residential uses in a larger area including all of Northam Road.
- 5.2.2 The CCAP proposes reducing the protected retail area in St Mary Street. The protected retail area will however be designated as a secondary retail frontage. The previous local centre extended from 101 – 145 St Mary Street and 63 – 86 St Mary Street and incorporated Kingsland Square. The proposed secondary retail frontage extends from 120 – 135 St Mary Street, 66 - 77 St Mary Street and Kingsland Square (see Map 1 overleaf).
- 5.2.3 The proposed secondary retail area protects the heart of the street and is focused around Kingsland Square and Jonas Nichols Square. It includes the listed St Marys Hall and three locally listed buildings; Bigland Bakery, Plume of Feathers and the Parish Centre. At the time of the survey, there was only one vacant retail unit within this area.
- 5.2.4 The units no longer safeguarded for retail include the block 101-119 St Mary Street which includes the derelict snooker hall at an upper level and the units opposite which are a mix of entrances to residential units and small shop units. The deletion of 101-119 provides more flexibility for the redevelopment of the block and to bring units back into use. To the south of the secondary retail area, the Hyde Housing office and residential units at 63 St Mary Street are excluded as they are not in retail use. The block 137-145 St Mary Street includes the Joiners PH. This block is not safeguarded as it is separated from the proposed retail area by James Street which provides a break in the frontage.

5.2.5 The reduction in the retail area will help concentrate retail uses in a smaller area and therefore address high vacancy levels. The core of the street remains safeguarded for retail. However, blocks to the north and south of this core can now be redeveloped for a wider range of uses. New residential schemes have been completed on St Mary Street in recent years. This shift in approach will provide the opportunity for high quality residential schemes to be developed in this area.

5.2.6 In addition to addressing retail uses, the policy requires development proposals to respect the character of the area and to seek local environmental improvements and improved linkages. This will ensure that development makes a positive contribution to the area.



Map 1 Changes to retail designations in St Mary Street

6. Conclusion

- 6.1.1 The policy for St Mary Street and Northam Road has evolved over the course of the plan preparation. The CCAP has provided the opportunity to reassess policy for these two streets. Different approaches are proposed; the regeneration works which are now underway in Northam Road are supported by maintaining restrictions on ground floor uses. In St Mary Street, the policy has changed and seeks to concentrate retail development within the core of the street. This provides the opportunity to redevelop peripheral blocks for mixed and non-retail uses. In addition to guidance on appropriate uses, the policy includes the requirement for proposals to respect the character of the area with high quality design, environmental improvements and improved linkages. This will be fundamental to the success of the area.

Appendix 1 St Marys workshop (9.2.12) and drop-in session (23.2.12)

As part of the consultation on the CCAP Preferred Approach, Planning Aid led two events in St Marys; a workshop with invited participants and a drop-in event open to all, both held in the evening at City College. The workshop was attended by 18 people including six Planning Aid representatives and two Southampton City Council planners. After a presentation about the proposals, the group discussed areas where the policy was unclear and suggested improvements to St Marys.

The discussion highlighted the isolation felt in the area; the lack of bus services, poor pedestrian and cycle links and poor signage. There was a request for the plan to include more detail on planned improvements and timescales for these. The group discussed the future of the area, highlighting the areas success historically and its cultural richness. It was commented that St Mary Street should be maintained as shops with less residential development and that policy on Northam Road should reflect the concept of an antiques quarter with an auction house (as the planning permission granted in 2005 is still valid). Despite an apparent lack of progress, Grays who own many of the properties are talking with the council and a transformation may be seen in a matter of months if agreement can be reached about what actions the council need to do. Other suggestions include making the most of City College and Solent University, revisiting design guidance and prioritising public realm improvements, better promotion of St Marys and community-led regeneration.

The drop-in session was attended by around 25 people, including a small overlap with the workshop participants. There was the opportunity for people to find out about proposals for the city centre and to record comments. The following summarises the comments recorded on Post-It notes:

- What is unique about St Mary's? – its character, history, community spirit
- How does it relate to the city centre? – in the past; old shopping district and home of Southampton's mother church, currently; physically separated by dual carriageway, loss of Kingsland Market and not appreciated or marketed although it is the most international, culturally diverse part of the city
- What would improve the area? – restoration and protection of historic buildings and shops; major investment in infrastructure including community areas and leisure facilities; cheap short stay parking; sympathetic development of Itchen waterfront; and tackling problem drinking
- Threats to the area? – complacency (if you think nothing will happen, then it won't); need for restoration and protection of shops and market
- Comments on Morrison's supermarket proposal – good idea; redevelops East Street Shopping Centre; improves connection with the city; but concern expressed that the layout will block city off from St Marys Street
- Other comments – suggestions for housing on St Mary's Street and Chapel; protection of Northam Road; highway work to Brinton Road; stronger licensing; an extra ferry to Hythe and a rail terminal behind Dock Gate 4; protecting parks and making key roads more 'green'; concern that activity will shift westwards with new development west of WestQuay.