

Report of the Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel

District Centres Inquiry

September 2009 – January 2010



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Contents

Contents	Page
Chair's Foreword	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	10
Background	12
Key Principles for Successful Town and District Centres	14
Shirley Town Centre	16
Portswood District Centre	18
Bitterne District Centre	19
Woolston District Centre	21
Lordshill District Centre	25
General Findings	27
Conclusions	34
Appendices	35

Chair's Foreword

The focus of the inquiry has been to develop recommendations that protect and aid the prosperity of Southampton's four district centres and one town centre. The Panel members were keen to gain a greater understanding of each centre and how Council policy impacts upon them. The Panel invited a wide range of interested parties from Cabinet Members, Council Officers dealing with areas such as parking, planning, public art and economic development, experts on town centre management, an authority with best practice, ward councillors, and local traders/residents. On behalf of the Panel I wish to thank all those that gave up their free time to get involved, which aided our understanding and helped us to identify areas where Southampton City Council can play an improved role.

It is clear that our centres are very diverse and face differing challenges. Shirley is Southampton's only town centre. It has had very significant investment from the local authority with highways improvements and the private sector with a new supermarket. Similarly, to a lesser degree, Portswood has secured reasonable levels of investment and it will soon benefit from a new supermarket. Both centres fair well, with better than average trading and lower levels of retail vacancies.

Bitterne has lacked the investment in its public realm and is dominated by 1960's style architecture. Local traders have successfully formed a traders association that has introduced a weekly market to the centre. The market has reversed the decline and encouraged new customers. The income from the market has provided funds for attractions such as Christmas lights. Despite the progress made, it is recognised that future investment will be required in the infrastructure of the centre.

Lordshill is a very different district centre, with fewer shops in its parade and is dominated by the supermarket and large open air car park. The focus for future investment and improvements in the centre has to be considered in context for the Lordshill master plan. Following the Buildings Schools for the Future programme with the planned investment in the new Academy, and the proposed Estates Regeneration, there will be opportunities to redevelop land around the Centre to change its shape and appearance.

The Panel recognised the immediate challenges faced by Woolston District Centre. The economic downturn and the resultant delays in the Centenary Quay site have placed the centre under very real threat as the level of trade has declined adversely. Hence it was pleasing to learn that the Administration had sought to divert resources from City Centre Management to this centre. This use of resources is commendable, but the Panel recognises the challenges being faced.

The recommendations from the Panel vary from quick wins with minimal resource implications to long-term significant capital programmes. The inquiry identified the need for improvements to promoting free parking in Council owned car parks within district centres, and increasing 1 hour on-street car parking where possible. The Panel recognised the best practice adopted by other Authorities and recommended the need for a district centre co-ordinator to act as a link between the Council, traders and community interests. Longer term the Panel recognised that there is a real need to develop a capital programme for investing in the public realm and investing in legible cities to promote the district centres.

Councillor Michael Ball
Chair of the Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel

Executive Summary

1. Southampton's main city-wide planning document, the Core Strategy, identifies that Southampton has 1 town centre, Shirley, and 4 district centres, Bitterne, Lordshill, Portswood and Woolston.
2. Recognising the importance of Southampton's town and district centres, and the impact that an under performing centre can have on a local community, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC), at its meeting on 18th June 2009, requested that the Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel undertake a full inquiry into District Centres and report back their findings to the OSMC in February 2010.
3. The approved objectives of the Inquiry are:
 - To examine the project development and planning process for the Shirley Town Centre development and the key lessons from this work
 - To examine the successful development of a district centre in another city, how this involved any local traders and the outcomes achieved
 - To examine the key factors that contribute to the stimulation of local economies, particularly in the current economic climate
 - To assess the viability of district centres and factors that contribute to their sustainability
 - To consider how the lessons from the evidence gathered and the factors considered in the review can be applied in the development and improvement of other district centres in the City.
4. The Inquiry was undertaken over 7 meetings of the Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel. At the first meeting of the Inquiry the Chief Executive of the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM) outlined the key elements for successful and sustainable town and district centres. According to the ATCM, the key to success is based on getting the 4 P's right – Place (Attractions, Accessibility, Amenity, Action), People, Partnership, Policy. The City Council's general approach towards Southampton's town and district centres, and each individual town and district centre was subsequently compared against this criteria.

Key Findings - General

5. The town and district centres in Southampton have an important and broad ranging role at the heart of the local communities. Town and district centres in Southampton are:
 - Home to some 500 shops
 - Significant employment hubs
 - Hubs of communities
 - Home to a broad range of services
 - A focus for leisure activities
 - A focus for social interaction
 - Easily accessible
 - Transport hubs
 - Supporting the local economy.
6. **Accessibility (Place)** - In general terms Southampton's town and district centres are well served by public transport and are public transport hubs, have adequate

car parking provision, possibly with the exception of Portswood. However, the clarity of the car park signage needs to be improved to raise awareness of the 5hrs free parking available. Members of the Panel also expressed the view that an extension of the Legible Cities Project to Southampton's town and district centres would help to enhance the accessibility, attractiveness and identity of centres. (The Legible Cities Project is explained in paragraph 51).

7. **Amenity (Place)** (Clean, safe and attractive) - In general terms Southampton's town and district centres are supported by a strong cleaning regime, have varying problems with crime and disorder but they are not hotspots for crime. Attractiveness varies from centre to centre and not all of Southampton's district centres have received investment to enhance the public realm.
8. **Shirley Town Centre development** - Shirley Town Centre has benefitted from significant investment. Improvements included the provision of better pedestrian, cycling and bus facilities, together with carriageway and footway improvements and distinctive street lighting enhancements. The capital investment has improved the appearance of Shirley Town Centre and has improved road safety. However, no study has been undertaken on the impact of this investment on the vitality and viability of Shirley Town Centre, and due to the availability of various funding streams the Scrutiny Panel considered that the work in Shirley Town Centre has been piecemeal and largely uncoordinated. These key lessons need to be learnt by the City Council and are reflected in recommendations 1, 2 and 3 within this report.
9. **People / Performance Management** – District centres are impacted by rapid and dynamic change in market trends and conditions and evidence from elsewhere in the UK indicates that there is the potential for sudden and rapid decline. As a consequence **there is a need to develop a greater understanding of the way in which district centres function and develop a more informed view of the condition of district centres.** The expectations of those who shop and/or live within the catchment areas of district shopping centres needs to be understood so that improvement plans can reflect these needs as far as possible.
10. **Policy** - Southampton City Council's planning policies have been successful in attracting development within a number of town and district centres, and the policy to encourage supermarkets to anchor town and district centres has helped secure the Portswood Bus Depot development, and the development at Centenary Quay in Woolston. The Scrutiny Panel recognised the role played by planning policies in enhancing the vitality and viability of Southampton's town and district centres, but the Panel believe that **the City Council can do more to actively manage change and shape the offering within the centres.** The development of a Sites and Policies Development Plan, detailed in paragraph 143, provides the City Council with the opportunity to increase understanding of Southampton's town and district centres, and to use the acquired information to, in conjunction with other tools, plan for the growth and development of the centres alongside the wider management role of the Council.
11. **Partnership Working / Integrating Policy** - Two issues related to partnership working and integrating policy emerged during the Inquiry:
 - The positive contribution that an effective traders association can have on the

vitality and viability of a town or district centre

- **The need to improve how the City Council interacts with stakeholders in town and district centres, and co-ordinates services.** In particular, utilising information gathered from other cities, the Inquiry identified the need for Southampton City Council to:
 - Improve contacts with businesses in town and district centres
 - Provide a single point of contact for town and district centre stakeholders to liaise with
 - Improve communication between departments, and co-ordination of work within town and district centres.

Key Findings – Individual Town and District Centres

12. **Shirley Town Centre** - The limited information presented to the Panel identifies that Shirley Town Centre is in good health and is performing a similar role to a freestanding town centre. Vacancy levels are low, there are adequate attractions to encourage footfall, the public realm has been enhanced and accessibility is good. The addition of a weekly market and a traders association will further enhance the vitality and viability of Shirley Town Centre, however there is a need to support the Town Centre to ensure it remains successful and sustainable.
13. **Portswood District Centre** - The information presented to the Scrutiny Panel identifies that Portswood District Centre is in reasonable health. There are a good range of shops and other attractions, vacancy rates are low, the enhanced public realm has improved the appearance of the District Centre, and it is accessible. The Scrutiny Panel were however, concerned about the lack of a traders association and events in the centre. There was a consensus that the bus depot development has the potential to enhance the vitality and viability of Portswood District Centre, but the impact of the development on traffic levels in the area needs to be monitored as the success of the new development, and the subsequent impact on the well-being of the District Centre, could be determined by accessibility.
14. **Bitterne District Centre** is an increasingly prosperous district centre. It fulfils most of the criteria for successful 'Places', with the exception of an attractive street scene, and members of the Scrutiny Panel identified that the District Centre would benefit from greater competition to the existing major food retailer. The Bitterne Village Traders Association has been a key driver behind the increased vitality and viability of Bitterne District Centre.
15. **Woolston District Centre** is currently in poor health. This has been attributed partly to the closure of Vosper Thorneycroft, the significant employer within the District Centre, in 2004. The closure resulted in reduced footfall within the Centre that the area has not recovered from. The high Business Rates levels facing traders has compounded the problems still further. The Scrutiny Panel expressed concern that Woolston District Centre has reached a tipping point and unless usage increases the Centre will become unsustainable. This is clearly of concern to local residents as identified by the consultation undertaken by Swaythling Housing Society in June 2009. The Centenary Quay development offers real hope for the regeneration of the Woolston District Centre. However, unless action is taken now there is real concern amongst the traders that

retailers will have vacated the District Centre before the Centenary Quay development is able to benefit the area. This report has however, identified that work is ongoing to support Woolston District Centre. In addition to the potential use of the Future Jobs Fund to improve the appearance of the centre, the Christmas Festival held in Woolston, and the Crime Reduction Environment Week scheduled for February, an Economic Development Officer has been given the task of co-ordinating the City Council's efforts to address the downturn in Woolston District Centre's fortunes. This has been welcomed by the Scrutiny Panel. In addition, at the 5th meeting of the Inquiry the Scrutiny Panel heard numerous suggestions that consultees believe would help to increase the vitality and viability of the District Centre. This has led the Panel to conclude that there should be a vision developed for Woolston District Centre, in conjunction with traders and community groups that identifies how Woolston District Centre can be revitalised to help realise the centre's potential and ensure that the area has a centre that is able to meet the week to week needs of the community.

16. **Lordshill District Centre** is currently in moderate health. It has low vacancy rates and a number of community facilities. However, it has a limited retail offering, is poorly designed, and its vitality and viability is reliant on the Sainsbury's store. The plans for the redevelopment of Lordshill District Centre, as part of a wider regeneration of the Lordshill area, provide an opportunity to strengthen and improve the District Centre to enable it to more effectively perform the role as the key district centre in the north west of Southampton.

Conclusion

17. Evidence gathered throughout the Inquiry has led the Scrutiny Panel to conclude that Southampton's town and district centres perform a valuable role as centres of retail, services and as a community focus, and whilst the Scrutiny Panel understand that the City Centre will be the focus for much of the planned development in the City, it is important that the town and district centres receive appropriate levels of support, investment and intervention in accordance with their specific needs, as identified by stakeholders, including local residents.

Recommendations

18. The Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel have developed a number of recommendations to address the issues identified above that, if, and when implemented, should enhance the vitality and viability of Southampton's town and district centres. A number of the recommendations are strategic, and may require a longer period of time to implement and evaluate. However, some of the recommendations, reflecting the particular issues within town and district centres, are more operational and could be implemented quickly with limited expenditure, these are shown in italics.
19. **To improve the co-ordination and management of Southampton's town and district centres it is recommended that:**
 - 1) Using Portsmouth's model, appoint a District Centres Co-ordinator to:
 - a. Act as a link between Southampton City Council, traders and other commercial and community interests in town and district centres
 - b. Work with traders to establish traders associations within each town and district centre

- c. Help establish a programme of events within town and district centres with traders associations and Active Communities
 - d. Act as the lead officer for district centres within the Council, acting as the conduit for a joined-up, planned approach to the future development and improvement of town and district centres
 - e. Explore potential external funding to support initiatives to improve town and district centre management.
20. **To improve understanding of Southampton's town and district centres, and to actively promote growth and manage change, it is recommended that:**
- 2) The City Council, using Planning Policy Statement 6 as a guide, collates and analyses on a regular basis, relevant performance measurement information on the health of the town and district centres. This may include existing data on cleansing, crime, vacancy rates as well as information available from the Chamber of Commerce on business confidence.
 - 3) Through the Sites and Policies Plan process, and monitoring / implementation of the existing adopted Local Plan, the City Council's increases its understanding of the vitality and viability of the town and district centres, and that this information is used to assist in managing change in town and district centres where needed, and when consistent with planning powers.
21. **To improve the accessibility of Southampton's town and district centres it is recommended that:**
- 4) *The clarity of the car park signage is improved to ensure that shoppers are aware of the 5hr free parking available within the City Council's town and district centre car parks.*
 - 5) To enhance access to the district centres, develop a sense of identity, and improve the attractiveness of district centres, extend the Legible Cities programme to the town and district centres and devise an approach to prioritise resources. (The Legible Cities Project is explained in paragraph 51).
22. **To enhance the vitality and viability of Portswood District Centre it is recommended that:**
- 6) The impact that the new development on the bus depot site has on the economic well-being, traffic levels and congestion within Portswood District Centre is monitored.
 - 7) *The potential to reduce the length of the taxi rank to enable more on-street car parking within the District Centre is investigated.*
23. **To enhance the vitality and viability of Bitterne District Centre it is recommended that:**
- 8) Southampton City Council invests in the public realm to improve the appearance of Bitterne District Centre.
 - 9) Through the Sites and Policies Plan process, the existing adopted local plan, and the determination of planning applications, the City Council

facilitates proposals which come forward for the provision of an additional food store within Bitterne District Centre to promote greater competition.

24. To enhance the vitality and viability of Woolston District Centre it is recommended that:

- 10) *The time limit for on-street parking is raised from 30 minutes to a minimum of 1 hour.*
- 11) *Signage within the District Centre is improved to raise awareness of available car parking provision within the District Centre.*
- 12) *The Cabinet Member for Economic Development makes representation to the Government about the Business Rate Valuation levels being charged within Woolston District Centre.*
- 13) *If the initiative utilising the Future Jobs Programme to improve the externals of vacant business premises in Woolston District Centre is successful, this approach be applied across all of Southampton's town and district centres.*
- 14) *Building upon work undertaken by Swaythling Housing Society, a vision for Woolston District Centre is developed, in conjunction with traders and local community groups that identifies how Woolston District Centre can be revitalised, and funding is sought to deliver the vision.*

25. To enhance the vitality and viability of Lordshill District Centre it is recommended that:

- 15) *The consultants appointed to undertake the Lordshill Masterplan take into account the best practice in planning for district centres (eg as identified by the Association of Town Centre Management and others), and best practice employed within New Town developments when developing the Lordshill Masterplan.*
- 16) *The consultants appointed to undertake the Lordshill Masterplan consult residents fully throughout the Masterplanning process, and utilise Sainsbury's expertise in helping to promote successful centres.*

26. The District Centres Inquiry report was considered by OSMC on 18th February 2010 and agreed that the following recommendations should be included:

- 17) *That the possibilities of splitting vacant shop premises within the district centres into a number of smaller retail units or work areas be investigated.*
- 18) *That an annual review of the health and potential of the district centres be undertaken and the results be presented to the OSMC as part of the State of the City report from the Leader.*
- 19) *That the Cabinet Member for Economic Development request that officers investigate an appropriate mechanism or forum for traders across the City to exchange ideas and best practice.*

District Centres Inquiry

Introduction

27. Southampton's main city-wide planning document, the Core Strategy, identifies that Southampton has 1 town centre, Shirley, and 4 district centres, Bitterne, Lordshill, Portswood and Woolston.
28. The importance of Southampton's town and district centres is outlined within the Core Strategy. The Proposed Submission - Core Strategy Summary Leaflet, identifies, when referring to Southampton's town and district centres, that:

*"The continuing viability of these centres is important to local residents since very often they are the focus for the community, providing local shops, small scale offices, leisure and other facilities and services."*¹
29. However, the British Retail Consortium reports that the number of empty shops on Britain's high streets has trebled since Autumn 2008 and that many high streets are approaching a "tipping point" after which they will no longer be viable commercial centres.²
30. Recognising the importance of Southampton's town and district centres, and the impact that an under performing centre can have on a local community, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC), at its meeting on 18th June 2009, requested that the Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel undertake a full inquiry into District Centres and report back their findings to the OSMC in 2010. The full terms of reference for the inquiry, agreed by the OSMC, are shown in Appendix 1.
31. The approved objectives of the Inquiry are:
 - To examine the project development and planning process for the Shirley Town Centre development and the key lessons from this work
 - To examine the successful development of a district centre in another city, how this involved any local traders and the outcomes achieved
 - To examine the key factors that contribute to the stimulation of local economies, particularly in the current economic climate
 - To assess the viability of district centres and factors that contribute to their sustainability
 - To consider how the lessons from the evidence gathered and the factors considered in the review can be applied in the development and improvement of other district centres in the City.
32. The recommendations within this report have been generated by the delivery of the objectives identified above. The Scrutiny Panel have focussed particular attention on identifying best practice, and applying the lessons learnt from the evidence gathered to identify actions that will improve the outcomes for Southampton's town and district centres. The key lessons from the Shirley Town Centre development are identified within paragraphs 59 - 61, and are reflected in the recommendations.

¹ Proposed Submission, Core Strategy Summary leaflet, Southampton City Council, 2008,P4

² 21st Century High Streets: A vision for our Town Centres, British Retail Consortium, 2009

Consultation

33. The Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel undertook the inquiry over 7 meetings and received evidence from a wide variety of organisations and individual traders to meet the agreed objectives. This included the Chief Executive of the Association of Town Centre Management. A list of witnesses that provided evidence to the inquiry is detailed in Appendix 2. Members of the Economic Well Being Scrutiny Panel would like to thank all those who have assisted with the development of this review.

Background

Defining District Centres

34. The Government's main objective for town and district centres is to promote their vitality and viability. To deliver the Government's objective local planning authorities are required to, through Planning Policy Statement 6, "Planning for Town Centres" (March 2005), define a network and a hierarchy of retail centres. Table 1 below identifies the types of centres and their main characteristics.

35. **Table 1: Retail Hierarchy - Types of Centre³**
1. **City** - City centres are the highest level of centre identified in development plans. In terms of hierarchies, they will often be a regional centre and will serve a wide catchment.
 2. **Town** - Town centres will usually be the second level of centres after city centres and, in many cases, they will be the principal centre or centres in a local authority's area.
 3. **District** - District centres will usually comprise groups of shops often containing at least one supermarket or superstore, and a range of non-retail services, such as banks, building societies and restaurants, as well as local public facilities such as a library.
 4. **Local** - Local centres include a range of small shops of a local nature, serving a small catchment. Typically, local centres might include, amongst other shops, a small supermarket, a newsagent, a sub-post office and a pharmacy.

36. Nationally, the vitality and viability of town and district centres has been impacted upon by the growth of out of town retailing, internet shopping and the concentration of development within city centres. To promote the vitality and viability of town and district centres, Planning Policy Statement 6 stipulates that development should be focused in existing centres with its scale relating to the role and function of the centre within the retail hierarchy and its catchment. A sequential approach should be applied to development proposals and they should only be located on edge of centre or out of centre sites if it has been demonstrated that there is no unacceptable impact on centres, there is a need for the development, and that there are no suitable, available or viable sites within existing centres.

Retail Hierarchy – Southampton

37. Policy CS3 within the Core Strategy, outlines the retail hierarchy within Southampton:
1. **City centre** - Southampton city centre serves city wide and regional needs
 2. **Shirley Town Centre;**
 3. Four **District Centres;** Portswood, Bitterne, Woolston and Lordshill

³ Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres, ODPM, 2005, p30

The town centre and district centres meet the 'week to week' needs for their area of the city and local non food and community services.

4. A network of **Local Centres** - Local centres meet the 'day to day' needs for the immediate neighbourhood.

38. Policy CS3 states that:

“The Council will support the role of the town and district centres in providing shops and local services in safe, accessible locations. New development should make a positive contribution to the centres’ viability and vitality, promote and enhance its attractiveness, respect where possible the historic street patterns and building lines and improve its connectivity to surrounding residential neighbourhoods.

Non-residential development serving a city wide or sub regional catchment will be focused on the hierarchy of centres with a sequential approach. New development must be at a scale appropriate to the size and role of the centre.”

39. This policy supports Strategic Objective 6 within the City of Southampton Strategy, that states that 'Southampton will have a unique sense of place - a place with distinctive neighbourhoods and district centres providing a focus for local services and community activities', and Southampton City Council's priority to get the city working.

Why are Southampton's Town and District Centres Important?

40. In Southampton, in accordance with the hierarchy of centres, much of the planned development is focussed on the city centre with the expectation that this will act as catalyst for increasing prosperity across the City. However, the town and district centres also play a key role in supporting the social, economic and environmental well being of the City. The concentration or cluster of a range of goods, services and facilities in one area creates a centre for communities and activities enabling people to make one trip for many reasons.
41. The town and district centres in Southampton therefore have an important and broad ranging role at the heart of the local communities. Town and district centres in Southampton are:
 - Home to some 500 shops
 - Significant employment hubs
 - Hubs of communities
 - Home to a broad range of services
 - A focus for leisure activities
 - A focus for social interaction
 - Easily accessible
 - Transport hubs
 - Supporting the local economy.
42. Southampton's town and district centres also include venues that enhance Southampton's night time offering. This is the focus of an inquiry by the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Panel who are currently undertaking an inquiry into Southampton's Night Time Economy. Recommendations generated by the Night Time Economy inquiry may have implications for Southampton's town / district centres where opportunities to develop the night time offering exist.

Key Principles for Successful Town and District Centres

43. At the first meeting of the Inquiry Simon Quin, Chief Executive of the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM), Europe's largest membership organisation dedicated to promoting the vitality and viability of town and city centres, outlined for the Scrutiny Panel the key elements for successful and sustainable town and district centres.
44. According to the ATCM, the key to success is based on getting the 4 P's right – **Place, People, Partnership, Policy**.
45. **Place** – For a town or district centre to be successful it must have the following:
- Attractions** – There must be a reason to visit the town / district centre. People may visit for:
- Shopping
 - Entertainment
 - To work
 - Access Services (Council / Health / Education / Worship)
 - They live there.
- Accessibility** – You need to be able to get into and out of the town / district centre by bus, car, cycling and walking and orientate yourself when you are there.
- Amenity** – The town / district centre must be a place where you want to linger. It needs to be clean, safe and attractive.
- Action** – There should be events happening in the town / district centre.
- All of the above have to be co-ordinated to improve place.
46. **People** - You need to understand how people use the town / district centre, identify what people think about the centre and who the key stakeholders are.
47. **Partnership** – There is a need to work with local businesses, and local media to collectively improve town / district centres. Partnerships can operate strategically and operationally.
48. **Policy Framework** – There is a need to integrate policy across local authority services and with partners to support the vitality and viability of town and district centres.
49. Following the principles identified above the Scrutiny Panel sought to use the subsequent meetings of the Inquiry to compare Southampton's town and district centres against good practice, and to look at Southampton City Council's general approach to supporting the vitality and viability of the town and district centres.

Findings – How do Southampton’s Town and District Centre’s Compare?

Southampton City Council’s Services and Policies

50. At meeting 2 of the Inquiry the City Council’s services and policies that impact on the vitality and viability of town and district centres within Southampton were analysed, with the support of appropriate Southampton City Council officers, to identify how services compare with the key principles for successful district centres identified by the ATCM. A list of consultees is shown in Appendix 2.
51. This approach focussed predominantly on the Place element of the 4 P’s with Southampton City Council services being fundamental to the accessibility of town and district centres and the amenity aspects (clean, safe, attractive).
52. **Accessibility** – Meeting 2 of the Inquiry identified that in general terms Southampton’s town and district centres:
- Are well served by public transport and are public transport hubs.
 - Have adequate car parking provision, possibly with the exception of Portswood, and that parking in City Council car parks within the town and district centres is free for the first 5 hours. However, the clarity of the car park signage needs to be improved to raise awareness of the 5hrs free parking available.
 - Local direction signage is provided from the nearest main routes to the designated town and district centres. The Panel were informed of the Legible Cities Project that is being implemented to improve wayfinding, identity and understanding of the City Centre through, amongst other things, the installation of pedestrian signposts and map installations. Members of the Panel expressed the view that an extension of the Legible Cities Project to Southampton’s town and district centres would help to enhance the accessibility, attractiveness and identity of centres.
53. **Recommendations -To improve the accessibility of Southampton’s town and district centres it is recommended that:**
- The clarity of the car park signage is improved to ensure that shoppers are aware of the 5hr free parking available within the City Council’s town and district centre car parks.
 - To enhance access to the district centres, develop a sense of identity, and improve the attractiveness of district centres, extend the Legible Cities programme to the town and district centres and devise an approach to prioritise resources.
54. **Amenity (Clean, safe and attractive)** – Meeting 2 of the Inquiry identified that in general terms Southampton’s town and district centres:
- Are supported by a strong cleaning regime. Town and district centres all receive daily visits from the District Clean Teams, scheduled for early in the morning to ensure that the bulk of the cleaning work is completed before the majority of visitors arrive. In addition Shirley Town Centre and

Portswood and Bitterne District Centres are provided with street orderly's to stay on top of the litter through the day.

- Have varying problems with crime and disorder but they are not hotspots for crime. However, they can be intimidating places after dark.
 - Attractiveness varies from centre to centre. Not all of Southampton's district centres have received investment to enhance the public realm. Members of the Scrutiny Panel were informed of a report from the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) that identified that investment in good street design brings quantifiable financial returns and that the quality of a high street can add at least 5% to the price of homes and the level of retail rents.⁴
 - Crime Reduction Environment Weeks (CREW) have taken place in town and district centres over the past 18 months to improve their cleanliness, safety and appearance.
55. This exercise provided an overarching view of key City Council services and the impact they have on the town and district centres. A wider comparison with the key principles for successful town and district centres was provided when individual town and district centres were analysed by the Scrutiny Panel.

Shirley Town Centre

56. At meeting 3 of the Inquiry the Scrutiny Panel examined the vitality and viability of Shirley Town Centre. Shirley is the second largest centre in Southampton after the City Centre.

Place

57. Attractions – There are 259 businesses in Shirley Town Centre, this includes over 230 shops. There are a mix of national retailers and a range of independent shops providing both convenience and comparison goods. According to a recent BBC Survey 7%⁵ of the units are vacant, this compares favourably with the national average of 13.5%⁶.



⁴ Paved with gold: the real value of good street design, CABE, 2007

⁵ How the recession has changed your High Street, BBC Website, 22 October 2009

⁶ Experian research, quoted on BBC website, 22 October 2009

58. Shirley Town Centre is also home to in excess of 50 cafes, pubs and restaurants, and there are a number of community facilities such as a library, police station, church, and a housing office that attract people to the centre.
59. Accessibility – Shirley Town Centre is well served by public transport, has adequate car parking, cycling and bus facilities.
60. Amenity – Shirley Town Centre has benefitted from significant investment. The Shirley ‘Streets Ahead’ project along Shirley High Street was largely completed between 1995 and 1999 in partnership with Hampshire County Council. The main objectives were to increase pedestrian safety, to improve mobility for all users, to upgrade the appearance of the street scene environment and to reduce traffic speed. Improvements included the provision of better pedestrian, cycling and bus facilities, together with carriageway and footway improvements and distinctive street lighting enhancements.
61. There were some further improvements to the footways undertaken between 2005 and 2008 through use of highways maintenance and other funding (capital spend in 2008/09 was approximately £1m).
62. A key objective of the District Centres Inquiry is to examine the project development and planning process for the Shirley Town Centre development and the key lessons from this work. Discussions at the Scrutiny Panel meeting identified that the capital investment has improved the appearance of Shirley Town Centre and has improved road safety. However, no study has been undertaken on the impact of this investment on the vitality and viability of Shirley Town Centre, and due to the availability of various funding streams the Scrutiny Panel considered that the work in Shirley Town Centre has been piecemeal and largely uncoordinated. These key lessons need to be learnt by the City Council and are reflected in recommendations 1, 2 and 3 of this report.
63. Action – The Scrutiny Panel were informed that few events are currently held in Shirley Town Centre. However, from Spring 2010 it is expected that a weekly market will operate in Shirley on the triangle of land in front of Sainsbury’s and the library.

Partnership

64. A traders association is currently being formed for Shirley Town Centre, with the support of the City Council’s Economic Development Team. The traders association will be responsible for the market.

Summary

65. The limited information presented to the Panel identifies that Shirley Town Centre is in good health and is performing a similar role to a freestanding town centre. Vacancy levels are low, there are adequate attractions to encourage footfall, the public realm has been enhanced and accessibility is good. The addition of a weekly market and a traders association will further enhance the vitality and viability of Shirley Town Centre, however there is a need to support the Town Centre to ensure it remains successful and sustainable.

Portswood District Centre

66. Portswood District Centre has a linear urban form along Portswood Road and the District Centre serves a large population in the north of Southampton. The vitality and viability of Portswood District Centre was discussed at the 4th meeting of the Inquiry.

Place

67. Attraction - Portswood District Centre has approximately 108 shops, including a range of convenience stores, local comparison shops and services. There is a post office, bank and 2 pharmacies. The number of charity shops has risen however, the vacancy rate within the District Centre is low at 7%.
68. The Centre includes a range of community facilities such as a surgery, church, library and a police station within the vicinity of the District Centre. In addition there are a number of cafes, pubs and restaurants in the District Centre (12 according to 2008 planning survey findings).
69. Accessibility – Portswood District Centre is well served by public transport but finding a car parking space can be difficult. Local Councillors in attendance at the meeting commented on the length of the taxi rank within the District Centre and questioned whether this could be shortened to allow for more on-street parking.
70. Amenity - Portswood District Centre has a distinctive character and the appearance of the Centre has benefitted from recent public realm enhancements.



71. Action – Invited guests were not aware of any events that take place in Portswood District Centre to encourage more people to visit.

Partnership

72. There is no traders association for Portswood District Centre. Invited representatives from Waitrose expressed a desire for closer co-operation with fellow retailers and the establishment of a traders association for Portswood.

Bus Depot Development

73. The Scrutiny Panel were informed of a development planned for Portswood that would have a significant impact on the District Centre. The bus depot site on Portswood Road is to be redeveloped to provide a new supermarket, with associated 325 space car park, medical centre, and 140 residential units.
74. A survey undertaken in 2006/07 identified that 30% of Portswood householders do their main food shop outside Southampton, and only 24% do it within Portswood District Centre. It is anticipated that the new Sainsbury's supermarket will encourage more shopping to be undertaken locally and it is hoped that through the design of the store and its proximity to the District Centre, planning restrictions limiting the offering that the supermarket can sell (eg no post office, no pharmacy), signage, and public realm enhancements, more shoppers will venture into Portswood District Centre before or after their visit to the supermarket. The additional car parking provision could also reduce the pressure on existing parking within the District Centre.
75. The Scrutiny Panel, and invited consultees, were concerned about the impact that a new supermarket would have on existing traders within the District Centre, but the main concern related to the impact that the development would have on traffic levels as a result of visits to the supermarket and the relocation of the bus depot to an alternative site.

Summary

76. The information presented to the Scrutiny Panel identifies that Portswood District Centre is in reasonable health. There are a good range of shops and other attractions, vacancy rates are low, the enhanced public realm has improved the appearance of the District Centre, and it is accessible. The Scrutiny Panel were however, concerned about the lack of a traders association and events in the centre.
77. There was a consensus that the bus depot development has the potential to enhance the vitality and viability of Portswood District Centre, but the impact of the development on traffic levels in the area needs to be monitored as the success of the new development, and the subsequent impact on the well-being of the District Centre, could be determined by accessibility.

78. **Recommendations - To enhance the vitality and viability of Portswood District Centre it is recommended that:**

- The impact that the new development on the bus depot site has on the economic well-being, traffic levels and congestion within Portswood District Centre is monitored.
- The potential to reduce the length of the taxi rank to enable more on-street car parking within the District Centre is investigated.

Bitterne District Centre

79. Bitterne District Centre serves the north-east of the City and includes a pedestrianised precinct.

Place

80. Attractions - Bitterne District Centre contains over 80 shops and there is a reasonably good range of shops and services for the size of the centre. However, since Safeway's withdrawal from the District Centre invited consultees and members of the Scrutiny Panel expressed the view that greater competition to the remaining supermarket would further enhance the attractiveness of the centre's offering.
81. Vacancy levels in Bitterne District Centre are low at 5% and this number has actually decreased during the recession, reflecting the growing popularity of the District Centre.
82. Bitterne District Centre contains a number of community facilities including a leisure centre, library and health clinic (separated from the main part of the District Centre by the A3024), churches, as well as 13 cafes, pubs and restaurants according to a 2009 planning survey.
83. Accessibility - Bitterne District Centre is well served by public transport and there are 2 large car parks with 5hrs free parking serving the District Centre.
84. Amenity – The appearance of the pedestrianised precinct is improved by the addition of hanging baskets funded by the Bitterne Village Traders Association, but in general terms the landscaping is hard and the public realm is in need of enhancement. The invited consultees identified that the public realm within the precinct had not been updated since it was created in 1983. This is reflected within the City Council's Core Strategy that identifies as a key priority for Bitterne District Centre 'enhancing the centre's built environment to create a positive street scene' (Policy CS 3 – 4.5.4).



85. Action - Bitterne District Centre regularly hosts events and fun days to encourage more people to visit. There is a Christmas Extravagnza at which Christmas lights, funded through the Traders Association, are turned on. In addition the weekly market, established in October 2008, has had a dramatic impact on the District Centre and footfall has increased by 15-25% since the market commenced. The Traders Association campaigned for the market to be established.

Partnership

86. The Bitterne Village Traders Association has been the key vehicle responsible for increasing the viability and vitality of Bitterne District Centre. Southampton City Council supported the creation of the Traders Association and, along with the police, regularly attend meetings of the Bitterne Village Traders Association.

Summary

87. Bitterne District Centre is an increasingly prosperous district centre. It fulfils most of the criteria for successful 'Places', with the exception of an attractive street scene, and members of the Scrutiny Panel identified that the District Centre would benefit from greater competition to the existing major food retailer.
88. The Bitterne Village Traders Association has been a key driver behind the increased vitality and viability of Bitterne District Centre.

89. **Recommendations - To enhance the vitality and viability of Bitterne District Centre it is recommended that:**

- Southampton City Council invests in the public realm to improve the appearance of Bitterne District Centre.
- Through the Sites and Policies Plan process, the existing adopted local plan, and the determination of planning applications, the City Council facilitates proposals which come forward for the provision of an additional food store within Bitterne District Centre to promote greater competition.

Woolston District Centre

90. Woolston District Centre serves a population in the east of Southampton. The vitality and viability of Woolston District Centre was discussed at the 5th meeting of the Inquiry.

Place

91. Attractions - Woolston District Centre has 103 shop units. There are a limited range of national multiples and although the District Centre is capable of meeting the day to day needs of the local community, it has a more limited range than the previous district centres, a high number of charity shops and takeaways, and it has a smaller main supermarket than Southampton's other town and district centres.
92. The vacancy rate within the District Centre is high. When planners surveyed the area in Autumn 2009 vacancy rates were recorded as being at 16%. Local traders invited to the meeting of the Scrutiny Panel indicated that this figure is now nearer 30% than 16%, this is well above the national average.
93. Reflecting this, Woolston District Centre is the only centre that has been unable to fill the unit vacated when Woolworth's collapsed in 2008, and surveys undertaken in 2007/08 for the Centenary Quay development identified that only 14% of total household food shopping undertaken by Woolston residents is done in Woolston District Centre.

94. Woolston District Centre contains a number of community facilities including a health clinic, library, social club, housing office as well as 15 cafes, pubs and restaurants according to a 2008 planning survey. Swaythling Housing Society is also seeking to establish a community 'Shop Front' facility on Victoria Road to act as an information hub and to provide outreach services to the local community.
95. Accessibility - Woolston District Centre is well served by public transport and there is adequate car parking provision available. However, local traders invited to the meeting identified a problem with the limited length of time available to park for free on the streets outside the shops. The current 30 minute limit was deemed to be insufficient to do the necessary shopping and return to the car. This has resulted in parking fines being given to shoppers, further impacting on the modest footfall in the District Centre.
96. The invited Woolston Councillors also highlighted the lack of signage to raise awareness of the location and availability of car parks within the District Centre.
97. Amenity – Woolston District Centre has a relatively poor appearance with signs of a lack of investment. The public realm needs enhancing and the empty shops add to the general feeling that the area is in decline.



98. To help address some of these problems consideration is being given to utilising Future Jobs Programme participants to improve the externals of business premises and, through working with Active Communities in the Neighbourhoods Directorate, work with young people to prepare the former Vosper Thorneycroft site hoardings so that a mural could be painted on parts of the hoarding, thereby improving the appearance.
99. In addition a CREW week is scheduled for Woolston in February 2010. This will tidy up the area, remove litter and graffiti, and engage schools and traders demonstrating a commitment to change in the area.
100. Action – A 3 day Christmas Festival was recently held in Woolston District Centre to attract people to the area. Organised by Swaythling Housing Society, and Active Communities, the events included live music, a craft fair and late night opening of Woolston's shops.

101. Consideration was given at the meeting of the Scrutiny Panel to the possibility of having a market in Woolston District Centre. However, there was scepticism amongst traders and Councillors that a market would be successful in Woolston.

People

102. Consultation undertaken by Swaythling Housing Society in June 2009 to find out whether there was interest in a future community 'Shop Front' facility in Woolston District Centre revealed the following insights:
- Consultation identified that when asked what 3 things people dislike most about Woolston 48% identified the state of the shops/lack of them (highest response) and 16% identified the empty shops (second highest response)
 - Consultation identified that when asked what 1 thing would make the most difference to your life in Woolston the most popular response was a better variety of shops (29%)
 - During the consultation exercise the issue of the Victoria Road shopping area was uppermost in everyone's responses. More people complained about the empty shops, the lack of supermarket variety (Co-op monopoly), the litter and the general run down appearance than any single issue.

Partnerships

103. There is currently no traders association for Woolston District Centre. Attempts were made by Southampton City Council officers 2 years ago to help establish a traders association in Woolston but this failed.

Centenary Quay

104. At the 5th meeting of the Inquiry the Scrutiny Panel were provided with detailed information of a substantial development planned for Woolston that will have a significant impact on the District Centre. Outline planning permission has been approved for a major mixed use regeneration of the former Vosper Thorneycroft site at the edge of the District Centre. This development, known as Centenary Quay, will include 1,620 dwellings (mainly flats, some town houses, 25% affordable) a supermarket, other shops and restaurants, 100 bed hotel, library, day nursery, marine employment, new public spaces, a riverside walkway, and a public pontoon.
105. The developer is aiming to be on site in the first half of 2010 and the full build programme is expected to be completed in about 10 years time. The retail element includes a supermarket with a sales area of 3,024 sq m (slightly smaller than Asda in the City Centre), other retail units at 1,200 sq m and restaurants.
106. The retail element forms phase 2 of the development and could be completed within 4 years. Planning conditions limit the non-food offering that the supermarket will be allowed to provide, with no post office or pharmacy among the concessions excluded. The retail use of the remaining units will be predominantly restricted to the sale of yacht and marine goods.

107. The supermarket will be located at the northern part of the site and will be designed to enable easy access into the existing centre to help the new development integrate well with the southern end of the existing District Centre.
108. It is expected that the new supermarket will anchor the District Centre and will encourage more people to do their food shopping in Woolston, and the extra people living and working within the development will support more top up shopping for district centre stores. The benefit should therefore spread across a wide number of stores but it will impact on the Co-op and potentially on other food stores in the District Centre.
109. The Centenary Quay development will also result in public realm enhancements within the District Centre, to the value of £500,000. This is scheduled to commence prior to the occupation of the supermarket.
110. The development will also include a range of other developer contributions, including an additional approx £1.4 million for traffic schemes phased through the development.
111. The Scrutiny Panel recognised that the regeneration of Centenary Quay offers the opportunity to transform Woolston and enhance the District Centre. It will attract people to the area through the enhanced supermarket offering, the restaurants, the employment, local services, improved local amenities and public realm, access to the waterfront, and the increased population.

Summary

112. Woolston District Centre is currently in poor health. This has been attributed partly to the closure of Vosper Thorneycroft, the significant employer within the District Centre, in 2004. The closure resulted in reduced footfall within the Centre that the area has not recovered from. The high Business Rates levels facing traders has compounded the problems still further.
113. The Scrutiny Panel expressed concern that Woolston District Centre has reached a tipping point and unless usage increases the Centre will become unsustainable. This is clearly of concern to local residents as identified by the consultation undertaken by Swaythling Housing Society in June 2009.
114. The Centenary Quay development offers real hope for the regeneration of the Woolston District Centre. However, unless action is taken now there is real concern amongst the traders that retailers will have vacated the District Centre before the Centenary Quay development is able to benefit the area. This could impact on the desirability of the residential units scheduled for Centenary Quay.
115. This report has however, identified that work is ongoing to support Woolston District Centre. In addition to the potential use of the Future Jobs Fund to improve the appearance of the centre, the Christmas Festival held in Woolston, and the CREW week scheduled for February, an Economic Development Officer has been given the task of co-ordinating the City Council's efforts to address the downturn in Woolston District Centre's fortunes. This has been welcomed by the Scrutiny Panel.
116. In addition, at the 5th meeting of the Inquiry the Scrutiny Panel heard numerous suggestions that consultees believe would help to increase the vitality and viability of the District Centre. This has led the Panel to conclude that there should be a vision developed for Woolston District Centre, in conjunction with

traders and community groups that identifies how Woolston District Centre can be revitalised to help realise the centre's potential and ensure that the area has a centre that is able to meet the week to week needs of the community.

117. **Recommendations - To enhance the vitality and viability of Woolston District Centre it is recommended that:**

- The time limit for on-street parking is raised from 30 minutes to a minimum of 1 hour.
- Signage within the District Centre is improved to raise awareness of available car parking provision within the District Centre.
- The Cabinet Member for Economic Development makes representation to the Government about the Business Rate Valuation levels being charged within Woolston District Centre.
- If the initiative utilising the Future Jobs Programme to improve the externals of vacant business premises in Woolston District Centre is successful, this approach be applied across all of Southampton's town and district centres.
- Building upon work undertaken by Swaythling Housing Society, a vision for Woolston District Centre is developed, in conjunction with traders and local community groups that identifies how Woolston District Centre can be revitalised, and funding is sought to deliver the vision.

Lordshill District Centre

118. Lordshill is located in the north west of Southampton and the District Centre was developed in the 1960's / 70's. The vitality and viability of Lordshill District Centre was discussed at the 5th meeting of the Inquiry.

Place

119. Attractions - Lordshill District Centre is dominated by a Sainsbury's supermarket, currently the largest of any in the town or district centres within Southampton. There are only 11 shops in the District Centre, far fewer than the other district centres, but it does contain a good range of community facilities such as a health centre, with a doctors surgery and dental practice, a library, housing office, church, pub and community centre. Vacancy levels are low.
120. Accessibility - Lordshill District Centre can be accessed by public transport but it is dominated by the car with a disjointed environment for pedestrians, and of poor design and layout that fails to connect the centre with the surrounding streets and community.
121. Amenity - Lordshill District Centre's public realm is bland and in need of enhancement. The District Centre environment was noted as being at times intimidating, and partly due to design, was the centre with the greatest concerns regarding the level of crime and disorder.
122. Action – The community centre located within the district centre opened in September 2009, and Active Communities informed the Scrutiny Panel that the new hall is attracting a lot of bookings.

Partnerships

123. There is no traders association for Lordshill District Centre



Lordshill Masterplan

124. Limited analysis was undertaken of the existing Lordshill District Centre because at the Inquiry meeting the Scrutiny Panel were informed of a development that will fundamentally impact upon the vitality and viability of Lordshill District Centre.
125. Southampton's Core Strategy states that: "Lordshill District Centre is to undergo a comprehensive redevelopment to improve its design and expand the range of services to serve the north western area of the city and neighbouring areas."
126. To help deliver this Southampton City Council has recently appointed consultants to prepare a masterplan to guide the future development of the Lordshill area within the City. Work will start on the masterplan in early 2010, and it is scheduled to be completed by the end of July 2010.
127. Four key drivers behind the development have been identified as:
- The Estates Regeneration Programme
 - Co-location of community based services
 - Education (Building Schools for the Future, and Academies)
 - Private sector inputs and partnership
128. The Scrutiny Panel were provided with the Lordshill Masterplanning Project Brief. The Project Brief identifies that the overall outcome for the masterplan study will be: "To secure a long term twenty year vision for the regeneration of the Lordshill area which is practical, affordable and deliverable".
129. Members of the Scrutiny Panel expressed their interest in the large scale regeneration of Lordshill, not just the District Centre. The Panel were keen to see the appointed consultants take into account the best practice in planning for district centres, as identified by the Association of Town Centre Management and others, and best practice employed within New Town developments when undertaking the masterplanning process.

130. The Scrutiny Panel recognised the importance of consultation throughout the masterplanning process, particularly with the local community, and recommended that the consultants utilise the expertise acquired by Sainsbury's in helping to promote successful centres when developing proposals for Lordshill District Centre.

Summary

131. Lordshill District Centre is currently in moderate health. It has low vacancy rates and a number of community facilities. However, it has a limited retail offering, is poorly designed, and its vitality and viability is reliant on the Sainsbury's store.
132. The plans for the redevelopment of Lordshill District Centre, as part of a wider regeneration of the Lordshill area, provide an opportunity to strengthen and improve the District Centre to enable it to more effectively perform the role as the key district centre in the north west of Southampton.

133. **Recommendations - To enhance the vitality and viability of Lordshill District Centre it is recommended that:**

- The consultants appointed to undertake the Lordshill Masterplan take into account the best practice in planning for district centres (eg as identified by the Association of Town Centre Management and others), and best practice employed within New Town developments when developing the Lordshill Masterplan
- The consultants appointed to undertake the Lordshill Masterplan consult residents fully throughout the Masterplanning process, and utilise Sainsbury's expertise in helping to promote successful centres.

General Findings

134. The analysis of individual town and district centres has helped identify specific issues that require attention within each centre. However, the inquiry process has identified a number of issues, linked to the principles of a successful town and district centre, that impact on the vitality and viability of all of Southampton's town and district centres.

People / Performance Management – Understanding the town and district centres

135. The ATCM outlined the importance of understanding who uses a centre, how people use a centre, what people think about the centre and who the key stakeholders are.
136. The inquiry has identified that Southampton City Council has a limited awareness of a number of these issues and that there is a need to have a greater understanding of Southampton's town and district centres.
137. The information provided to support the analysis of the vitality and viability of the town and district centres has either been generated by the City Council's Planning Policy Team surveys or it has been obtained by developers to support planning applications for major developments in the district centres.

138. The available information includes vacancy levels, and the type of retailers but does not include details on lead indicators such as footfall, residents / customers views or business confidence that would enable the City Council, with partners, to identify changes within a centre and to respond rapidly to them.
139. Planning Policy 6 – “Planning for Town Centres”, stipulates that the vitality and viability of centres should be kept under regular review, to detect changes over time, and that local authorities should regularly collect information, preferably in co-operation with the private sector on key indicators. It concludes that this should, amongst others, include information on such things as pedestrian flows (footfall), customer and residents’ views and behaviour, as well as details on vacancy levels, shopping rents and perceptions of crime.⁷
140. The need for Southampton City Council to improve its understanding of the town and district centres was expressed during the Inquiry by the City Council’s Economic Development Manager who, to summarise his written evidence to the Panel, concluded:

‘Whilst the survey work carried out by the Forward Planning Team provides an invaluable record of the condition of district centres because it is based upon limited analysis there is a danger that the incorrect conclusions might be drawn. In addition, district centres are impacted by rapid and dynamic change in market trends and conditions and evidence from elsewhere in the UK indicates that there is the potential for sudden and rapid decline.

As a consequence there is a need to:

- Develop a greater understanding of the way in which our district centres function.
- Develop a more informed view of the condition of our district centres.....This might also include footfall counts and analysis of property prices. All data needs to be benchmarked against data that provides some context.
- The development dynamics in district centres require greater understanding in order that opportunities to strengthen them through this route are taken. This may include the inclusion of non-retail activities such as residential, offices and other workplaces that have the capacity to generate new trade.
- The expectations of those who shop and/or live within the catchment areas of district shopping centres needs to be understood.’

Policy – Proactively managing change

141. Planning Policy Statement 6 states that: ‘In order to deliver the Government’s objective of promoting vital and viable town centres....local planning authorities should:
- Actively promote growth and manage change in town centres
 - Adopt a proactive, plan-led approach to planning for town centres.’⁸

⁷ Paraphrased from Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres, ODPM, 2005, p28/29

⁸ Paraphrased from Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres, ODPM, 2005, p7

142. Southampton City Council's planning policies have been successful in attracting development within a number of town and district centres, and the policy to encourage supermarkets to anchor town and district centres has helped secure the Portswood Bus Depot development, and the development at Centenary Quay in Woolston.
143. The Scrutiny Panel recognised the role played by planning policies in enhancing the vitality and viability of Southampton's town and district centres, but the Panel believe that the City Council can do more to actively manage change and shape the offering within the centres.
144. Southampton City Council has recently commenced the preparation for the development of a Sites and Policies Development Plan. This document will accompany the Core Strategy, and will look in detail at key sites within the town and district centres.
145. The development of a Sites and Policies Development Plan provides the City Council with the opportunity to increase understanding of Southampton's town and district centres, as requested in the previous section, and to use the acquired information to, in conjunction with other tools, plan for the growth and development of the centres alongside the wider management role of the City Council.

146. **Recommendations - To improve understanding of Southampton's town and district centres, and to actively promote growth and manage change, it is recommended that:**

- The City Council, using Planning Policy Statement 6 as a guide, collates and analyses on a regular basis, relevant performance measurement information on the health of the town and district centres. This may include existing data on cleansing, crime, vacancy rates as well as information available from the Chamber of Commerce on business confidence.
- Through the Sites and Policies Plan process, and monitoring / implementation of the existing adopted Local Plan, the City Council's increases its understanding of the vitality and viability of the town and district centres, and that this information is used to assist in managing change in town and district centres where needed, and when consistent with planning powers.

Partnerships / Policy Framework – Improve the co-ordination within town and district centres

147. The Chief Executive of the ATCM identified the importance of working in partnership with local businesses and stakeholders to collectively improve centres, and the need to integrate policy across local authority services and partners to support the vitality and viability of town and district centres.
148. Two issues related to partnership working and integrating policy have been prominent during the Inquiry:
- The contribution that an effective traders association can have on the

vitality and viability of a town or district centre

- The need to improve how the City Council interacts with stakeholders in district and town centres and co-ordinates services.

149. **Traders Associations** – Evidence provided to the Scrutiny Panel by the Chair of the Bitterne Village Traders Association and the Chair of the Bedford Place Traders Association has revealed how effective a strong traders association can be. Through the co-ordinated efforts of local traders a well chaired traders association can lobby with one voice on behalf of a centre's traders, can pool resources to support events and initiatives, and can provide a support mechanism for traders.

150. The Bitterne Village Traders Association has been key to the turnaround in fortunes of Bitterne District Centre, and Bedford Place is a vibrant location that through the active traders association has organised events, promotional brochures, and campaigns to ensure that local decision makers are aware of traders views.

151. **Interaction with stakeholders and co-ordination of services** – At each meeting the Scrutiny Panel were informed by traders, officers and other invited consultees that there was a need to improve how the City Council interacts with stakeholders and supports town and district centres. The City Council's approach was judged to lack co-ordination and to be under resourced.

152. In summary the evidence provided throughout the Inquiry identified the need for Southampton City Council to:

- Improve contacts with businesses in town and district centres
- Provide a single point of contact for town and district centre stakeholders to liaise with
- Improve communication between departments, and co-ordination of work within town and district centres.

153. The Scrutiny Panel were informed about a number of approaches employed across the country to improve the co-ordination and management of town and district centres.

154. **District Centres Co-ordinator** – Portsmouth City Council employs a City Centre Manager and a District Centres Co-ordinator. The District Centres Co-ordinator post is part funded by Local Authority Business Growth Initiative (LABGI) funding and is charged with helping to improve contacts with businesses from Portsmouth's district centres, to act as a conduit between the City Council and local district centre stakeholders, and to strengthen and develop the district centres. The District Centres Co-ordinator has an office within Cosham Town Centre to maintain a visible presence in the centre.

155. Initiatives delivered through the District Centres Co-ordinator in Portsmouth:

- Cosham Business Association, and Hilsea and North End Business Association were both formed in 2006 (following significant work undertaken by the District Centres Co-ordinator with local businesses)
- Vacant shops initiative – A Not for Profit company is now working with

landlords to recruit new short term tenants to vacant units

- Working with students from South Downs College to design a new branded logo for Cosham, linked to history of area. The Business Association is offering a laptop to the winner
- Events being delivered in district centres – Radio station Wave 105 are media partners and run events (without cost to the City Council) in addition farmers markets, Christmas lights, and other community events are organised by the District Centres Co-ordinator, with local businesses, to increase footfall
- Support given to local businesses – Mystery shopping exercises, training, business advice clinics, speakers on topics (eg police, NNDR). Funders such as the Learning and Skills Council approach the District Centres Co-ordinator who acts as a broker and encourages support from traders
- Worked with traders to reduce costs and reduce problems relating to the collection of trade waste
- Chairs of Business Associations have met the City Council Leader and Chief Executive
- Cosham and Hilsea and North End Business Associations are key stakeholders in regeneration plans for the respective areas and involved in designing schemes relating to centre feasibility.

156. Outcomes generated by District Centre Co-ordinator led initiatives in Portsmouth:

- Active involvement in Business Associations from independent retailers and volunteers help support the District Centres Co-ordinators role
- Business Associations are now active in fighting for improvements to the local area (parking charges etc) and represent a powerful and influential body when operating collectively
- Increased awareness of the needs of district centres from Strategic Directors at Portsmouth City Council
- Providers of business support are now contacting the District Centres Co-ordinator to offer support to district centre businesses
- Increased understanding of the dynamics and issues within the district centres following mystery shopping exercise funded by the Learning and Skills Council
- Improved co-ordination of activities that impact on district centres – e.g. Highways speak with District Centres Co-ordinator and Business Associations
- Greater ownership and understanding of issues by local businesses, and an understanding of how local government operates
- Improved performance across the various district centres – Cosham District Centre has 95% occupancy rate and Hilsea and North End has between 92-95% occupancy rate (as at October 2009).

157. **Place Management Approach** – Bristol City Council piloted a Place Management approach in October 2008. This was a recommendation from a city wide retail study that identified the need for the Council to improve the co-

ordination of support to retail centres.

158. Bristol's Place Management approach is defined as: 'A co-ordinated area based, multi-stakeholder approach to improving locations'. Fundamentally this means delivering better outcomes for the retail centres through a more co-ordinated approach. It is intended that this approach will form part of the work of Bristol's Neighbourhood Partnerships.
159. Each of the 4 pilot centres has a Co-ordinator who acts as the first point of contact and is responsible for engagement with traders, Councillors, other stakeholders, action planning and co-ordination of delivery within the centre. This role is carried out by officers from different teams within the City Council to encourage corporate buy in and a multi-disciplinary approach.
160. The Place Management Co-ordinator works with a Place Management Group comprising representatives from various Bristol City Council departments, and the police. The Place Management Group is responsible for action planning and the delivery of initiatives within the centres. A chart outlining Bristol's approach to Place Management can be found in Appendix 3.
161. Initiatives and outcomes generated by the Place Management approach – At the time the Scrutiny Panel were informed about Bristol's approach the impact of Place Management had not been fully evaluated. However, the officer from Bristol City Council identified that team working had improved, it had raised the profile of the centres and the retail sector, it had helped to improve communications with traders, and had helped to form a new traders association.
162. **Town / District Centre Management** – A number of towns and cities employ an approach similar to 'Streets Ahead Southampton', Southampton's City Centre management company, within town and district centres.
163. Stockport MBC have worked with stakeholders to establish District Centre Partnerships within each of Stockport's 8 district centres. Each partnership comprises local stakeholders such as retailers, Councillors and representatives from statutory agencies, and is supported by District Centre Managers, who assist a number of partnerships. The partnerships develop district centre action plans to enhance the vitality and viability of the centre.
164. The Scrutiny Panel were informed about town centre management by a representative from Sainsbury's, who are one of the top 3 financial supporters of town centre management schemes in the UK.
165. Sainsbury's have acquired significant expertise in town centre management and are committed to develop best practice and share their expertise. Their criteria to determine if they will support a town centre management scheme in an area where they operate, includes the need for the scheme to have:
 - Clear and relevant role
 - Independent structure
 - Inclusive membership scheme
 - Local Authority support
 - Relevant and well defined business plan
 - Retail focussed projects and services
 - Accountability for delivery.

166. Implementing any of the above approaches would help to improve the co-ordination and management of town and district centres, and contribute to the City Council's priority: 'Getting the city working – Improving our links and relationships with businesses will be the key to this work. We need to make sure we support business locally.'
167. When considering the different options available the Scrutiny Panel believe that at this moment in time the District Centre Co-ordinator approach would best serve the needs of Southampton's town and district centres. This approach has delivered improvements within Portsmouth's town and district centres and this success can be largely attributed to the presence of a dedicated officer who has been able to develop strong links with local businesses, understands an area and its needs, is recognised by traders and whose remit is utilised by the City Council to act as a conduit between the City Council and local business.
168. The Place Management approach employed in Bristol appears capable of securing big improvements to the co-ordination and management of services within town and district centres. However, the Panel were informed that the vital role of Place Co-ordinator within the pilot study is placing significant demand on officer time, impacting on their ability to undertake their 'day job' within a service. If full time Co-ordinators were required it would add significant costs to this approach.
169. Town centre management should be an approach that a number of Southampton's town and district centres aspire to implementing to support their growth and development, with financial contributions from stakeholders. However, Bitterne aside, none of the town and district centres have established traders associations yet and members of the Scrutiny Panel considered that the imposition of this approach would be a step too far at this moment in time for the town and district centres.

170. **Recommendations - To improve the co-ordination and management of Southampton's town and district centres it is recommended that:**
- Using Portsmouth's model, appoint a District Centres Co-ordinator to:
 - a. Act as a link between Southampton City Council, traders and other commercial and community interests in town and district centres
 - b. Work with traders to establish traders associations within each town and district centre
 - c. Help establish a programme of events within town and district centres with traders associations and Active Communities
 - d. Act as the lead officer for district centres within the Council, acting as the conduit for a joined-up, planned approach to the future development and improvement of town and district centres
 - e. Explore potential external funding to support initiatives to improve town and district centre management.

Conclusion

171. Evidence gathered throughout the Inquiry has led the Scrutiny Panel to conclude that Southampton's town and district centres perform a valuable role as centres of retail, services and as a community focus, and whilst the Scrutiny Panel understand that the City Centre will be the focus for much of the planned development in the City, it is important that the town and district centres receive appropriate levels of support, investment and intervention in accordance with their specific needs, as identified by stakeholders, including local residents.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – District Centres Inquiry Terms of Reference

1. Scrutiny Inquiry Panel: Economic Well Being
2. Nature of the Inquiry: Full
3. Membership:
 - a. Councillor Ball (Chair)
 - b. Cllr Bogle
 - c. Cllr Burke
 - d. Cllr Fuller
 - e. Cllr Osmond
 - f. Cllr Sollitt
 - g. Cllr Wells
4. **Purpose:**
 - a. Exploration of how to stimulate local economies with a focus on a particular district centre including assessing the viability of district centres within the city by examining the lessons learnt in Shirley and their potential application to other areas such as Portswood.
5. **Background:**
 - a. Considerable work was done over a period of years to achieve improvements in the Shirley District Centre. This involved different Council services as well as the private sector. Work is also now planned in other District Centres such as Portswood.
6. **Objectives:**
 - a. To examine the project development and planning process for the Shirley District Centre and the key lessons from this work
 - b. To examine the successful development of a District Centre in another city, how this involved any local traders and the outcomes achieved
 - c. To examine the key factors that contribute to the stimulation of local economies, particularly in the current economic climate
 - d. To assess the viability of District Centres and factors that contribute to their sustainability
 - e. To consider how the lessons from the evidence gathered and the factors considered in the review can be applied in the development and improvement of other District Centres in the City.
7. **Methodology and Consultation:**
 - a. Undertake desktop research
 - b. Identify best practice
 - c. Seek stakeholder views

- d. Conduct interviews with Cabinet Members leading on issues related to District Shopping Centres, Executive Director, Policy Co-ordinator, Heads of Service and local businesses
- e. Examination of policies of supermarkets who may be governed by national directives as well as the views of local shopkeepers
- f. Site visits to District Centres

8. **Timetable - Meetings currently scheduled:**

30th September 2009

13th October 2009

28th October 2009

11th November 2009

25th November 2009

27th January 2010

Appendix 2 – Project Plan (including a list of witnesses)

DATE	MEETING THEME	TOPIC DETAIL	EVIDENCE PROVIDED BY
30/09/09	Introduction to inquiry	<p>Definition of district centres and why are district centres important?</p> <p>Strategic Policy that supports district centres in Southampton</p> <p>What are the key elements of a successful and sustainable district centre?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor Dean, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport • Paul Nichols, Head of Planning and Sustainability, SCC • Simon Quin, Chief Executive of the Association of Town Centre Managers • Graham Tuck, Regional and Strategic Planning Co-ordinator, SCC
13/10/09	Impact of Council Policy	<p>How does Council policy/ services impact on District Centres? (linked to key elements of successful centre)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mick Bishop, Head of Highways and Parking Services, SCC • Simon Bell, Principal Transport Planner, SCC • Paul Walker, Transport Policy Team Leader, SCC • Derek Stevens, Anti-Social Behaviour Operations Manager, SCC • Liz Smith, Public Arts Officer, SCC
28/10/09	Best Practice & Shirley Town Centre	<p>Example of an alternative district centre / council approach</p> <p>Developing capacity within District Centres</p> <p>The development of Shirley Town Centre</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jason Thorne, Regeneration Policy Officer, Bristol City Council • Jeff Walters, Economic Development Manager, SCC • Graham Penny, Chair of the Bedford Place Traders Association • Denice Prestidge, Environment Directorate Development Manager, SCC
11/11/09	Portswood & Bitterne District Centres	<p>Viability and vitality of the district centres</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graham Tuck, Regional and Strategic Planning Co-ordinator, SCC

DATE	MEETING THEME	TOPIC DETAIL	EVIDENCE PROVIDED BY
		Proposals and plans Comparison with best practice Key issues for district centres	Portswood: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kate Slater and Dan Olive from Waitrose (Portswood) • Councillor Baston and Councillor Barnes-Andrews Bitterne: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rod Bennett , Chair of Bitterne Village Traders Association, and Mrs Bennett • Councillor Jones • John Mayo, Bitterne resident
25/11/09	Woolston and Lordshill District Centres	Viability and vitality of the district centres Proposals and plans Comparison with best practice Key issues for district centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graham Tuck, Regional and Strategic Planning Co-ordinator, SCC Woolston: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woolston retailers - Andy Grace from Wearabouts, Bob Rowe from Something Special, and Colin Martin from Mitchells • Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Economic Development • Councillor Cunio, Councillor R Williams and Councillor Payne • Giv Thornton, Community Development Officer, Swaythling Housing Society • Robin McDonald, Economic Development Officer, SCC Lordshill: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul Nichols, Head of Planning and Sustainability, SCC • Councillor Galton

DATE	MEETING THEME	TOPIC DETAIL	EVIDENCE PROVIDED BY
16/12/09	Managing town and district centres	District / Town Centre Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kristine Salomon-Olsen, Head of Representation, Southampton & Fareham Chamber of Commerce & Industry • Martin Wright, Director of Zeteor Ltd and Consultant employed by Sainsbury's to develop town centre management initiatives
27/01/10	Agree final report	Approve report for submission to Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee	

In addition the Scrutiny Co-ordinator gathered evidence from Sharon Baldwin, Croydon's District Centre Development Manager, and Colin Walker, Portsmouth's District Centre Co-ordinator.

Appendix 3 – Bristol’s Approach to Place Management

Appendix A

Place Management structures for pilot

