

# Northampton Place Brand Strategy

NORTHAMPTON



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# 1.0 Background and context

*Northampton has developed a bold 10 year vision in the Town Investment Plan (TIP) a £25 million investment from UK Government supporting regeneration projects across the town centre and aligned to the broader spatial strategy of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. The TIP is based on strong community insight and provides a clear plan for urban regeneration and improvements in connectivity that will drive enterprise and skills*

The plan provides the perfect platform for Northampton to strengthen its position at the centre of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc by providing modern spaces for creative businesses to capitalise on the town's undoubted manufacturing and entrepreneurial passion.

Situated within the Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone, the town boasts a strong high-performance technology and automotive sector alongside the University of Northampton's £330m purpose built waterside campus and Vulcan Works a new home for up to 100 new start ups and scale ups.

Northampton is already a great place to start-up<sup>1</sup> but now needs to foster more scale up businesses that will commercialise innovation and provide the jobs of the future.

The plan also highlights the importance of Northampton's rich heritage and culture offer in rejuvenating the town centre and helping restore civic pride so Northampton can once again represent the aspirations of its residents.

The plan also focusses on the need to support the town's diverse and multicultural communities with high-quality housing, digital infrastructure, educational opportunities and open spaces to meet economic, health and wellbeing and environmental challenges.

These themes also emerged from Stage 1 of the Place Branding project for Northampton carried out in 2020, where circa 1500 people were surveyed regarding their perceptions of the town. What emerged from this work and the subsequent qualitative work with representative groups in Stage 2 was the distinctiveness of Northampton that needs to be invested in and promoted to key target groups.

There are many opportunities for growth in Northampton. The town is historically important, well connected, with a rich history of enterprise that is maintained to this day and is also home to a number of major employers such as Carlsberg, Cosworth, Nationwide and Barclaycard.

From the historic Market Square to the growing Cultural Quarter, the town needs to better promote its unique and differentiating cultural and heritage assets.

The town's reputation for delivering major projects is growing, as evidenced by the completion of Northampton Museum and Art Gallery, The Vulcan Works, and Northampton Station project.

This ability to deliver will be further enhanced by the creation of the new single unitary council, West Northamptonshire Council now responsible for providing a range of public services in a joined up and cost effective way across Daventry, Northampton and South Northamptonshire.

<sup>1</sup> <https://gosuperscript.com/most-entrepreneurial-locations/>

## 2.0 Wider Economic landscape

*Covid-19 has had a devastating effect on communities and local economies across the UK and as we begin to emerge from the pandemic there will be winners and losers. The winners will seize the opportunity to think differently and rebuild in a more resilient, greener, fairer and more inclusive way.*

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/the-eight-trends-that-will-define-2021-and-beyond>

# 1

Accelerated digitalization

# 2

A move from global to local supply chains

# 3

Inclusive and social business models.

Three specific trends amplified by the pandemic and highlighted by McKinsey

Now is the perfect time for places to hit the reset button and try pioneering new approaches.

Against this backdrop, Northampton must now work effectively to amplify its new brand positioning and start to promote the city as a great place where people want to live, work and visit.

## 2.1 Relocation and Remote Working

The pandemic has also started to shift the balance of power away from London and the larger cities. Less people are commuting and productivity is now more evenly spread across the country. Many people are now enjoying a work-life-balance they only aspired to pre-pandemic.

Major employers including financial giants such as Nationwide and Santander have recently announced that their staff can work from anywhere. This means huge opportunities are opening up for smaller places with good transport links to the capital. Northampton is not immune to this challenge with Avon and Carlsberg reducing their space in the town by 40,000 sq feet as a result of hybrid working policies.

The PWC Economic Outlook 2021<sup>3</sup> anticipates that in 2021 London's population could decline for the first time in the 21st century. The Institute of Economic Affairs (2021)<sup>4</sup> have coined the term 'Zoomshock' to measure the impact of Covid-19 on towns and cities. Their findings indicate that 30-40 year olds are increasingly looking to move out of London to use their new found freedom and flexibility to find a new home. A recent survey by Rightmove (2021)<sup>5</sup> confirmed that a year ago 39% of house hunters were inquiring about properties outside London, this has now jumped up to over half (52%) in 2021.

Research by the Office of National Statistics<sup>6</sup> has found that the number of Londoners leaving the city has reached a 10-year high. Their study found that the number of 30 to 40-year-olds leaving the capital last year is more than those arriving and 1 in 5 tech professionals working in the city are either considering or in the process of relocating elsewhere.

There is a clear opportunity for Northampton to attract many of these talented people with 1 hour train connections to London and easy access to the M1.

The combination of a strong and vibrant business community, outstanding cultural and heritage assets, attractive green spaces and a fiercely independent spirit which unites diverse communities, makes Northampton an interesting alternative for many in the post Covid world of remote and distributed working.

Many employees liberated from long commutes and travel have found more productive ways to spend that time, enjoyed greater flexibility in balancing their personal and professional lives, and decided that they prefer to work remotely rather than commuting to the office every day. Many organisations are now finding that they can access new pools of talent with fewer locational constraints, adopt innovative processes to boost productivity, create an even stronger culture, and significantly reduce property costs.

What is becoming clear is that people are looking for a life beyond London.

*There is a clear opportunity for Northampton to attract many of these talented people with 1 hour train connections from London and easy access to the M1.*



<sup>3</sup> PwC Economic Outlook 2021 ,  
<sup>4</sup> Institute of Economic Affairs –  
Is 'Zoomshock' here to stay May 2021  
<sup>5</sup> Rightmove UK Property Survey 2021  
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/migrationwithinthekuk>



**RELOCATION**

**REMOTE  
WORKING**

Consumers' shifting interests, combined with remote working, have driven a surge in 'localism' around the world. According to research from Shopify<sup>7</sup>, 61% of consumers said 'they plan to buy from local and independent retailers six months from now.'

A recent report from Deloitte<sup>8</sup> predicts that the market is set to polarise between real 'experiential destination stores' in big cities that will continue to attract consumers and "hyper local shopping". This bodes well for the future of the high street in towns like Northampton where existing independent retailers should be encouraged and supported and the remodelled Market Square could be a catalyst for attracting young, mobile retail entrepreneurs to curated markets.

Now that significant public commitments on climate have been made at COP26 it will be increasingly important for retailers to consider how they can begin to transition to Net Zero Retail and accelerate their efforts to decarbonise operations, products and their supply chain. The "Blue Planet 2 effect" has seen a major shift in consumer attitudes towards disposable and single use plastic. The pandemic has encouraged consumers to be more conscious of their shopping choices and wanting to 'do good'. There is an opportunity for Northampton with its strength in social enterprise to attract new and innovative retail uses to the town.

Northampton has the opportunity to become a 'hyper local' centre, celebrating independent retailers and local supply chains and 'building back better' as an exemplar of a more inclusive and greener economy.

## 2.2 Relocalisation, Net zero retail and conscious consumerism

*Northampton has the opportunity to become a 'hyper local' centre, celebrating independent retailers and local supply chains and 'building back better' as an exemplar of a more inclusive and greener economy.*

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.shopify.com/blog/consumer-trends>  
<sup>8</sup> Deloitte Retail Trends 2021  
<sup>9</sup> <https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/top-five-climate-commitments-made-at-cop26/>





# EXCITING ECONOMIC GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

## 3.0 Why Northampton is well placed to benefit from these trends

The world has hit the reset button and places and communities that respond to these trends will be well placed.

This is the time for Northampton to step forward, be ambitious and utilise the investment from Government to deliver an excellent experience to those who live, work and visit the town.

The significant changes to the way we now live, work and travel give Northampton the opportunity to become a place at the vanguard of the positive change emerging in a post pandemic world.

### 3.1 Wider spatial positioning

Northampton also has the highly significant benefit of location within the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, a world leading economic area set to deliver transformational growth in the period to 2050, creating increased knowledge-based jobs to boost the regional economy building on global strengths in science, technology and high-value manufacturing.

The Arc contains globally renowned universities, and sits at the heart of a business, science and technology ecosystem that makes it one of the most exciting economic growth opportunities in the world.

Northampton has a key role to play within the Arc. The Town Investment Plan supported by the Future High Streets Fund and the Towns Fund is significantly contributing to the place-making agenda within the Oxford-Cambridge Arc through the creation of an attractive town centre with a strong cultural offer, the delivery of sufficient, affordable and high-quality homes, and wider services including health and education.

Realising this potential will mean more jobs, of a higher quality, for existing communities and future residents, and will also encourage international investment and exports for the benefit of the strong SME base.

*The world has hit the reset button and places and communities that respond to these trends will be well placed.*



## 3.2 Creative and Digital cluster in the Cultural Quarter

There is the opportunity to develop a strong creative and digital hub in and around the Cultural Quarter with the development of Vulcan Works and 24 Guildhall Road. Strong creative hubs tend to succeed in very specific locations, usually a building or group of buildings that provides a combination of affordable workspace, support and exhibition or sales space for creative entrepreneurs and acts as the central point of a wider network such as The Watershed in Bristol and the Custard Factory in Birmingham.

Hubs should be equally for social exchange and informal networking as they are places for doing business and that is especially valuable for creative people who work on their own or in micro-businesses where their range of contacts and networks may be limited.

The American author Richard Florida famously proclaimed that success in the creative industries was dependent on what he called a 'creative class' – well-educated people who lived in diverse, usually urban communities with access to a wide variety of social and cultural facilities from museums and universities to clubs and bars. This 'Clustering' enables groups of related or mutually dependent businesses and resources to be grouped together in a neighbourhood or part of a city such as Shoreditch in East London where artists initially moved in during the 1980s, followed by fashion designers, product designers, web businesses and finally software start-ups. There was a huge amount of creative activity and a free-flowing collaborative culture, but very little structure and no government recognition. In more recent times, operators like The Trampery have brought cross disciplines together to foster innovation and creativity, working with Government and Universities.



### 3.3 An opportunity to leverage Northampton's proximity to Cambridge and growing Social Enterprise credentials supported by ISII/SEUK Place status.

*Northampton is the perfect location for 'purpose led businesses' many of which are in high growth tech sectors*

With the scale of some of the societal problems we are facing, such as climate change, poverty and lack of access to healthcare, the role of technology in solving these challenges will continue to grow<sup>10</sup>.

Cambridge, alongside Oxford and London, forms the backbone of the life science sector in the UK. With £2 billion of funding from the government dedicated to this triangle alone, Cambridge has successfully grown a burgeoning life science tech scene. In the Tech Nation's 2018 report, Cambridge saw twice the level of digital tech turnover per staff (£152,000 per member) than the UK average (£99,000), indicating its strength as a tech hotspot.

Cambridge's small size and strong business interest has enabled swift growth over the decades, but this major influx of corporate interest has led to a number of challenges. The existing transport infrastructure is overburdened, and the operational costs of office rental and the expensive housing market is taking its toll on businesses seeking to be near to industry leaders.

A recent BDO report<sup>11</sup> highlighted that fast-growth tech companies are increasingly looking beyond the city boundaries. Cambridge companies such as AstraZeneca, Illumina and Abcam are among many in the Tech Corridor tackling the big challenges facing society around the future of food, medicine and mobility. Northampton needs to align itself as an alternative hub located in the same economic region, just 60 miles from Cambridge and London.

Northampton has been designated a 'social enterprise town' by the national development body for social enterprise by Social Enterprise UK (SEUK), and has now formed West Northamptonshire Social Enterprise Towns (WNSET) to become a centre of excellence in social enterprise, to be a voice for the growth of West Northamptonshire's vibrant, existing social enterprise sector and an advocate of the positive social, economic, environmental and cultural impact it makes.

Northampton is also home to the Society for innovation, technology and modernisation (Socitm <https://socitm.net>) a leading membership organisation of more than 2,500 professionals helping shape and deliver public services through challenging convention, inspiring change and powering progress throughout the public sector.

The above are complemented by The Institute for Social Innovation and Impact (ISII) <https://www.northampton.ac.uk/research/research-institutes-and-centres/institute-for-social-innovation-and-impact/> at the University of Northampton which evaluates and measures the social impact of social innovations in the UK and around the world, as well as exploring the financing of, and policy support for, social innovation.

The vision of WNSET is for Northampton to be one of the top five places in the UK for social enterprises: a place where there is significant investment in the sector and where social enterprise output forms a significant and vibrant part of the economic landscape. The post Covid world will see a significant growth in inclusive and social business models. Social enterprise is uniquely placed to offer creative solutions that will make a real difference to communities across the UK.

The proposal to utilise the Town's Fund to create a Skills and Social Enterprise Fund<sup>12</sup> within Vulcan Works is a positive step towards supporting and growing the sector and diversifying the economic offer in Northampton. Creating new and diverse products and services (including a major focus on those related to food given the strength of the sector in the wider region) will create new, innovative and attractive propositions to consumers that are unique to Northampton.

A Tech Nation report<sup>13</sup> on future trends highlights the UK's growing status as a developer of 'impact tech' which is the intentional use of responsible technology and science to benefit people and the planet, ideally addressing a major social or environmental problem.

There is an opportunity for Northampton to attract tech businesses in key sub sectors such as Mobility Tech (given the presence of Cosworth and the wider Automotive Innovation strengths of the region) and Food Tech (given the large number of growers and producers in the region facing challenges such as Food Waste).



<sup>10</sup> <https://technation.io/insights/tech-for-social-good/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bdo.co.uk/en-gb/plugdir/insights/regional-hotspots-for-tech>

<sup>12</sup> Skills and Social Enterprise Fund Proposal,  
<sup>13</sup> <https://technation.io/report2021/#uk-trends>

The image features three stylized human figures in a park setting. The figures are rendered in a dark, almost black, silhouette style with intricate cutouts, giving them a screen-printed or laser-cut appearance. They are positioned in a line across the middle ground. The background shows a lush green lawn, a concrete bench, and a line of trees under a bright, slightly cloudy sky. The overall scene is bathed in the warm light of late afternoon or early morning. Overlaid on the center of the image is the text 'PLACE BRAND / IDENTITY' in a large, bold, white, sans-serif font.

# PLACE BRAND / IDENTITY

# 4.0 Place Brand and Identity

Northampton Forward and West Northamptonshire Council have commissioned a Place Marketing Strategy for the town which aims to increase inward investment, improve local perception and civic pride and increase tourism.

Stage 1 of the process was a comprehensive research and consultation exercise undertaken by Tricolour Associates during 2020. Stage 1 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.

The findings of this analysis focussed heavily on the significant challenges facing the town centre and the need for improvements to be made. The report also highlighted a number of positive narrative themes to be explored in Phase 2 of the process.

As part of Stage 2 it was important to find a place brand and narrative to accompany actual development – both social and economic. The Place branding process gives Northampton an opportunity to reimagine and drive on its own favourable terms.

Place branding often focuses on certain verticals such as talent attraction, tourism or economic development. Those often still operate in silos. The Place branding process can help to connect the dots and to bring different players together around a shared vision and theme.

Below is a diagram to illustrate the process in Stage 2 of the project, where the narrative themes emerging from Stage 1 were further distilled and refined.

This distillation and refinement process was considered in the broader context of the fast moving economic, political and competitor environment to ensure differentiation for Northampton. A number of focus groups (2 public groups with one being all under 30 and 2 business groups including one with larger employers and one made up of small and micro SME'S) were held to further develop the broad narrative themes from stage 1

These were considered in the context of the needs of potential customers (residents, visitors, investors), place strengths (tangible and intangible) and competitor strengths. A place brand positioning needs to be authentic, differentiated, compelling, persuasive and sustainable rather than a set of generic claims that could be made elsewhere.

Stakeholders were strongly supportive of the need to restore the distinctiveness of the town centre, acknowledging the restructuring of the retail sector and the need to invest in the cultural and leisure offer.

There was a strong desire to build on the town's outstanding cultural and heritage assets, but importantly to marry a proud history with a modern aspiration.

The Phase 1 themes were further developed to determine the most 'differentiating' and 'unique' and those that would resonate with both internal and external audiences. The town's culture, heritage and history of making and innovating began to emerge as the dominant narrative.

These narrative themes were also well received by the business community and young talent who are attracted by the associations with Northampton as world class centre of craft, making and innovation. The interface that the new Vulcan Works development will have with the Arts, Culture and Heritage assets in the Cultural Quarter was seen by many as a major selling point.

Further desk research was carried out to support the findings of the focus groups and is summarised below :

– The 'democratic history' of Northampton town manifests itself in terms of "non- conformism", "rebellion", "resistance and protest" due to the iconic personalities, reformists and incidents that took place in Northampton, representing a "dynamic" and "edgy" urban environment. From the radical Charles Bradlaugh through to Alan Moore and Slowthai.

– The town has a unique geography in that it doesn't readily associate with the midlands, east midlands or south east midlands – on TV it is in the East of England, but in many ways looks towards London and the South East. There has always been a slight urban-rural disconnect between the town and county.

– The town's continued growth in population has created tensions between protecting heritage and facilitating growth with new development. Many locals lament lost heritage but acknowledge the importance of the attraction of major investors such as Barclaycard, Carlsberg and Avon who have provided significant employment and opportunity for the growing population.

– The town has a world class reputation for craft and making, the census of 1841 highlighted 1800 different shoemakers, the heraldic shields on the Guildhall still showcase the guilds of prominent trades and families. The term 'Made in Northampton' has a cache with international audiences, including many high end boutiques in Japan. Church's are proud to incorporate the town crest in their brand.

– Northampton has one of the highest densities of SME's in the UK and one of the highest start-up rates outside London. This 'enterprise culture' is supported by the presence and activities of the University of Northampton in terms of the infrastructure, human capital and training.

– The town has a growing cultural offer and an ambition to become a 'creative centre' where talent, ideas and enterprise come together. There is an opportunity to use this environment to embrace diversity and inclusion, forging a renewed and contemporary sense of place and ambition and providing opportunities to create for talented and ambitious people.

These core themes of Craft and Industry, Heritage and Culture and a strong sense of Community form the 'brand pillars' of Northampton (Fig 2). These pillars are what set places apart and can be leveraged for competitive advantage. The supporting brand values (innovative, spirited, bold, resilient) are placed at the very core of the brand and are there to dictate brand message, identity and personality.

The overarching 'brand positioning' that emerged to provide a unifying platform for celebrating the plurality of heritages and voices within the town is 'Independent Spirit'. This is in the very DNA of Northampton, past, present and future.

The key to implementation is to develop a strong programme of activity and a compelling narrative which reflects this positioning, evidenced by great examples from the brand pillars. This will start to give Northampton a stronger identity and personality and claim an important space in the mind of key target audiences.

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Fig 1 – Stage 2 Process

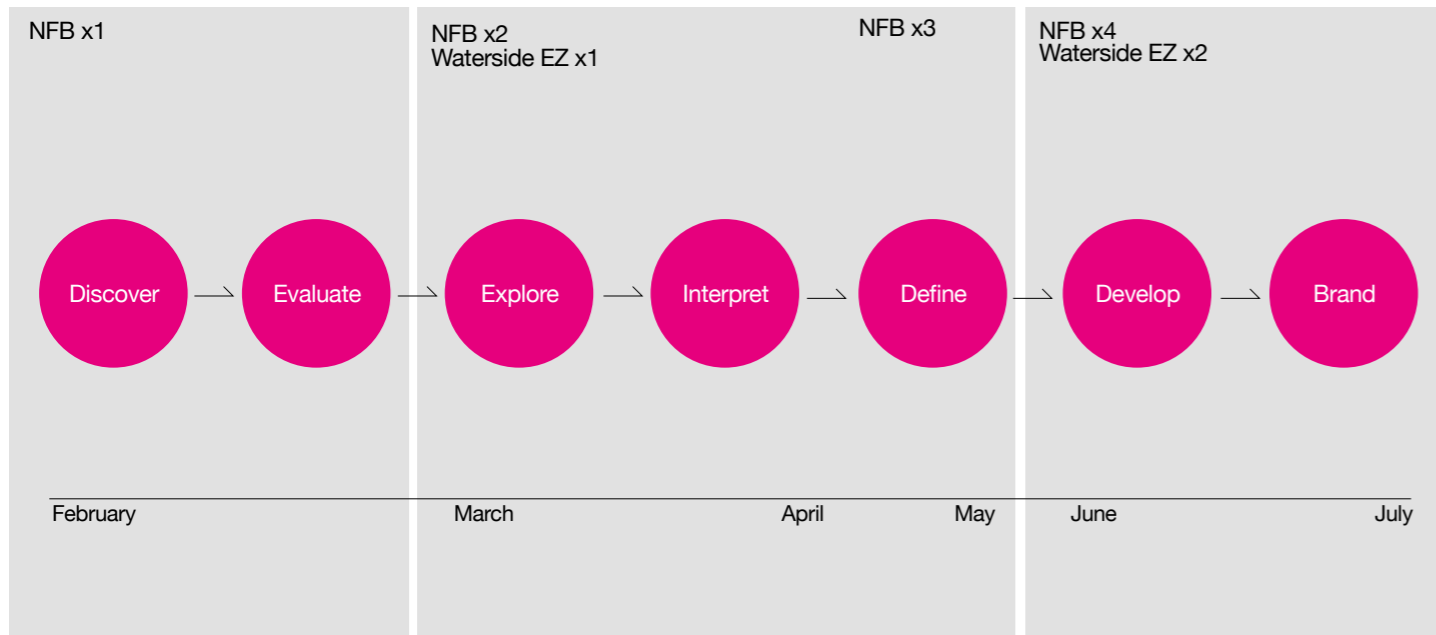
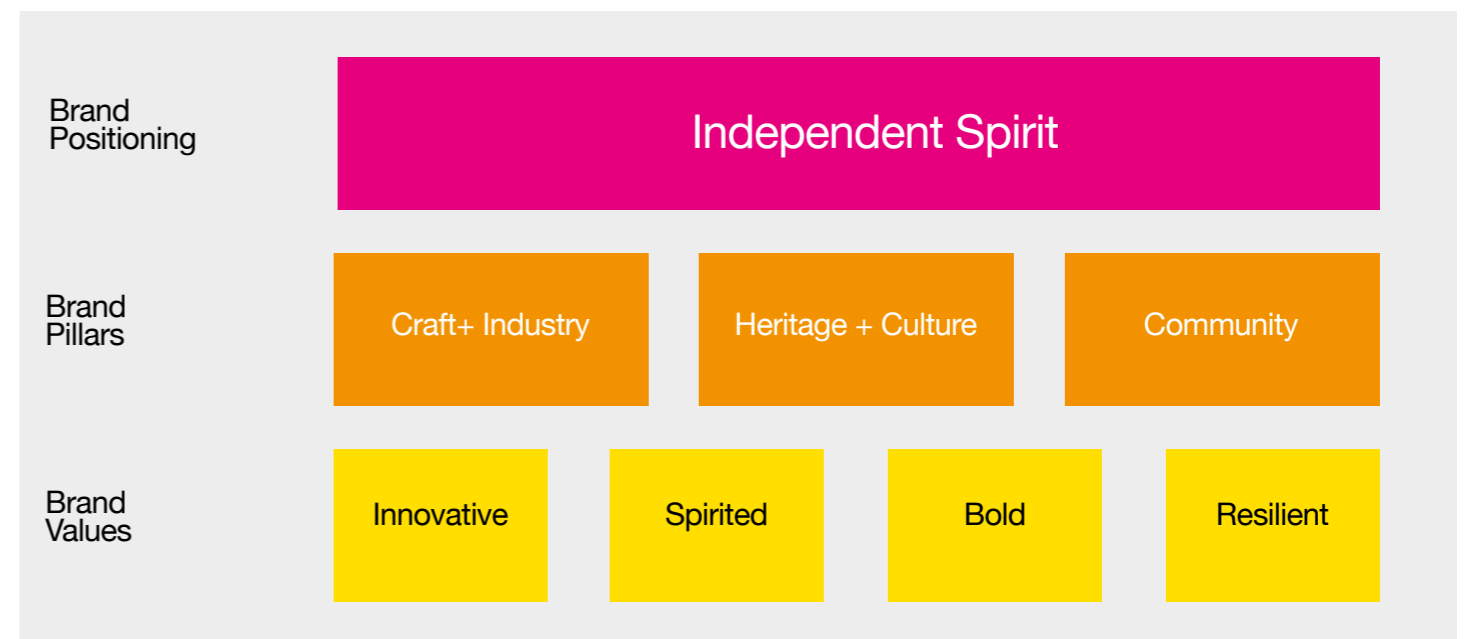


Fig 2 – Brand Positioning Model



# Independent Spirit





# 5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Using the brand positioning for a Targeted B2B Campaign

There is a clear opportunity to position Northampton as the ideal location for entrepreneurs, freelancers, small and micro SME's in creative and digital knowledge businesses. There is a compelling story in the cultural quarter with a growing creative scene which will be greatly enhanced by the opening of Vulcan Works and the proximity of the University/business support.

Businesses and talent looking to relocate want to be part of a community. Being part of a community or cluster increases confidence, experimentation, collaboration and growth.

There is already a major battle for migrant talent underway as locations look to woo the many choosing to leave London and reappraise their lifestyle in the wake of COVID-19.

The London Assembly Housing Committee (2021) recently published a report showing that one in seven Londoners (14 per cent) want to leave the city, a third of Londoners (33 per cent) want to move to a new home and of those 46 per cent want the home to be out of London. Private spaces, the proximity of parks and a greater sense of community have become important factors for Londoners when thinking about their living situation as a result of the pandemic.

We propose a business to business (B2B) digital marketing and communications campaign targeting micro, small and SME businesses profit for purpose businesses (1-250 employees) based in and around London, the South East and Cambridge area, using the Independent Spirit narrative to highlight Northampton as a new area of potential with likeminded people and support systems in place.

These profit for purpose and tech for good businesses are focussed on impact on the environment, communities, health, education, mobility and transport. Organisations in this space are establishing a clear sense of identity and starting to show significant growth potential.

The 'tech for social good' sector was worth £2.3 billion in the UK in 2018, with a turnover of £732 million – larger than the amount generated by the manufacture of consumer electronics in the UK (£634 million).

The campaign should be designed to drive awareness of the new Northampton offer and why the 'environment' is right for independent thinking and collaboration.

Stage 1 would involve working closely with SEMLEP to create a target list of businesses from the DueDil (<https://www.duedil.com>) data platform.

Stage 2 would utilise the 'Matched audiences' functionality on Linked In which allows the uploading of contacts for direct targeting. Matched audiences are an important way to reach the exact decision makers with tailored messages to ensure budgets are optimised.

This should be supplemented by dedicated Instagram activity which reinforces the creative environment within the Cultural Quarter such as <https://www.instagram.com/indigbeth/>

This should then be supplemented by PR and Comms activity highlighting Northampton as an alternative lifestyle location post pandemic.

**Total anticipated budget for this activity in 2022/23 would be circa £65k**

**This would include to data analysis, campaign planning, building creative assets and copywriting, media spend, pr and communications activity.**

*'we propose a b2b digital marketing campaign targeting micro, small and SME businesses'*





Central business district, Copenhagen

Custard Factory, Digbeth, Birmingham



# Inspiration from elsewhere

## Copenhagen, Denmark

Copenhagen have a focussed approach to talent attraction, targeting experienced specialists within software development and software engineering. The campaign is run by Copenhagen Capacity in partnership with Digital Hub Denmark and is designed to support Danish tech companies that are on the hunt for international tech talent by promoting jobs in fintech, healthtech, robotics, createch, proptech, agrotech and edtech.

## Greenwich Peninsula Design District

The Design District have organised a programme of events with leading speakers, looking at issues such as modern remote leadership, the future of work, net zero architecture and retail, these are also filmed and shared online. They have also run an exhibition called FLUX showcasing the work of 50 contemporary artists from dynamic painters, sculptors, and performance artists.

## Digbeth, Birmingham

Centred around the famous Custard Factory built by Alfie Bird in 1906, the area promotes itself as a diverse, creative, enterprising community, home to freelancers, makers, agencies, start-ups and cultural venues. Providing a combination of events space, work space and play space.

## Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire

Back in the 1960s Hebden Bridge was an ordinary Northern mill town which was floundering as traditional industries declined. The town is now famous for its arts scene, has been named among the world's quirkiest places to be and is now home to a 'motley mix' of painters and poets and sculptors and more.

## Todmorden – Calder Valley

Many Mancunians tired of the noise, grime and crime of the city made the 20-mile journey north to the Calder Valley so they could have their creative cake and eat it. A stroll through the centre of Todmorden shows very visible signs of bohemia, from a vegetarian South American-inspired café to a second-hand guitar shop and a popular board games cafe.



*The Custard Factory in Digbeth is a diverse creative and enterprising community.*

9 <https://www.fastcompany.com/90553437/this-city-run-secondhand-department-store-is-helping-berlin-reduce-waste>

10 <https://www.news18.com/news/buzz/this-shopping-mall-in-sweden-only-sells-old-things-2723969.html>

## 5.2 Improving the Northampton 'brand experience' and amplifying the role of 'independent retail'

The image of Northampton has been further damaged by the performance of its town centre which like many others in the UK has been a victim of the changing nature of retail, the loss of big occupiers such as BHS and M&S as well as the brain drain and economic drain experienced from locals and university graduates relocating to (or working in) London, Birmingham, Cambridge, Oxford, Leicester and Milton Keynes and taking their spending with them.

The challenge for historic, market towns like Northampton has been exacerbated by trying to compete with more modern, out-of-town shopping centres such as Rushden Lakes, The Centre: MK, and Bicester Village as well as larger and more varied retail offerings in Milton Keynes, Birmingham and transformational new urban shopping centres like the new Westgate in Oxford.

The sight of boarded-up shops leads to a cycle of decline in places because landlords and tenants begin investing less in neighbouring properties and concentrating their investment elsewhere. These downwards spirals need to be broken by a bold new vision for a place. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that for decades market towns, county towns and even large regional cities have been unfashionable. However, this is a downwards spiral that is already beginning to change.

Businesses and talent looking to relocate want to be part of a community. Being part of a community or cluster increases confidence, experimentation, collaboration and growth.

There is the opportunity to 'curate' the town centre better in the build up to the delivery of major regeneration schemes such as the Market Square. This could be delivered through pop-ups, encompassing everything from market stalls to temporary shop units, events space for use for entertainment, health, education and other community-focused activities.

Upcycling, reused objects and shared objects are significant growth areas (Norwich has pioneered this). Innovative retailers are now adding an experiential element by offering courses such learn how to bake, to sew, to knit, to mix cocktails etc.

We know that the Future High Streets Funding that will enable the development of the current Market Square area into a high-quality space that supports the ambition and pride within the town. This will give Northampton the chance to showcase what makes Northampton unique and provide dynamic new event spaces that can be curated and programmed with relevant content.

All this will take time and in the interim we need to actively encourage and re-purpose vacant retail units, work with landlords to create more flexibility in leases and encourage pop-ups and concept stores on short-term leases. We need to urge landlords to think beyond quick return on investment and pick tenants that enrich the area culturally – restaurants, cultural centres, independent traders.

*'There is the opportunity to curate the town centre better in the build up to the delivery of major regeneration schemes'*







## Inspiration from elsewhere

### B-Wahrenhaus – Berlin

Berlin's city government recently took the highly unusual step of opening a department store<sup>9</sup>. But this wasn't a typical retail outlet – the store sold only high-quality recycled and upcycled items. By selecting only high-quality items, the city's objective was to bring an end to throwaway culture, part of the programme to make Berlin a zero-waste city by 2030.

The store called B-Wa(h)renhaus, attracted people who previously might not have considered shopping in the city's many second-hand furniture and clothing shops. The store featured vendors offering products ranging from recycled and upcycled furniture and clothing to refurbished electrical appliances and toys.

Berlin is now planning 'warehouses of the future' that will include a shop, space for workshops and events, repair cafés, and food and beverages.

### Eskilstuna – Sweden

Eskilstuna, a small Swedish city has become the world's capital of recycling<sup>10</sup>.

Eskilstuna does not necessarily fit the Scandinavian stereotype of glossy modernity as a former steel town with grey streets, kitsch 1980s pizzerias, workers' cafes and gloomy pubs – not a place where you would expect to find such a radical approach to the environment.

However, despite lacking clear advantages, the city started to implement a spate of green initiatives back in 2012, vying to make it the most environmentally friendly city in Sweden. One of the major initiatives has been the creation of a mall called ReTuna. "Tuna" is the nickname of the city and "Re" because the goods on sale have been recycled or repurposed. As well as "pre-loved" items for sale, there are also many that have been upcycled. The mall itself is spacious and appealing, almost Ikea-like. An art installation – a tree and circular bench all fashioned from recycled materials greets customers on arrival, it also includes a coffee shop and gift-wrapping service.

### Sunderland – UK

A former Binns department store site in Sunderland<sup>11</sup> is fostering the musical and catering talents of young people.

Artists with local connections including Futureheads, Field Music, and Frankie & the Heart Strings, will form the line-up for the first gig at the former store, now reincarnated as Pop Recs, a music and arts venue and community hub.

The Grade II-listed building opened as Binns haberdashery store in 1811, trading there for about 80 years. Now, after a £1m renovation over the last three years the site houses a music venue, record shop, cafe, gallery and kitchen where young people can gain catering skills. It also accommodates a youth mental health charity and market where teenagers can sell products. A neighbouring store is set to house the first high-street outlet for Sunshine Co-operative, a local online grocer.

The project is one of a rising number across the country where communities, local authorities, social entrepreneurs and charities, are raising funds to bring former department stores, left vacant by the collapse of chains such as BHS and Debenhams, back into use.

### London, West End

A new store offering pop-up space<sup>12</sup> to independent fashion brands launched ahead of Christmas inside a former New Look branch at 500 Oxford Street. The 1000 square foot ground floor will be temporarily used for an art installation and the 5000 square feet on the first floor will be shared by small retailers, many with a focus on sustainability, until the end of January 2022.

The launch of the store, called 'The Collect', is aimed at supporting entrepreneurs, diversifying the retail offer in the area, and attracting more shoppers to the West End.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.fastcompany.com/90553437/this-city-run-secondhand-department-store-is-helping-berlin-reduce-waste>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.news18.com/news/buzz/this-shopping-mall-in-sweden-only-sells-old-things-2723969.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/dec/01/doors-open-for-uk-community-projects-as-retail-chains-fold>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/start-ups-pop-up-space-former-new-look-oxford-street-shop-london-b967227.html>

### 5.3 Vibrant Northampton Campaign

Local residents are often a harder audience to influence. They experience the 'product' on a daily basis and in the Stage 1 research, 60.7% of residents felt that the town had become a worse place to live in the last 5 years. The town was generally perceived negatively – with the most frequently used words to describe it being 'tired', 'average' and 'disappointing'. and there was a clear view that the town should better celebrate and promote its heritage, history, attractive buildings and green spaces that differentiate it from other towns, particularly Milton Keynes.

The Town Centre Masterplan (2018) and Town Investment Plan (2020) both clearly acknowledge the importance of building on the town's outstanding cultural and heritage assets. Successful funding bids to the Future High Streets Fund, and Towns Fund now mean there is a compelling story to tell.

This major programme of work now needs to be packaged for residents as 'bold and deliverable', showing them that they are being listened to and that the town is rediscovering its 'independent spirit'. This will be a key element of the new website and should be supplemented by a comprehensive hoardings strategy.

Cultural aspirations for the town should be inclusive encouraging residents to take part in and shape cultural programmes.

This would be a citizen focused campaign using owned channels (Love Northampton/Discover Northampton) and should include a hoardings strategy to communicate the wider regeneration story and engender civic pride. This should include key projects from the Town Investment Plan such as Market Square, Four Waterside etc.

In order to give the initiative some credibility we suggest creating an online Retail Property Directory in association with Northampton Town Centre BID, listing all empty shops and the contact details for the marketing agents. Once this data is in place, we can approach independent retailers to submit a brief business case emphasising the benefits to the landlord of the business or project to encourage them to agree a short-term lease (usually for a period less than six months)

Although the concept of a pop-ups is mostly associated with retail, pop-up units in town centres can also be successfully utilised for a number of activities including art galleries and community projects. Pop-up units are an excellent opportunity to encourage entrepreneurs to try out a new business and see if the concept works before making a long-term commitment. They also offer community projects and charities a great way to reach a much wider audience. This is a great way of bringing 'Independent Spirit' to life quickly.

Landlords will appreciate some income (albeit small) and having a tenant will improve the appearance of the property, raising awareness of the property with other potential tenants. Occupied properties also deter vandalism and offer the potential for lower insurance premiums.

Occupied properties with a rateable value of £6,000 or less qualify for 100% Small Business Rate Relief, properties between £6,001 and £12,000 rateable value qualify for a reduced amount of relief (e.g. 50% relief for a £9,000 rateable value) and when a pop-up unit is occupied by a registered charity they will be eligible for 80% business rate relief.

#### **Anticipated budget for this initiative in 22/23 would be circa £45k.**

This would include the creation of a retail property directory, an engagement event with landlords and the potentially with some small grant incentives to improve the look and feel of empty shops and encourage young independent entrepreneurs and makers into the town centre. This should include a co-ordinated hoardings strategy that informs residents of future plans and celebrates great examples of 'independent spirit' Any long term and problematic voids should be covered with positive brand messages about Northampton.



## 5.4 Create a single digital destination platform

Northampton has a weak digital presence, performs poorly in search results and isn't managing its reputation online effectively. We've previously stated the importance of place brands being strategically managed and this means that a strong digital identity is critical in achieving a positive online reputation.

According to the Pew Research Centre<sup>12</sup>, 91% of people trust what they see and read in search engine results. And the Edelman Trust Barometer<sup>13</sup> says that engines surpass traditional media outlets and social media channels as the most reliable source of information. What appears in the first search results about a place influences the will to visit it, to invest in it and to live in it. In light of this, it is critical that the Place Brand strategy is aligned with the Digital Brand Identity in order to generate a consistent and positive perception and reputation.

Northampton currently struggles from a weak digital presence. There is no definitive site which owns the Northampton story and signposts businesses, visitors and residents to key information and events. Northampton is not currently in control of the message.

Our recommendation would be to merge the Love Northampton and Discover Northampton sites into one consumer facing digital platform (co-funded by Northampton BID).

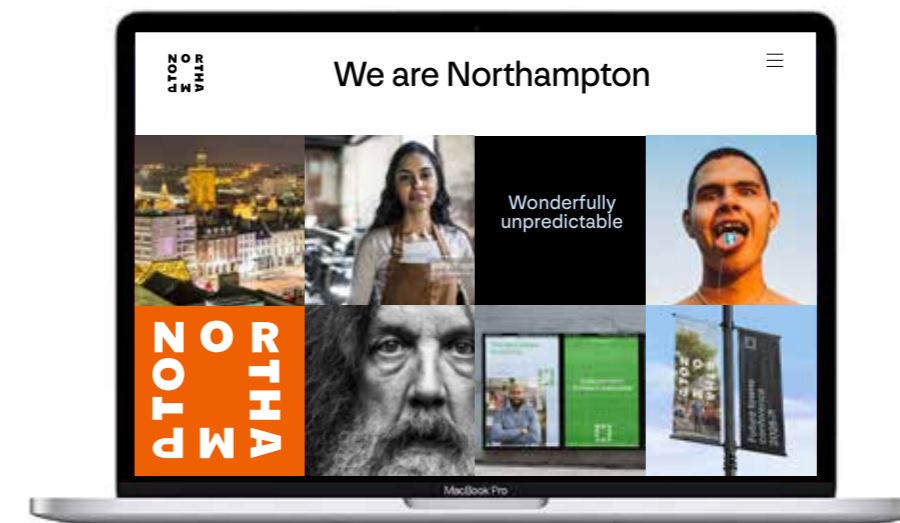
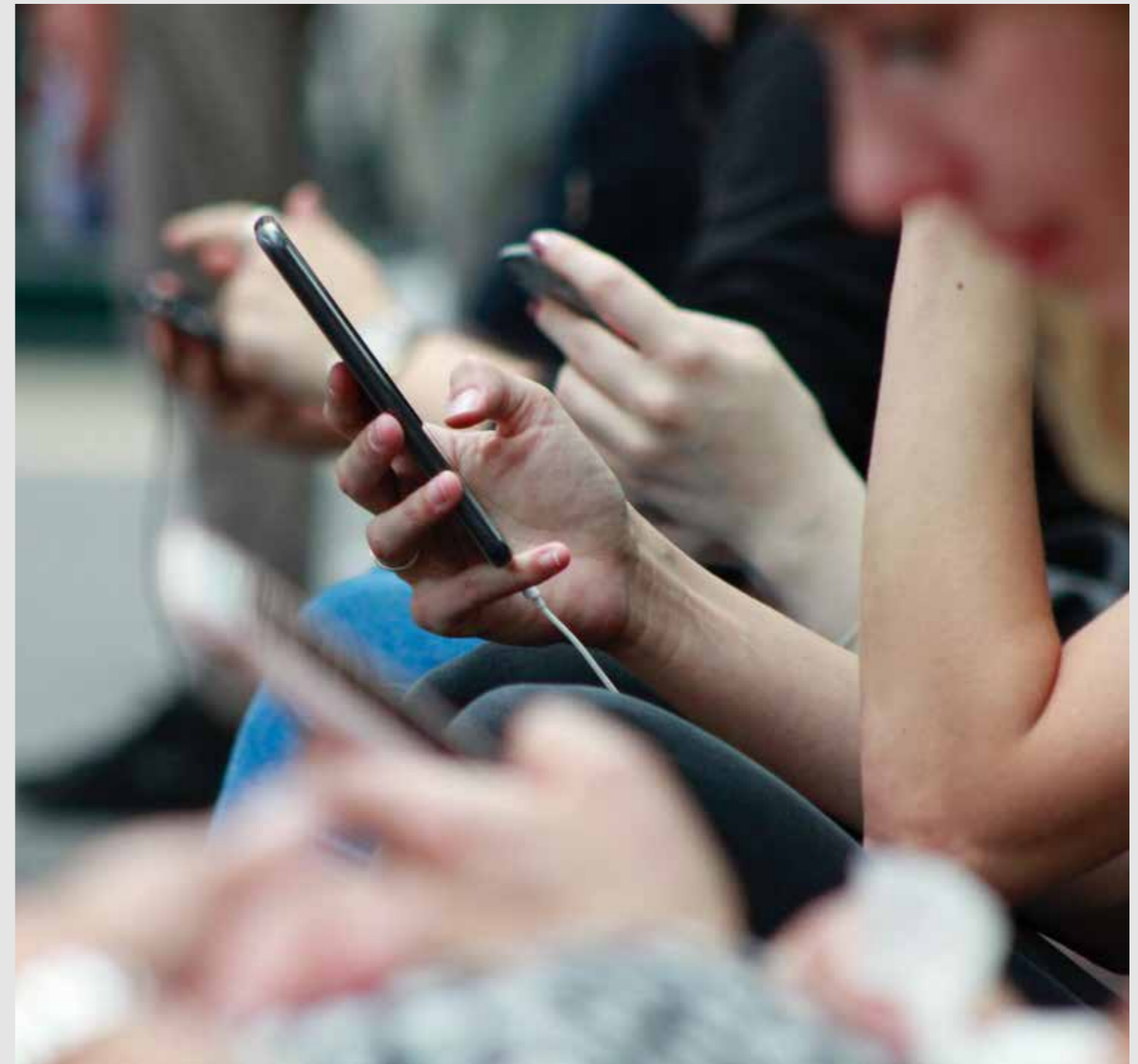
Some good examples of destination sites are highlighted below

[www.thisiseindhoven.com/en](http://www.thisiseindhoven.com/en)  
[www.experiencesalisbury.co.uk](http://www.experiencesalisbury.co.uk)  
[www.destinationtoronto.com](http://www.destinationtoronto.com)

**A thorough brief and site map needs to be developed, but a typical cost of a broader destination platform would be circa £35-40k**

*Northampton currently struggles from a weak digital presence. There is no definitive site which owns the Northampton story and signposts businesses, visitors and residents to key information and events. Northampton is not currently in control of the message.*

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/news-habits-media/media-society/misinformation/>  
<sup>13</sup> <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2021-trust-barometer>





## 5.5 Culture, Events and Tourism

We also recommend the creation of a Strategic Events Programme to include the development of existing successful events and the creation of new events that can be curated in the regenerated Market Square when it reopens.

Examples of new on-brand events that could respond to some of the societal changes mentioned earlier in the report could include Northampton Makers' a market hosting design-led British brands and makers exhibiting and selling unique, handcrafted products in a pop-up space on the Market Square. REUSE : Northampton, a celebration of sustainability and innovation where shoppers, start-ups and emerging talent can buy, learn and network with pop-up stores, styling sessions, a vintage market, workshops, events and installations. Welcome to the future of fashion.

We also propose working with the West Northants Economy, Culture and Tourism team on aligning the brand positioning with the proposed visitor economy strategy. There is the opportunity to work more closely with culture and heritage partners to develop itineraries that deliver a better 'brand experience' and to consider how working with the Culture Compact the idea for a Year of Independent Culture 2024 could be developed.

**No immediate costs, but to be considered as part of the role of the Brand Partnership**

*We also propose working with the West Northants Economy, Culture and Tourism team on aligning the brand positioning with the proposed visitor economy strategy.*



# 6.0 Leadership and Delivery

Northampton has been successfully created a strong public private partnership in Northampton Forward, which has led on the creation of the town investment plan and successful bids to Future High Streets and Towns Fund initiatives.

The recommendation is that a 'Brand Partnership' is established as a subset of Northampton Forward to develop a marketing and communications plan for 2022-25. This needs to look beyond the individual objectives of each of the members involved and create joined up and collaborative activities. The partnership should act as 'brand managers' and should look to develop and implement effective 'on-brand' initiatives that can have a major impact on how Northampton is perceived.

This should include the development of future initiatives including the brand experience such as events, festivals, new retailers etc.

## 6.1 How do we make this happen?

It is critical that Northampton builds capacity in place brand leadership, with a post (potentially shared between WNC and Northampton Town Centre Bid) that provides overall Salisbury place brand management and curation.

The Brand Partnership should utilise the brand toolkit to operate a quality control system which will analyse projects and consider how they are making a positive contribution to Northampton's brand values and image.

The Brand Partnership is an opportunity to bring in a number of key partners from across the Enterprise Zone including The University of Northampton, Carlsberg and Cosworth

The Brand Partnership should consider how strong existing events such as Northampton Carnival and Diwali can be supported but importantly how new initiatives that support the brand positioning can be encouraged and developed.

Cultural Institutions should be encouraged to develop a year of 'Independent Culture' in 2024, the town should have a regionally significant Food and Drink Festival which supports independent producers and traders in the region but also celebrates the diverse ethnic communities in the town. There is an opportunity to leverage Northampton's equity in making to create new festivals that draw people to the town and re-enforce the brand

The Brand Partnership would be the environment for organisations to bring their future plans and initiatives and consider how greater alignment and collaboration could benefit Northampton.

## 6.2 Appoint a Place Brand Manager

Without a coherent story and coordinated stakeholders, your brand loses its distinctive flavour. Unfortunately, many destinations spread their messages too thin.

When people in a destination begin to tell diverging stories, as though they each belong to a different place, no one recognises what the place brand stands for.

Place brand managers are a highly effective way of reversing this trend by adopting a new role and responsibilities focused on collaborative, long-term planning.

This role should focus on execution, being across the detail from managing the way logos are displayed, choosing words and colours, and shaping the tone of voice.

Effective brand management means coordinating and managing the brand story across the entire destination. Our 'Independent Spirit' brand is an aggregation of the people and stories, so a brand manager must work to align stakeholders, lead the brand's evolution over time, and measure its impact. It will be important the role follows the three Cs of place brand management

([www.destinationthink.com](http://www.destinationthink.com))

*Place brand managers are a highly effective way of reversing this trend by adopting a new role and responsibilities focused on collaborative, long-term planning.*

## Make sure we can walk the talk

A brand manager's role shouldn't just focus on what Northampton says but also on what Northampton does. Communication and experiences should be inseparable, because they are two halves of an equation that equals the larger brand story that must authentically reflect the place (Fig 3). Copenhagen is one place where development and communication support the place brand. Copenhagen's brand positions the city, in part, as an eco-friendly place where cycling improves the local quality of life.

To support this green lifestyle, the city has developed a system called the 'green wave' which coordinates traffic lights to favour bicycles rather than cars in some neighbourhoods.

## Consistency: Every visitor touchpoint counts

Place brand managers also need to consider the customer journey and improving touchpoints by working with local stakeholders in retail, culture and hospitality.

Some places like Manchester have on-the-ground ambassador programs to make visitors welcome and offer assistance, this could be developed further with Northampton BID. Each touchpoint is a chance to reinforce the destination brand and tell a story worth sharing.

## Continuity: Long-term planning

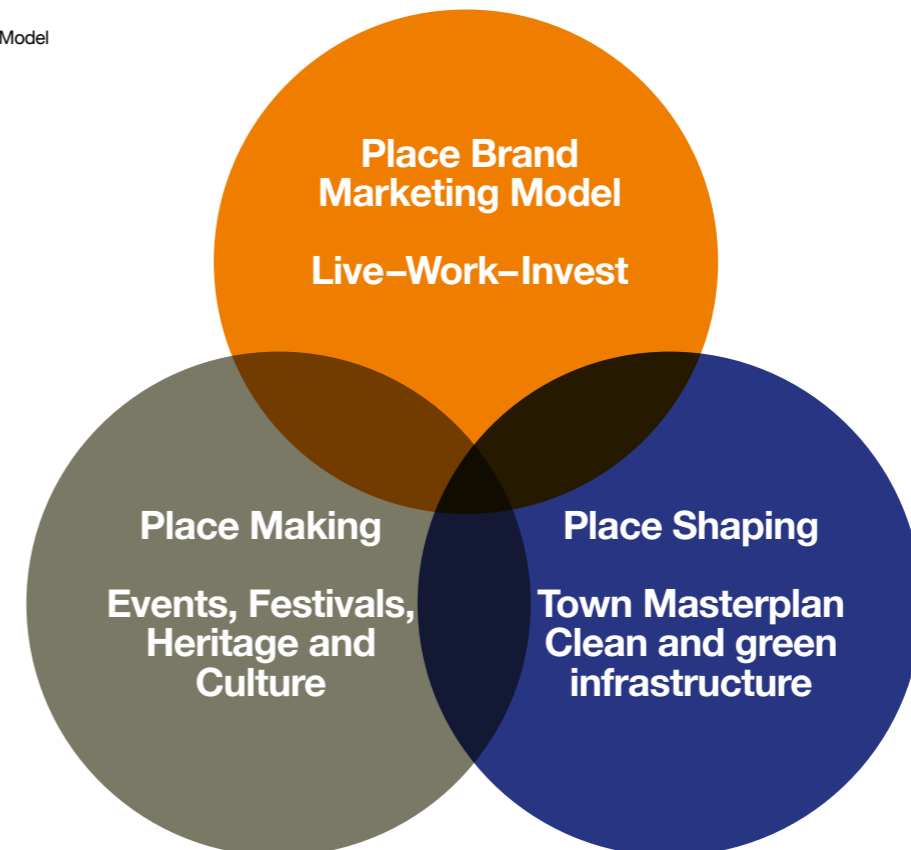
An authentic place brand is shaped around identity. The brand comes alive through a mosaic of stories, but your place's identity is the continuous thread holding those stories together. A place brand manager's responsibility is to make sure that the elements of identity remain in place as the destination gradually evolves. This person is the link between a place's identity and the brand's expression. Continuity is often the most difficult of the three Cs for towns and cities who become too narrowly focused on marketing tactics rather than influencing the long-term vision.

The strongest place brands don't change much, the key is to maintain and improve the existing brand by telling better stories that involve the community. With community support, the brand can prevail beyond managers can challenge political or corporate decisions that are misaligned with the place's identity.

We envisage that the Place Brand Manager would chair the brand partnership and work closely with partners to ensure a curated, consistent and coherent set of brand activities are delivered. They would be chaired with making the brand activities more sustainable by securing private sector support, commercialisation and seeking out new funding opportunities.

**We would anticipate this role being budgeted at circa £50k annually. In other locations this is co-funded by the BID.**

Fig 3 – Place Management Model





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