



# ASSOCIATION of FAR COTTON ENTERPRISES

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Mr Peter Baguley  
Head of Planning  
Northampton Borough Council,  
Guildhall,  
St. Giles Square,  
Northampton, NN1 1DE

27 September 2017  
Ref. AFCE/NBC/PL/LR-1

Dear Mr Baguley

**Subject: Developing the Status of St Leonard's Road Far Cotton as a District Shopping Centre**

We would like to propose that the policy for granting change of use in Far Cotton be subject to two criteria:

1. **Zoning strategy:** Grants for HiMO and commercial use to be decided within a zoning policy confirming St Leonard's Road status as a district shopping centre and extension to the town centre linking with the planned development of Bridge Street and Ransome Road thus barring HiMOs from St Leonard's Road.

Cumulative HiMOs in the Road will produce revenue that can not be ingested by the present mix of enterprises nor will it help to diversify types of trades and services to benefit the local community and economy. This revenue will leak to prosper other areas and venues to the detriment of the local fabric.

To sustain the economic stability of the current mix of enterprises and for the street to be competently attractive to potential custom from the Abbey, serve the student population and boost the local economy to the benefit of the local community, it is vital to amplify the variety in trades and services on offer.

Almost all shop units are taken blocking access to new trades or services. As HiMOs offer a gainful ready market, developers are not expected to opt for commercial use as the trend has been so far. Proposals to refine the ambience of the road in order to enhance its appeal and its role are forthcoming.

The Association will work with the enterprises to effect further self-help measures to complement these proposals like restoration of fair-faced brick and stone work facades, window display, floral garniture and mending a back access road linking St Leonard's and London roads when its ownership is resolved.

2. **Option for Locals:** Priority to grant any commercial planning permission to be given to established home-owners. This puts the decision to develop any freehold property along the road in the hands of its Cottonite homeowners along the road to enable them to benefit from the incoming development potential.

The Association does not seek to induce homeowners to take this decision rather than to continue to live in their homes or to sell their property. The Association aims to alert them to this option as a long-term prospect and to help any homeowner who chooses to become self-developer achieve this goal.

A homeowner can net an extra £600 from letting the ground floor shop and continue to live in the flat above. This would pay for conversion costs in 2-3 years. Both flat and shop can be let for £1200, enough to pay for conversion costs and a mortgage for an alternative house in the area or another of choice.

This arrangement will channel development benefits to existing Cottonite homeowners who continue to be homeowners as well as landlords. Working with local homeowners, the Association can help the disrupted development trend of the road to pick-up and continue to the benefit of all parties involved.

The Association aims to help homeowners who opt to become developers by negotiating on their behalf favourable finance terms, building quotes As well as mortgage terms for those who choose to relocate. The Association would thus expect their cooperation in ensuring diversity in enterprises moving in.

We premise our proposal on Northampton Local Plan 1993-2006 adopted in 2007. It ranks St Leonard's Road with other shopping centres: "The older shopping centres have developed along sections of the main radial routes such as Wellingborough Road, Kettering Road, St James/ Weedon Road and St Leonard's Road. Within these centres there are types of trade and service not found in the town centre—specialist shops attracting particular customers. These take advantage of secondary and cheaper locations. The trend for small retail premises to diversify away from traditional uses in this way is beneficial." In St Leonard's Road this trend stalled due to several factors.

The economic slump of the late 80s was closely followed by floods in 98 before which time, the Co-op, now Asda, attracted shoppers from East and West Hunsbury who used its car park to combine shopping at the store with strolling down St Leonard's Road to shop. Parking at St Peter's Walk development diverted the shoppers to the Town Centre, reviving Gold Street but negating a similar role for Asda as a magnet serving St Leonard's Road. Enterprises along the road were not consulted as to the possible back-lash on their businesses or to how these effects can be mitigated. Footfall declined and thereupon the street lost the diversity of shopping variety.

The state with CAAP and Enterprise zone projects is dismal. Both aim to direct the benefits to the Town Centre ignoring Far Cotton shopping centre. Beside University students spend, the combined premises for the County and Borough Councils boast about how the spend of 2,000 professional workers will boost the town centre economy. CAAP severs St Leonard's Road continuity with Bridge Street and Ransom Road excluding it from the Enterprise zone [Appenix2]. A main aim for forming this Association is to rectify the situation and to develop the potential of St Leonard's as projected in the Local Plan. The current developments provide the opportunity.

The Local Plan further states, "The Council's aim is to strengthen and improve the facilities of the district / local centres as reflected in Policy R1. Where there is scope for redevelopment within the centres, proposals for providing a variety of shopping uses and associated facilities are encouraged. Some district centres need environmental improvements to enhance their attractiveness and to maintain their role." The AFCE is aware of this need and has developed a holistic vision that includes, interalia, lining the Road with trees incorporating Green infrastructure. The Association will work with local enterprises to effect further self-help improvements.

The Localism Bill of 2011 asserts that "One of the most important things that councils can do to improve local life is to support the local economy." To this end, the FCEA aims to promote existing enterprises as well as to encourage and develop new enterprises. This, in turn, will help to bring further prosperity and facilities to the residents. Now is the time to act proactively rather than reactively later. The current high-ranking development in the area—the restoration of Delapre Abbey and the relocation of the main campus of Northampton University to its Waterside site—will surely impact Far Cotton and in particular St Leonard's Road as developers zoom in.

Property prices have already risen by over 10%. A developer would buy a property: as an investment to let and wait for prices to reach their ceiling and sell it at a profit, convert it to a HiMO or, a ground floor shop with a flat above. The latter has been the trend for development hitherto. It simultaneously increases the supply of both commercial and residential rental units, preserves the residential element in the area **and creates consumer demand to benefit the local economy**. A lucrative and ready market for HiMOs will strike yet another serious blow to this positive trend. Any consent given at this stage will only induce an overkill of HiMO applications.

Conversely, beyond granting consent to commercial use, use classes apart, planners have little control over the nature of trades and services taking over converted units. When it comes to use classes, the Association will work in concert with planners and self-developers to maximize variety in trade and service to diversify the local economy. We trust this to be a viable way to manage change with proactive local participation. It can not be of benefit to the local community of residents and enterprises for the area to be dominated by supermarkets and warehouse retailing. The beauty of a garden is not in its trees only but in its flowers as well—small *is* beautiful.

Out-of-town retailing has affected even the town centre which aspires to an Urban Regional Shopping Centre role. There is no readily available information on how planners define district and local centres. It was thus necessary to refer to other sources e.g. Swansea [appendix 2]. Against these criteria, and the range of shopping and community facilities offered, St Leonard's Road is part of fully fledged district shopping centre in which local branches of supermarkets and warehouse retailing ***can act positively*** as anchors rather than competitors. To realize this, the current segmental approach to the area has to give in to an integrative approach.

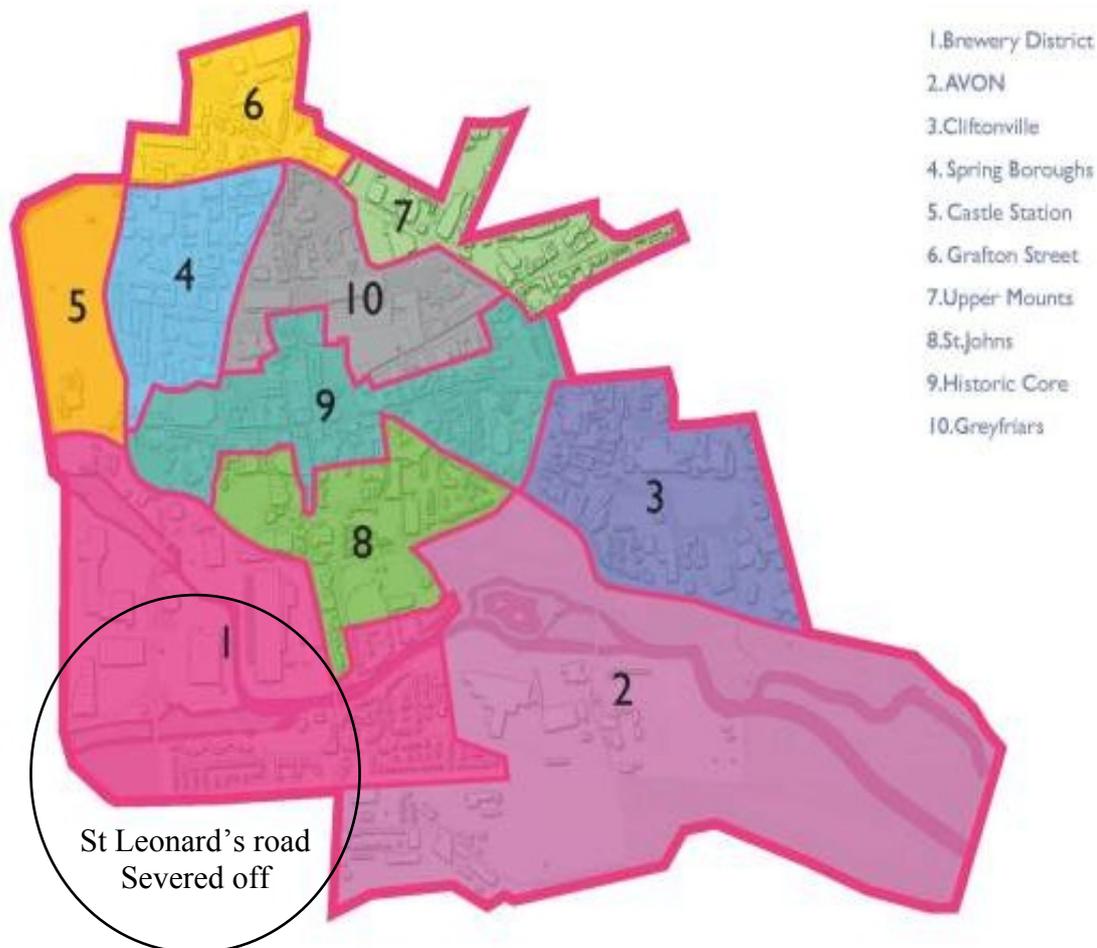
An integrative stance will help expand and diversify the retail offering in the area ***in a complementary way*** with St Leonard's Road linking the area to the rest of the CAAP regeneration plans. These seem to electively exclude St Leonard's Road. An integrative angle will rectify this anomaly and provide out-of-the-box answers to issues, such as parking, that may arise from kick-starting the natural trend for developing St Leonard's Road promoted and supported by the presence of national brands in the retail parks. Looking at St Leonard's Road, Ransom Road and Rothersthorpe Road integrally, Far Cotton is a substantial resource of economic potential.

Therefore, Sir, we hereby request an immediate stay on all applications for HiMOS along St Leonard's Road until this submission receives further consideration.

With kind regards,  
Yours sincerely,  
George Karayannis  
John Cox

Encl. Appendices 1 and 2

## Appendix 1



### Character Area 1: The Brewery District

Character 2010: Despite being located a short distance from the historic and retail heart of Northampton, the Brewery District currently feels isolated and disconnected from the town centre due to the severance provided by St Peter's Way. The River Nene is the centrepiece of the character area with the mixture of built development responding to its presence but not always exploiting the benefits of being at a riverside location. Key landmarks in The Brewery district which aid navigation around the area are the Carlsberg Brewery and the Gas Holders on either side of Towcester Road.

Design Aspirations: New development should promote The Brewery District as a place to work, live and visit, which is well linked to and complements the overall offer within the town centre boundary. Development should enhance movement north towards the town centre and Castle Station. Proposals should also look to fully exploit the potential of the River Nene as a location for mixed use development and seek to provide active frontage onto the River. A finer grain of development more typical of Northampton's heritage is more appropriate and will allow more permeability through the area. [**emphasis** by AFCE]

Extract: Northampton Central Area Action Plan 2013 Appendix:A]

## Appendix 2

1.6 A **District Centre** can be described as a **large group of shops**, together with appropriate **supporting non-retail facilities and services**, which **collectively** form a coherent shopping centre. The retail emphasis in District Centres is on food and other convenience goods, though larger Centres can also support a wide range of comparison goods outlets and other essential services. They are normally **anchored by at least one supermarket or superstore** (described further in Chapter 3). **Non-retail facilities and services encompass a range of uses outside Use Class A1 Shops**. This includes banks, building societies, restaurants, café's, pubs, launderettes, healthcare facilities, public libraries, leisure facilities, places of worship and buildings for community uses. Not all of the aforementioned uses will be present in every District Centre. They normally **feature not less than 50 units**, often many more, and are well placed to serve the County's major population