

EXECUTIVE

20th January 2026

Report Title	Growth of Town Centres - Masterplan Development
Lead Member	Councillor Jan O'Hara, Executive Member for Planning and Economic Growth
Report Author	Jonathan Waterworth, Assistant Director Assets & Environment

Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	N/A
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with?	Prosperity

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Phase 1 Town Centre Health Checks: Executive Summary

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 On 11th December 2025 the Council agreed its new Corporate Plan, setting out its vision and priorities for North Northamptonshire over the next four years. Prosperity is a key Priority, with a specific commitment to *'Help improve town centres and provide support to help them reshape what they have to offer'*.
- 1.2 Town Centres are the hearts of our communities, and in recent years our town centres have faced decline with challenging circumstances from the cost of living and energy crisis to COVID as well as the impact of online shopping. Whilst the Council cannot solve all of these challenges, it can play an important role in how town centres can be supported to transform to create thriving and resilient places and bring partners together to be involved in making it a success.
- 1.3 The first step in delivering our corporate priority is to develop a strategic masterplan, which will lead to a detailed action plan to deliver growth and

regeneration in our town centres. Given the number of town centres in North Northamptonshire, and to ensure quality plans are developed, this report proposes the development of two town centre masterplans initially, with further phases of masterplan development to be followed, subject to available budget.

- 1.4 To support this work and identify the first towns, the Council invited consultants to bid for a two-stage approach to developing regeneration plans for the four growth towns of Corby, Kettering, Rushden and Wellingborough. This would include phase 1, a strategic review including a health check for the four towns and then phase 2, a masterplan for one of the growth towns. Urban Foresight were appointed to undertake this work.
- 1.5 Executive are asked to consider the findings of the review and the options for the next steps in development of a masterplan.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 In October 2025, consultants specialising in the work to be undertaken were appointed. The Consultants were engaged to undertake an independent strategic review of North Northamptonshire growth towns to understand the vitality and viability of growth town centres (Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough and Rushden). This included gathering data from existing studies, undertaking site visits and assessing each of the towns and identifying opportunities and constraints for sites and town centre initiatives.
- 2.2 The results of the strategic review (as summarised in **Appendix A**) indicate that Wellingborough offers the biggest scale and opportunity for developing the masterplan when considering its existing assets, opportunities for change (marketplace area / larger redevelopment sites), strategic context (the future transport interchange), and lack of recent investment against other towns.
- 2.3 The next stage of the process is for a masterplan to be drafted to outline the long-term vision for the town centre to guide future development and investment. Once drafted a series of stakeholder engagement sessions will take place to inform the detail of the masterplan, with a report to be brought back to the Executive in Spring 2026.
- 2.4 Following a competitive procurement exercise, the available budget and based on the findings of the strategic review, a further masterplan can then be produced for Kettering. The findings of the initial assessment highlighted the strong strategic role played by Kettering town centre, being the largest centre in North Northamptonshire, and a clear set of regeneration opportunities.
- 2.5 Based on the available budget and conclusions of the strategic review, it is recommended that a masterplan for Wellingborough town centre be progressed first, with a Kettering town centre masterplan developed thereafter.
- 2.6 In terms of preparing masterplans, the Council must start with one town and the process of review and evaluation outlined within the report has approached this based on need and outcome for North Northamptonshire residents. It is important to note that selecting Wellingborough and Kettering first does not

mean that the Council will not continue to work with partners locally on key town centre sites across all North Northamptonshire towns.

- 2.7 The decision to progress in a phased approach is driven by available budget and the consideration of resourcing the implementation of the end plan to ensure it has a positive outcome locally. The strategic review undertaken provides data which the Council can use to positively influence activity across different towns and continue to proactively explore opportunities for regeneration of key town centre sites across North Northamptonshire.
- 2.8 The development of town centre masterplans, beyond Wellingborough and Kettering, for other North Northamptonshire towns will be considered later in 2026 and will be subject to available budget.

3. Recommendations

3.1. It is recommended that the Executive

- a) Notes the information in the Town Centre assessment attached as Appendix A.
- b) Approves the production of a Town Centre Masterplan for Wellingborough, with a Kettering town centre masterplan to be developed thereafter.

3.2. Reasons for Recommendations:

- The recommended course of action will allow a plan to be developed for Wellingborough town centre to support the growth and regeneration of the town.
- This decision is based on the review of data across North Northamptonshire key towns to identify which town to progress first.
- Progressing the masterplan will support a co-ordinated approach to regeneration sites across the town.
- Corby, Kettering and Rushden were also considered against the criteria, with Kettering having a strong strategic role and a clear set of regeneration opportunities.

3.3. Alternative Options Considered

- The Council could choose not to develop a masterplan for any of the town centres; however, this would be a missed opportunity of creating a co-ordinated plan and long-term vision to support the regeneration of our growth towns.
- The Council could progress masterplans for all key North Northamptonshire town centres. The available budget and resources to progress this work have driven the decision to progress one plan initially, with a second to follow thereafter.

4. Report Background

- 4.1. North Northamptonshire is a polycentric place and has a network of twelve town centres of which four are growth towns. The Council has sought to plan positively to support the regeneration of town centres through policies in adopted local plans. However, due to economic challenges several opportunity sites have not yet been delivered. Whilst many of these sites will be privately owned, the Council remains a significant landowner within some of our town centres and so can positively influence development locally.
- 4.2. The town centres in North Northamptonshire are the focus for retail, leisure and cultural facilities and provide significant employment. They also act as the heart of their communities and serve their surrounding rural areas, whilst also offering opportunities for regeneration over the coming years.
- 4.3. Kettering town centre is the largest centre in North Northamptonshire in respect of both unit numbers and floorspace followed by Wellingborough, Corby and Rushden. However, the town centres are small compared to those in neighbouring settlements such as Northampton, Leicester and Peterborough.
- 4.4. Town centres across North Northamptonshire have changed and evolved significantly over recent years, due to the growth in online shopping, the Covid-19 pandemic, which has had, and continues to have a significant impact, and the opening of the Rushden Lakes development in 2017. Whilst the Council cannot reverse or stop these national trends, it can help provide the framework and plan to support town centres to reinvent themselves.
- 4.8 Urban Foresight were appointed as independent specialist consultants undertake a strategic review to help the Council understand the vitality and viability of each of the four growth town centres (Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough and Rushden) and then to use this as the evidence base to select the town to create an initial masterplan for. This includes gathering data from existing studies, undertaking site visits and assessing each of the towns and identifying opportunities and constraints for sites and town centre initiatives.
- 4.9 This review was undertaken between November and December 2025 and included site visits as well as reviewing data to provide an assessment of each town. It included the following:
- The diversity of uses (e.g. retail and services offer)
 - Proportion of vacant street level property
 - Retailer representation & balance between independent and multiple stores
 - Commercial rents
 - Pedestrian flows (where available)
 - Accessibility – this includes transport accessibility and accessibility for people with different impairments or health conditions, as well as older people with mobility requirements
 - Perception of safety and occurrence of crime
 - State of town centre environmental quality
 - Extent to which there is evidence of barriers to new businesses opening and existing businesses expanding
 - Opening hours/availability/extent to which there is an evening and nighttime economy offer.

- 4.10 The next step is to develop a masterplan for a town centre. This masterplan will look to outline the long-term vision for the town centre to guide future development and investment. This masterplan would cover areas including:
- **Vision and Objectives** - The overall vision, specific objectives and guiding principles including public consultations.
 - **Land Use and Development** - Consideration of the uses in the town centre including residential, retail/commercial, offices, leisure, public spaces and amenities, alongside identifying and planning for the redevelopment of vacant or underutilised sites.
 - **Transportation and Movement** - Consideration of elements such as active travel, public transport and accessibility and parking and traffic management.
 - **Public Realm and Heritage** - Analysis of Public Spaces, Heritage and Culture and Public Art and Events
 - **Delivery and Implementation** - Including an action plan, funding and Investment opportunities, phasing and prioritisation and monitoring and evaluation sections.
- 4.11 The masterplan does not replace or supersede any formal planning document, such as the Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan where they exist or are being developed. It provides a framework to engage with local stakeholders, including the public, on opportunities within the town and how it can capitalise on regeneration sites within the town centre. This will support the co-ordination of sites in the town, including the use of Council owned assets. The masterplan development will also need to have strategic alignments with other reviews and projects taking place in the locality, such as the Pride in Place investment within Wellingborough and Kettering.
- 4.12 Once complete, the Town Centre masterplan will be brought back to Executive in Spring 2026 for approval, consideration of an action plan and a review of the plan to consider if/when further masterplans are undertaken.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 The strategic review, as summarised at **Appendix A**, identified the priority order for considering North Northants major towns as:
1. **Wellingborough** – Highest structural need, most significant market weaknesses and the strongest opportunity for a transformative masterplan.
 2. **Kettering** – Strong strategic role and a clear set of regeneration opportunities, though already supported by existing frameworks.
 3. **Corby** – Positive recent performance and ongoing investment reduce the relative additional value of a new masterplan at this stage.
 4. **Rushden** – Important local centre with clear challenges, but fewer strategic or large-scale opportunities for master planning compared with the other towns.
- 5.2 The recommendation to progress with Wellingborough first is based on the potential scale and opportunity for developing the masterplan when

considering its existing assets, opportunities for change (marketplace area / larger redevelopment sites), strategic context (the future transport interchange), and lack of recent investment against other towns. This recommendation reflects:

- **The highest level of structural need**

Wellingborough has the highest vacancy rate, the most significant market weaknesses, and the clearest evidence of long-term decline in comparison retail. These conditions indicate that the town centre is facing deeper structural challenges than the other locations. There is also a real need/opportunity to strengthen pedestrian connections between town centre and wider area (inc. train station - new interchange), including gateway spaces and car dominated areas e.g., Castle Way.

- **The greatest potential for transformative impact**

The town centre contains several major regeneration opportunities, including the repositioning of Swansgate in terms of its offer, a number of large vacant units and the need to reconnect the town centre with the railway station and wider growth areas. A masterplan offers the opportunity to coordinate these elements in a way not currently provided for through existing frameworks. There are strong existing assets and character to build on e.g., historic core streets around Old Hallow's Church and Conservation Areas (inner and outer), and greenspace (e.g., Croyland Gardens and Swanspool Brook). There are redevelopment opportunities within the town centre e.g., Market Place, which provide opportunities for new building development, mix of uses, and improved public realm.

- **Strong strategic alignment**

Wellingborough plays a pivotal role in supporting major new growth at Stanton Cross and Glenvale Park. A masterplan would help ensure that this growth strengthens, rather than bypasses, the town centre, which aligns closely with both local and national policy objectives.

- 5.3 The decision to develop only one or two masterplans was principally driven by the available budget, which was allowed for as a one-off expenditure in 2025/26, along with the availability of internal resource to progress a quality plan and considering delivery arrangements.
- 5.4 Following a competitive procurement exercise, the available budget and based on the findings of the strategic review, a further masterplan can be produced, with the findings of the initial assessment highlighting the strong strategic role played by Kettering town centre, being the largest centre in North Northamptonshire, and a clear set of regeneration opportunities.
- 5.5 There is insufficient budget available to progress a masterplan for all towns at present, and the Council also needs to consider resourcing the implementation of the end plan to ensure it has a positive outcome locally. However, the Council will continue to work with partners on key town centre sites across all North Northamptonshire towns, with the strategic review undertaken providing data which the Council can use to positively influence activity across different towns

and continue to proactively explore opportunities for regeneration of key town centre sites across North Northamptonshire.

5.6 The options available to the Council are:

1. Produce a single masterplan for the recommended town centre of Wellingborough, or a different town centre.
2. Produce a masterplan for two town centres. The strategic review indicates both Wellingborough and Kettering present the greatest opportunity. To manage resources and ensure quality plans are produced it is recommended this takes place in a phased approach.
3. Produce a town centre masterplan for all four growth towns. Whilst this would be the eventual ambition, a balance needs to be struck between available budget and officer resource and ensuring that once the plans are created there is sufficient focus on delivery of the plan. A phased approach would be recommended if this option was progressed.
4. To not produce any town centre masterplans. This is not recommended given the opportunity to support North Northants town centres.

5.7 Based on the available budget and conclusions of the strategic review, it is recommended that a masterplan for Wellingborough town centre be progressed first, with a Kettering town centre masterplan developed thereafter. Consideration of the development of further town centres masterplans will be considered as part of the annual budget setting process.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. The next step following confirmation to progress is for a Town Centre Masterplan to be drafted for Wellingborough with a report to be brought back to the Executive in Spring 2026. This will include engagement with local stakeholders
- 6.2. The outcome of this work will be brought back to Executive and will consider resources for implementation of the plan.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources, Financial and Transformation

- 7.1.1. There are no resources or financial implications arising from the proposals at this stage. As part of the development of a town centre masterplan, project costs, possible funding opportunities and delivery methods will be considered and brought back for further consideration. The cost of undertaking this review and developing a masterplan for Wellingborough is budgeted at a cost of £65,000.

7.2. Legal and Governance

7.2.1. There are no legal implications arising from the proposals detailed in this report.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1. In December 2025, the Council agreed its Corporate Plan for 2025 - 2029 setting out a bold and forward-looking strategy to improve lives across the region. Importantly, it outlined the council's key commitments for the next four years, focused on four key themes:

- **Family** – supporting children, families, and vulnerable resident
- **Community** – building safer, stronger, and more connected communities.
- **Prosperity** – driving economic growth, housing, and infrastructure.
- **Smarter, Faster, Fairer Public Services** – improving service delivery and accessibility.

7.3.2. This project will help the delivery of a number of these themes, in particular the Community theme, building safer, stronger, and connected communities by agreeing to develop a masterplan for one town. The masterplan development will also link in with other strategic projects, such as the Pride in Place investment within Wellingborough and Kettering.

7.4. Risk

7.4.1. At this stage, there are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report, the outcome of this work will be to create a masterplan which identifies future delivery options, and at this time a risk register will be developed.

7.5. Consultation

7.5.1. Consultation will be included as part of the work over the coming months and a plan for this engagement is being developed to ensure relevant stakeholders are involved.

7.6. Consideration by Scrutiny

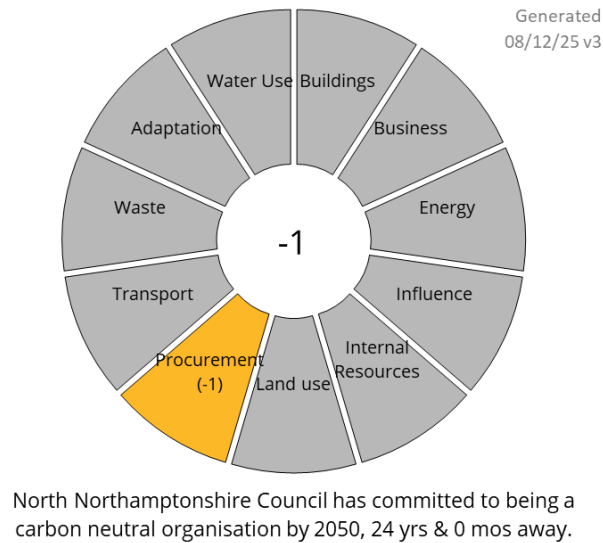
7.6.1. This proposal has not been considered by the Place & Environment Scrutiny Committee but as this work progresses could form part of their work programme for 2026/27.

7.7. Equality Implications

7.7.1. An Equalities Screening Assessment has been completed which identifies that at this stage there is no impact. A further assessment will be completed as this project progresses.

7.8. Climate Impact

7.8.1. A Climate Change Impact Assessment (CCIA) has been undertaken:



7.8.2. There is a negative climate impact associated with the contract procurement, this is down to not knowing the environmental credentials of the potential supplier. Attempts will be made to ensure the supplier has an environmental policy and carbon neutral ambition. As the scheme progresses it is anticipated that there will be a positive in this area.

7.9. Community Impact

7.9.1. There are no significant community impact implications arising from the proposed recommendations in this report. The development of a town centre masterplan will help to identify any community issues within the area and will develop a vision for the future.

7.10. Crime and Disorder Impact

7.10.1. There are no significant crime and disorder impact implications arising from the proposed recommendations in this report. The development of a town centre masterplan will help to identify any crime and disorder issues within the area and create an action plan for the future to help to address some of these issues.

8. Background Papers

8.1 Previous and existing reviews/plans include:

Planning Policy- Local Plans including North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, Part 2 Local Plans and Neighbourhood plans. These contain specific policies about the town centres.

Kettering

The Kettering Town Centre Area Action Plan 2011-21 although this is legacy Council (KBC) document it details schemes that have historically been undertaken and measures to regenerate the town centre.

The Kettering Central Neighbourhood Plan Area designated in October 2024

Wellingborough

Chapter 9 of Plan for the Borough of Wellingborough adopted Feb 2019

Corby

Chapter 9 of the Part 2 Local Plan for Corby adopted September 2021

Policy 22 - Regeneration Strategy for Corby Town Centre

Policy 23 - Spatial Framework for Corby Town Centre

Rushden

Chapter 10 East Northamptonshire Local Plan Part 2 adopted Dec 2023.

Policy EN30: Reimagining Town Centres – guiding principles

Policy EN31 Splash pool and former Wilco's site redevelopment