

**A VISION FOR ST NEOTS
(Report by Head of Planning Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Members of the work carried out by the Civic Trust in producing the third Vision for our Market Towns and to approve its contents to be used as informal planning guidance.
- 1.2 This matter was considered at their meeting on the 4th November but deferred.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Civic Trust were commissioned by the District Council to carry out a study of St Neots Town Centre that identified the environmental and development opportunities available.
- 2.2 The study commenced in the Spring of 2003 and a small steering group representing the Town Council, the St Neots Community Action Partnership, Town Centre Initiative, the Town Centre Manager and the District Council was formed to monitor the project
- 2.3 The Town centre partnership had already been active in examining town centre issues and had formed a number of subgroups representing various interests to deal with these issues. It was considered that these groups were in an ideal position to respond to the various stages of the visioning process.
- 2.4 Work commenced with a baseline review and opportunity assessment including a commercial review of the market for retail, offices and housing in the Town.
- 2.5 Following the meetings of the various sub groups held during the summer, ideas were fed into the preparation of the Policy and an exhibition/workshop was held in October 2003 at which the Public were invited. A special edition of St Neots Priorities was produced asking three questions:-
- Where are we now?
 - Where do we want to be in ten years time?
 - What are your ideas for the future?
- 15000 copies of the Priorities were distributed to addresses in the area and 445 responses were received. In analysing these comments it was decided to extend the boundaries of the study to include a number of sites outside the town centre but which are functionally linked. These included the two secondary schools in St Neots where there is a complementary relationship with the existing and proposed uses on the campuses and uses one would expect in the town centre.
- 2.6 The comments were fed into a draft report and circulated for comment during the early part of 2004. On completion of the final

report a further exhibition was held in St Neots for a period of three days in July.

- 2.7 Copies of the document have been circulated to all the stakeholders. The plan entitled 'Town Centre Character Areas ' situated at the end of section 2 of the document has been amended to clarify the opportunity areas and is included with this report.

3. IMPLEMENTATION

- 3.1 The document will provide a framework for decision making in St Neots Town centre over the next ten years for the District Council. In two areas it goes beyond the town centre where decisions may have an impact on town centre functions. It will affect land use planning decisions, environmental improvement programmes, and service delivery options. It will also inform the policies and land use allocations in the forthcoming Local Development Document and the priorities for action in the Community Strategy. The document does not pretend to be exhaustive by identifying all opportunities for future development or improvement. Other sites may be identified by developers in the normal way.
- 3.2 As the status of this document will only be informal policy guidance any development proposals brought forward for sites identified in the Vision will be treated no differently from those that have not been so identified. All will be the subject of further public consultation either through the planning process or by other means.
- 3.3 Other organisations will accept and use it as it suits them. The more that proposals are included in adopted plans, policy guidance or urban design frameworks the more that it will become accepted by those organisations and the easier it will be to defend proposals not in accordance with the Vision.
- 3.4 Notwithstanding that work has already commenced on studying a number of sites such as the Priory Centre, and St Neots Community College, Section 6 of Vision document attempts to provide an outline of an indicative action plan leaving details of matters such as the timescale, implementing agency and resources to be completed later.
- 3.5 It is proposed that the completion of the action plan be undertaken with the representatives of the groups that formed the steering group in order to identify what priorities and progress can be agreed.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 That the Cabinet adopt the 'St Neots Town Centre: The Future (as amended by revised 'Town Centre Character Areas' plan) as informal policy guidance

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Commercial Appraisal of St Neots – A study by Chestertons

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