

Sutton Town Centre – Rethink, Repurpose, Remake

Overview

The purpose of this paper is to provide a broad economic overview to the Spatial Masterplan for Sutton Town Centre, which is subject to public consultation. Any comments received on this paper will also be taken into account when the final Sutton Masterplan is produced in March 2019.

We are living in a time of dramatic structural change in our town centres, brought about by factors largely out of local control:

- Out of town retail parks, with free parking and which offer a broad mix of retail and leisure, continue to create new destinations to the detriment of traditional centres;
- Technological changes have over the past few years, seen a major shift to on line shopping, in many cases, negating the need for bricks and mortar. This is likely to continue;
- The national business rates' regime has hampered start-ups and has driven other retailers from the high street;
- Prevailing economic conditions since 2008 have led to many high profile national retailers either going into administration or undertaking financial restructuring at a cost of thousands of jobs;
- Consequently the number and type of shops being occupied in town centres has continued to decline and/or change at a faster rate than ever before. The structure of town centres has changed from a simple goods' transaction to a more complex mix of retail, leisure, food and drink, events, commercial, residential, health and education.



So what does this mean for Sutton?

Sutton is a traditional small town centre with a good mix of national and independent retailers, along with an indoor shopping centre and a market. It is the largest centre within the Ashfield District and is generally well used by the resident population. It has convenient and cost effective car parking and is surrounded by high density residential areas.

Ashfield Council has prioritised investment into Sutton, ie:

- £1.4m refurbishment of the Idlewells Indoor Market to create a modernised market offer. It is currently 78% full;
- Successful relocation of the outdoor market on to Portland Square, to create a more coherent town centre offer and provide additional car parking;
- Acquisition and demolition of the former Conservative Club, to create a development opportunity;
- Demolition of the redundant Fox street Council offices to create a development site;
- We have invested in shop front grants to bring empty properties back into use.

Despite this, Sutton Town centre is still over-exposed to a few large retailers and is not diversified economically. Vacancy rates stand at 15%, which is above the national average of 9%. Its retail spreads out beyond the core centre on to Outram Street and this dilutes the offer. There is little night time economy (eg bars, restaurants, events or entertainment space) to bring people in in the evening. This means that it is largely deserted after the shops have closed. Sutton is therefore in danger of being left behind and becoming irrelevant unless action is taken.

The Spatial Masterplan goes into some detail about Sutton as a Place: its coherence, its zoning, its destination feel.

This paper now proposes a range of other economic elements to supplement the spatial approach and to bring a new purpose to Sutton Town Centre.

Place Shaping – Discover Ashfield

More recently ADC has facilitated a private sector led partnership – Discover Ashfield – amongst other things to lead on the repurposing of the district and its town centres. This work has already commenced and provides a great opportunity to develop a true and sustainable partnership approach to Sutton’s future.

With that in mind, we put forward the following high level ideas to make Sutton Town Centre fit for the future. Most of these ideas cannot be delivered by ADC working alone. They (and any others subsequently proposed) will need a broad mix of other public, private, voluntary and community sector partners to shape and lead on delivery; including landowners, proprietors, funders and statutory agencies.

Rethinking Sutton Town Centre – What do we want for Sutton?

Broadly speaking, we want Sutton Town Centre to have a bright and successful future. But for this to happen, there is a need proactively to rethink its purpose, both spatially and economically. The associated Spatial Masterplan sets out the framework for future investment and development by identifying a common understanding of Sutton Town Centre as a physical Place. What follows here are some thoughts about its future purpose. These are not in any order of priority:

- Consideration needs to be given of the appropriate mix of retail: nationals, local boutique style independents, markets, incentives for start-ups. What do people want to see in their town centre;
- This needs to be linked to other leisure type operations to encourage more footfall and a greater length of stay: choice of food and beverage (cheap and cheerful, family friendly, trendy, gourmet), health and beauty, leisure and community facilities;
- More events to draw people in, linked to a greater choice of food and beverage and other leisure activities to increase length of stay. What kind of events do people want to see?
- High quality of public realm and street furniture. One of the outcomes of this consultation will be to agree and provide a consistent palette of materials;
- Digital connectivity and investment into Smart town/city concepts;
- A vibrant and safe night time economy, which again links to a greater choice of food and beverage, events and leisure activities. This will need to be linked to measures to combat any threat of anti-social behaviour. What do people want to see within a night time economy?
- A high quality environment and greenspace offer, eg an urban park, green trail, public art. Care will be taken to design out crime and anti-social behaviour;
- Encouragement for commercial businesses to locate in Sutton in low cost office accommodation. Consideration to be given for the Council/LEP to provide start up workspace accommodation. Following on from the success of Ada Lovelace House in Kirkby, a phase 2 development should be considered for Sutton Town Centre, as this would improve the number of professional workers and business owners using the town centre;
- Where necessary, the Council will continue to take strong enforcement action to deal with dereliction and blight in retail, commercial and industrial premises;
- The Council will use its new Supplementary Planning Guidance on conversions of vacant retail into residential properties and to work with owners of other vacant premises to bring them back into productive use;
- ADC will also propose proactively repurposing long term vacant retail premises in secondary or tertiary locations in order to protect the vibrancy of the Town Centre;

- Through the Place agenda:
 - o Work with all proprietors to facilitate a great customer experience, which will give Sutton a positive reputation;
 - o Use the newly re-established Town Teams to develop and deliver a high standard of customer care, attractive shop fronts and windows, use of IT and social media. They will build on existing initiatives in Ashfield in terms of Dementia Friendly and the Have a Seat campaigns;
 - o Develop a BID if this is required by businesses;
 - o Consider what community aspirations exist with regard to town centre facilities, in particular making use of vacant sites or buildings;
 - o Ensure high levels of public safety and usage of the PSPO where required to deter anti-social behaviour;
- ADC will develop (through the LEP or via the Future High Street Fund) a grant for: shop front improvements, for conversions to other purposes and to bring derelict properties back into productive use. This will require an element of match funding by proprietors;
- Look for more opportunities for residential developments in order to boost town centre living;
- Work with the owners of the Idlewells and the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) to develop a 21st Century market, encouraging such things as: make to sell, artisans, food, fashion and other niche offers not available elsewhere. What do people want to see?
- Transport – accessibility.

Next Steps

The purpose of this paper has been to set out the current issues facing town centres in general and Sutton Town Centre in particular. It then supplements the draft Spatial Masterplan by proposing a set of high level ideas to rethink and repurpose Sutton in order to remake it fit for the 21st Century.

Comments on any element of this paper are welcome and they will be taken into account along with the consultation on the draft Spatial Masterplan. The final document will be taken to Cabinet for approval in March 2019.

The Council is engaging directly via the Discover Ashfield Partnership with, visitors/shoppers, retailers and businesses in Sutton to shape the vision and objectives for Sutton Town Centre and to inform the Spatial Masterplan for Sutton Town Centre.

Comments can be made by:

- using the online interactive comment form at **www.ashfield.gov.uk/consultation**
- downloading and completing the **Consultation Representation Form**, copies of which can also be collected from the Council Offices. The completed form should then be either emailed to: **localplan@ashfield.gov.uk**
or
posted to: **Forward Planning Team, Ashfield District Council, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Notts, NG17 8DA.**