

D2 THE TOWN CENTRE

OBJECTIVES

- D2/a To provide a vibrant town centre which is located at the heart of Northstowe where it will be as accessible to all of the town's population as is possible by walking, cycling and public transport;**
- D2/b To maximise accessibility and usability within the town centre;**
- D2/c To provide a town centre with shops, services, cultural, leisure and community facilities to serve the needs of Northstowe and the immediately surrounding area which will not undermine the vitality and viability of nearby market towns or compete with Cambridge;**
- D2/d To provide a town centre with a large number and range of comparison and convenience shops and other units and spaces which will create an attractive urban environment at the heart of Northstowe;**
- D2/e To ensure that no single store sells such a range of comparison and convenience goods that it would threaten the development of the remainder of the town centre;**
- D2/f To create a high quality and varied built and open space environment where people will wish to shop and find their services and facilities, both day and evening;**
- D2/g To support the success of the town centre by locating uses which will generate additional custom and activity in and around the centre including employment, housing and other services and facilities which will provide the opportunity to combine trips;**
- D2/h To provide access to the wider road network for visitors to the town centre and car parking of a scale appropriate to a modest sized town with a limited catchment area;**
- D2/i To secure an early start to the development of the town centre to help create an identity for Northstowe at the earliest opportunity.**

POLICY NS/7 The Town Centre

Town Centre Location

- a) The detailed location of the town centre at Northstowe will be determined as part of the Masterplan to be approved by the local planning authority and will be:**
 - (i) Close to the geographical centre of the town where it will be most accessible to the population of Northstowe as a whole;**
 - (ii) Within rather than on the edge of Northstowe, somewhat to the east of Rampton Drift; and**
 - (iii) On the dedicated local busway route through the town in order to maximise accessibility to all of the town's residents.**

Town Centre Form

- b) The town centre will make provision for such a range of shops, services, cultural, leisure and community facilities that will serve the needs of Northstowe and the immediately surrounding area without undermining the vitality and viability of nearby village centres, market towns or compete with Cambridge.**
- c) The town centre will be developed in the format of a linear market town high street, reflecting the traditional form of Cambridgeshire market towns, with a water feature at its heart, which is part of the town's surface water drainage system.**
- d) The town centre will be designed and laid out to provide squares and other meeting places to which the public has unconstrained access and which will provide opportunities for Northstowe's residents to socialise as well as to shop.**
- e) Car parking provision will be included in the form of public car parks for the town centre of a size consistent with its role as a small market town.**

Vitality and viability

- f) A Town Centre Strategy for Northstowe must be submitted and approved prior to the granting of planning permission. It will be implemented as part of the planning obligation for the development of the new town. The Town Centre Strategy will provide detailed guidance on the overall size, mix of uses, urban design and measures required to provide early support for the development of the town centre. The Strategy will include tying**

the development of key retail, services and other facilities in the town centre to stages in the development of the housing at Northstowe.

- g) Development of the town centre will begin no later than 3 years after the commencement of development of Northstowe.**

Location

- D2.1 In most towns, the town centre is to be found where the town was originally established. Where there have been no geographical constraints to development, many town centres are still to be found in the middle of the towns that have grown up around them. Sometimes, geography intervenes and towns such as St Ives have their centre to one side of the town because the original settlement was based on the river crossing.
- D2.2 At Northstowe the town centre will be located broadly in the geographical centre of the site to ensure that its shops, services and facilities are as accessible as possible to the maximum number of its residents. Developed as a compact town, most parts of Northstowe will be relatively close to the town centre which will help to ensure the success of the town centre and allow a sustainable town to be developed with car as least preferred mode – i.e. maximise access by walk, cycle and public transport.
- D2.3 Placing the town centre on the dedicated local busway through Northstowe will increase accessibility to those parts of the town furthest from the centre. The town centre will also provide shops and facilities not found in surrounding villages and therefore access by road to car parks to the north and south of the town centre will also be important, and by footpaths and cycleways linking across the areas of Green Separation.
- D2.4 The centre of Northstowe will lie close to the main building complex at Oakington Barracks. Some of the present buildings may be capable of being incorporated into the development and others may have potential to be used on an interim basis by service providers and could even be converted to provide some local shopping during the early phases of development. However, a long-term view needs to be taken of the development of Northstowe. Once established, like any town Northstowe will be home to generations of residents. It is therefore important to ensure that the best possible plan is produced to ensure that it serves its residents as well as is possible.
- D2.5 The presence of the existing housing at Rampton Drift will have a bearing on the location of the town centre as these houses are relatively centrally located within the site. The impact of the town centre on this local community will be minimised by the town centre being located somewhat to the east and separate from Rampton Drift.

Town Centre Form and Uses

- D2.6 Creating an attractive and successful town centre for Northstowe will be challenging. The centres of Cambridgeshire's market towns have grown up over many centuries and their variety and number of shops and commercial premises owes much to the age of both the businesses and the buildings in which they are located. Without intervention, the commercial sector is likely to provide a few large retail units which are highly efficient for shopping but create very poor town centre environments.
- D2.7 The town centre will be THE main defining feature of Northstowe by which it will be judged by its residents and visitors. It will be crucial to create a town centre where people want to be even when the shops are shut because it has the best environment in the whole town and provides a range of opportunities to socialise into the evening. It is also important that it offers locations and facilities to hold community events. The mix of uses will be crucial to this as will be creating a town centre where people live and will help support many of its facilities. Creating attractive landmark buildings and spaces will also be vital in order that Northstowe town centre will be a place worthy of its residents.
- D2.8 Town centre uses will include shops, restaurants, public houses/bars commercial services (such as banks, building societies, post office) commercial leisure uses such as a cinema, library, health facilities, cultural facilities, places of worship and public services including the administrative buildings for Northstowe (a Town Council will be needed) (see also chapter on Community Facilities, Leisure, Art and Culture including Community Development). Locating employment at the southern end of the town centre on the approach roads from the A14 will ensure that people working in Northstowe will have safe and convenient access to its shops and facilities and help support a viable and vital town centre (see also Employment chapter).
- D2.9 The District Council will have co-sponsored a study to establish how much shopping floorspace should be located in the town centre and the types and mix of uses which will help to secure a successful and vibrant town centre. This study will lead to the production of a Town Centre Strategy which will be implemented as part of the planning obligation for the development of the new town and help in the determining of planning applications to ensure the staged development of the town centre as a whole, and in particular the early start to the development of the town centre in order to provide a heart to Northstowe as early as possible. An early start on the development of the town centre at Northstowe will be important not only to give Northstowe an identity but also to ensure that the rapid build up of population has available to it the services and facilities that its residents would expect to find in a growing town. After 3 years of development, Northstowe will have in the region of 2,000 dwellings and a population of some 5,000 persons.

D2.10 The form of the town centre will be crucial to its success in terms of achieving a place that is attractive and convenient as a destination for shopping and leisure. This will take the form of a market town high street, the typical form and character of Cambridgeshire's market towns and will include a market square. The generally elongated site for Northstowe lends itself to developing such a linear 'High Street' form of development. This could include a more concentrated centre that clusters around a town centre stop on the dedicated public transport route. It will have a larger town square as a key focal point for entertainment and gathering. The town centre will have water at its heart which is a typical feature of Cambridgeshire market towns and a very popular focus for activity.

Vitality and viability

D2.11 The vitality and viability of the town centre is likely to need support to ensure that sufficient custom is offered to retailers and service providers, particularly during the early years of development. In addition to the resident population of Northstowe as a whole, this can be assisted by:

- The town centre also being home to many of the town's residents – for example living above its shops, services and facilities;
- Mixing retailing with services and facilities such that undertaking one trip provides the opportunity to combine the journey with another purpose;
- Locating uses which can generate business activity in addition to the people normally living in Northstowe, most importantly locating the town business district in or adjacent to the centre will generate a significant amount of extra business during the working day.

D2.12 It is expected that residents of Longstanton and Oakington will find the town centre of Northstowe particularly attractive for its shops and services. In addition to the opportunity to visit the town centre by car, the cycle and footpath network in Northstowe will be extended to serve these two villages.

D2.13 It will be important to ensure that Northstowe's town centre is not so large that it threatens the viability of nearby towns and villages although it is inevitable that some changes elsewhere will occur. It is important that any such consequences are identified in advance and that change is managed. The study referred to above will also address these issues.