



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
PHASE 1 - PLACE MARKETING STRATEGY REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SEPTEMBER 2020





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INTRODUCTION

Northampton Borough Council (NBC) is developing a Place Marketing Strategy for the town which aims to:

- Increase inward investment
- Increase tourism
- Improve local perception and strengthening of civic pride

In March 2020 NBC commissioned Tricolor Ltd to deliver a piece of research and consultation work as the first phase of the development of the Place Marketing Strategy for the Town. This involved in-depth research conducted with a range of stakeholders, businesses, residents and people who live, work and study in the town, as well as views of those externally, to discover current perceptions of Northampton. It also began to develop the outline 'big picture' narrative of what makes Northampton unique and how this can help inform the next stages of work - the development and delivery of the Place Marketing Strategy.

It was intended that this and the two subsequent phases (the development and delivery of the strategy) would be completed in time for the Local Government reorganisation in the county, which would lead to the formation of two unitary authorities in April 2021.

Shortly after Tricolor's appointment, and before work could get underway, the COVID-19 lockdown began in the UK. Tricolor's original programme was pushed back to July - September 2020, and consultation work was delivered virtually, rather than face to face. Overall, despite restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 situation, there was a significant response to all consultation activities, which has provided a robust sample for conclusions to be drawn from.

This Executive Summary is supported by the Phase 1 Report, which summarises and analyses all findings of the consultation work. A full record of consultation is provided in the accompanying Appendix I - Consultation Findings Report.



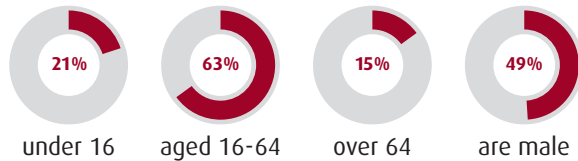
STRATEGIC BACKGROUND

Northampton is the largest town in England and the county town of Northamptonshire

A growing population of **225,100+**



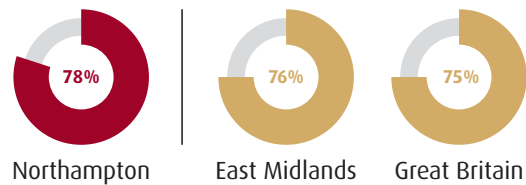
Northampton population:



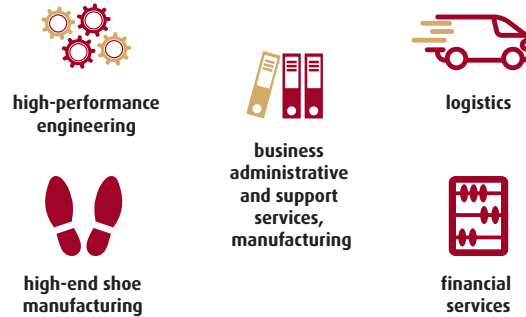
Life expectancy is:



High levels of employment:



Key business sectors include:



The town is on the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, the biggest growth area outside London - the Arc is predicted to require up to...

1,000,000 new homes
1.1 million jobs by 2050

249,460 visitors

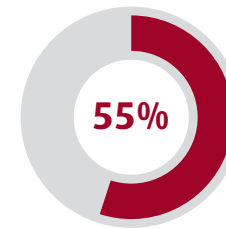
to Northamptonshire in 2018, a **decline of 8.9%** on the previous year

500+ listed buildings
21 conservation areas
7 scheduled monuments

3 professional sports grounds:



1,600ha of parks and green spaces



Served by **24 hotels, 55% budget** or limited service

Location and transport links:

1 central railway station



Served by **3 junctions of the M1**, the **A43** to the **M40 motorway**, and the **A14 at Kettering**

London Luton, Birmingham International and **East Midlands** airports are all within one hour's drive; with a direct train to Birmingham International.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY & DELIVERY

An Engagement Plan was developed and agreed, which included consultation with the following groups:

Key Players, Stakeholders and Brands

This group included: the Northampton Forward Board; Northampton Borough Council; Love Northampton; Northampton Alive; Northamptonshire: Britain's Best Surprise; University of Northampton; Northampton's Business Improvement Districts; Northamptonshire's Chambers of Commerce and the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership.

Live Group

Residents, workers and students

Visit Group

People who live outside the town but visit for a variety of reasons

Invest Group

Local businesses based in or operating out of Northampton

Consultation was rolled out July - September 2020 in the following phases:

Consultation Phase 1 - Key Stakeholders - July 2020

Consultation with 22 key stakeholders
Northampton Forward Board workshop
1-2-1 phone calls
Further brand mapping research

Consultation Phase 2 - Online Surveys - July - August 2020

Resident & visitor survey - 1,754 responses
Northampton business survey - 106 responses
National business survey - 58 responses

Consultation Phase 3 (a and b) - Public and Business Focus Groups - August 2020

2 public focus groups - 27 participants
2 business focus groups - 11 participants

Consultation Phase 3 - 1-2-1 Phone Calls - August-September 2020

further 1-2-1 calls with:

- 4 resident and community groups
- 8 tourism organisations
- 16 local businesses

Phase 5 - Online Audit of Visitor Perceptions - July - September 2020

An online audit of visitor perceptions in July and September to gauge perceptions from this wider audience. This monitored what people were saying about Northampton in online forums such as Mumsnet and on visitor platforms such as Tripadvisor.

CONSULTATION KEY FINDINGS: PERCEPTIONS

Overview

Across all groups consulted, there was agreement that:

The town deserved a

better quality town centre/ hub, and the **Market Square needed revamping.**

Cleanliness and the **environment** were **consistently poorly rated.**

It had become a **worse place to live over the last 5 years** as a result of issues such as cleanliness, parking and transport and the retail offer.

Communication across the town and the **marketing** of its offer **needed improving** to maximise potential.

Improved green infrastructure was needed.

Its **central location** was a **key selling point,** alongside its abundance of **green spaces** and internationally recognised **shoe industry.**

Value for money and the **quality of life** it could offer was **strong** in relation to schools and the university, house prices, access to green spaces, culture and heritage, and strong community spirit.

Key assets include **Abington Park, Royal & Derngate Theatre,** and **The Saints Rugby Club.**

Whilst there are a number of persistent issues that reflect negatively on the town, Northampton has a considerable amount of positive aspects to offer people who live, visit or may invest here. Some 'quick wins' could be achieved by investing in the town centre and improving the environment and levels of cleanliness.

What are Current Perceptions of Northampton from People Who Live, Study or Work in the Town?

- 50% of survey respondents who live in the town voted it as a 'good' or 'very good' place to live.
- 60.7% of residents felt that the town had become a worse place to live in the last 5 years.
- 58% of survey respondents rated 'green spaces' as the best part of the town, followed equally by the 'shoe and leather industry' and 'history and heritage' by 43% of resident respondents.
- Overall, the town was generally perceived negatively - with the most frequently used words to describe it being 'tired', 'average' and 'disappointing'. However, there was also some mention of positive attributes of the town or ways in which it could be improved, with reference to it being undiscovered and multicultural.
- The main issues raised by the public were: lack of shops; lack of leisure offer for families; parking charges and transport infrastructure; environmental concerns (fly-tipping and lack of cleanliness); rising crime and antisocial behaviour; a need for more support for independent businesses; more support for the arts; frustration with unmet potential and overstretched infrastructure for the growing population.

What are Current Perceptions of Northampton From People Who Visit Here?

- The majority of consultees who are visitors to Northampton are attracted by entertainment including; eating out, shopping, culture and leisure.
- Working, accessing key services, visiting family, or attending sporting events were also key reasons to visit the town.
- Most visitors find the commercial and environmental aspects unattractive.
- Whilst many visitors found the town to be easily accessible, there was also a strong indication that traffic was badly managed and parking fees should be scrapped.
- Whilst entertainment is believed to have generally improved in the last 5 years, most visitors agree that retail has declined during the same period.
- Visitors described Northampton as being tired and disappointing but indicated that there is potential for improvement.
- Whilst those living and working in Northampton rate the town highest for its green spaces, visitors are attracted more to the shoe industry, heritage and culture on offer.
- Royal & Derngate Theatre and Abington Park were stand out preferences for physical space amongst visitors.



What are Current Perceptions of Northampton From People Who Invest or Run a Business Here?

- The real key selling point and a positive aspect of the town is the key central location with the road and rail networks and access offered to London and throughout the country.
- Northampton has everything apart from a hub - there is an agreement that the town centre is run down and is the key area that needs investing.
- There is a general perception that the marketing and promotion of the town as a business centre is ineffective - with marketing and promotion inconsistent, or going unnoticed.
- Relatively few people rated any of the criteria of the town as 'very good' - with most responses being neutral.
- Businesses chose Northampton primarily because of its location, with the owners living in the town already being a significant factor.
- Town demographics, market size and labour market were also considered to be important.
- The majority of all respondents felt that the town had stayed the same as a centre for business in the last 5 years, with a significant proportion across the survey (34%) believing that it was worse, compared to 22% who felt it had improved.
- As its USPs, there was a perception that the town offered heritage, history, attractive buildings and green spaces that differentiate it from other towns, notably nearby Milton Keynes.
- Northampton is the heart of the shoemaking industry in England and has played a huge part in putting the town on the map - despite its heritage, there is no high-end shoe shop in the town.
- There is a need to promote Northampton as the county town - within the context of all that the county has to offer.
- It can be difficult to recruit talent locally – The University of Northampton has played a key role, and this needs support to ensure students remain and talent is nurtured.
- There is an opportunity to help companies in the Northampton area to work with companies within the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. This is the biggest growth area outside London, and is predicted to require up to 1 million new homes and create 1.1 million jobs across the Arc by 2050.
- There is an opportunity to build on the strength of the Science and Technology Cluster and ongoing development of Silverstone Park, where the Council could offer to host STC events or get MPs involved in sector business talks.



What are Current Perceptions of Northampton from Businesses Outside the Area?

- Affordability of office space, location and business rates were rated as being the most important, key considerations for businesses when looking at new locations - something for the Council to consider in their Place Marketing Narrative.
- Although there was some general lack of awareness about what Northampton had to offer, some of the town's key attributes were identified in other areas of resident and stakeholder consultation - including the central location and access to transport networks, green spaces, countryside, being a market town and having strong sporting connections.
- Those aware of the town thought that the town centre itself is run down and in need of investment and reimagining.
- Only 14.55% felt that Northampton didn't currently meet their needs; with many being uncertain. With the right marketing and clear messaging in place, it may therefore be possible to broaden the appeal of the town to the wider business community.



EMERGING PLACE NARRATIVE THEMES

The development of the Place Marketing Strategy will include the production of the Place Narrative - the 'big picture' story, about what the place is going to be for, why it is special, and how it stands out. Consultation has identified perceptions across residents, visitors and businesses and the key aspects, assets, themes and stories of the town that should be woven into the narrative; these include:

The wealth of green spaces - parks, the canal and river, and access to the countryside, with Abington Park being frequently mentioned.

World-class shoe and leather industry - with brands such as Church's and Trickers.

Heritage and history - with attractive buildings that create a sense of character and differentiate it from other towns.

A strong cultural offer - with the Royal & Derngate Theatre and Delapre Abbey as an integral part of this.

Well-loved sports teams - e.g. The Saints and The Cobblers.

Key central location with **good transport links** with the road and rail networks.

Value for money and affordability of housing and other amenities.

Recognised as **one of the best places in the country to set up a business**, location being a key factor.

Innovation and entrepreneurial spirit.

Strong automotive and engineering sectors.

Community spirit.

Ability to bounce back e.g. Great Fire of Northampton 1675, role in the War of the Roses.

Counterculture and creativity of the community.

Northampton is the **biggest town in the country**.

Northampton Museum & Art Gallery's upcoming **'We Are Northampton' temporary exhibition.**

Specifically, what does Northampton Offer...

People Who Live Here?

- Significant green spaces.
- Culture and heritage.
- Central, well-connected location - good links to London and Birmingham.
- Value for money and affordability in housing and amenities.
- A mix of good state and private schools, with a great University.
- Great sense of community.

People Who Visit It?

- Heritage and culture, with the Royal & Derngate Theatre, the Cultural Quarter and a nationally recognised shoe collection in the museum.
- Green spaces.
- Sporting clubs and venues - nationally important Saints Rugby Club.

People Who Want to Invest or Set Up Business Here?

- Great central England location and access to London, Birmingham.
- Good quality of life for workers with access to green spaces, culture and heritage, and great community spirit.
- Prominent location in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.
- Improving digital connectivity.



HOW CAN NORTHAMPTON DELIVER AGAINST THE STATED AIMS:

Increase Inward Investment

- Strong communication of the Place Marketing work - identifying where the economic strengths lie.
- Work to develop more varied office space (including Grade A).
- Develop the Market Square and progress significant investment in the town centre development.
- Play a more prominent role in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc promotion.
- Senior Council Leaders and politicians to get more involved in the Science & Technology Cluster.
- Improve internet connectivity e.g. super high-speed broadband.
- Improve physical connectivity e.g. improve cycling and pedestrian routes, links to Silverstone Park.
- Keep businesses up to date on plans to improve transport infrastructure.
- Support established businesses leading to more startups.
- Wider marketing so people are aware of Northampton and its amenities and prime location.
- Continued engagement with BIDs and individual businesses throughout the next phase of this work.
- Build and deepen relationships with national high profile brands within Northampton as the Place Marketing Strategy develops (particularly those affected by COVID-19).
- Improve the attractiveness and appeal of the commercial environment in the town.

Increase Tourism

- Improve the heart of the town, the Market Square, and make sure the town centre development is progressed to ensure the current condition does not decline further.
- Improve parking and accessibility - consider parking charge strategy to increase dwell time.
- Promote and consider developing the riverside to provide a greater leisure offer.
- Celebrate the footwear industry through e.g. big shoe trails, festivals and events.
- Make more of the significant moments in Northampton's history.
- Support the development of a varied accommodation offer.
- Improved communication and marketing of what's on - reinvigoration of the Love Northampton initiative - with sustained investment, and better coordination with Northamptonshire: Britain's Best Surprise.
- Invest in the quick wins - e.g. a deep clean and tidy to improve the appeal and perceived attractiveness.
- Develop partnership working across the cultural sector to create visitor packages through e.g. joint marketing and ticketing, to encourage visits and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the town.
- Develop a stronger direction of travel for the retail offer.
- Ensure all event and town promotional materials deliver cohesive and consistent marketing messages.

Improve Local Perception And Strengthen Civic Pride

- Continued engagement with the public throughout the next phase of Place Marketing Strategy development, and other borough-wide initiatives, to improve communication and measure against baseline data.
- Harness community spirit - support the public to act as Community Ambassadors and champions, who can deliver positive messaging and support events.
- Invest in the quick wins - deep cleaning, tidying etc, to support new messaging and campaigns.
- Improve transport infrastructure - parking, public transport, interconnectivity and easy and sustainable travel.
- Further develop green spaces, river walks etc and progress Green Agenda e.g. safe cycle routes, e-scooter schemes, to strengthen existing pride.
- Keep communication channels open around developments that come as a result of this work e.g 'you said our parks are your favourite part of the borough so we are investing/ developing/ improving...'
- The borough's residents (their creativity, strong-will, can-do attitude, entrepreneurialism etc) should not be forgotten in the next stage of strategy development.
- Need to reverse negativity with positive or more tongue-in-cheek messaging.
- Provide more incentives for independents to take on shops and explore what alternatives there may be in a post-retail high street.
- Currently voted in the top ten unhealthiest high streets - with an abundance of kebab shops etc. The Council could look at a strategy for managing this.



NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT PHASE OF WORK

This report and the accompanying consultation findings report sets out significant baseline data that can be used to set benchmarks to help evaluate the success of the Place Marketing Strategy.

The first planned temporary exhibition 'We Are Northampton' is closely aligned with the themes of this piece of work. The next stage of this project should involve working closely with the museum to ensure that the key messaging from this exhibition is consistent with the direction and content of the emerging Place Marketing narrative.

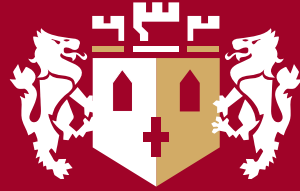
Whilst the Place Marketing Strategy delivery would run for approximately 5 years, there are a number of quick wins that could be delivered by the Council to improve perceptions:

- A deep clean of the town would address a significant proportion of the negative perceptions of the town
- The Town Centre Masterplan needs to be progressed to ensure the current condition does not decline further, and that the town can reinstate its hub.
- Improve communications of what's on and promotion of assets and activities by developing and maintaining the Love Northampton website - long term investment is required to ensure this stays relevant.
- Closer working with Northamptonshire: Britain's Best Surprise initiative to ensure the town is promoted as the jewel of the county.

Brief for development of Place Marketing Strategy

In commissioning the next phase of working, it is recommended that the following is considered for the brief:

- Review findings to refine the place narrative - who is Northampton for, what is Northampton for, why is Northampton different, and what is the story of Northampton - past, present and future?
- Utilise the work of the Northampton Museum & Art Gallery and ensure the messaging of the 'We Are Northampton' temporary exhibition is considered.
- Continue to involve a wide range of individuals in the process - provide opportunities for the Northampton Forward Board, key stakeholders including community, tourism and business representatives, as well as the general public, to feed into the place narrative and development of the Place Marketing Strategy and Action Plan.
 - Younger people, particularly under 17, were underrepresented in consultation, so opportunities to engage this group moving forward should be sought.
- Work with the Northampton Borough Council's Communications Team, Love Northampton initiative and Northamptonshire: Britain's Best Surprise to ensure these mechanisms are better integrated.



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