

## **RUGBY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **QUESTION PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 10**

**COUNCIL – 20 SEPTEMBER 2023**

#### **QUESTION C**

**Councillor Rabin to ask the Growth and Investment Portfolio Holder, Councillor Picker:**

“Every prosperous high street has a distinct identity, a personal service and the convenience and flexibility of neighbourhood shopping. Research has shown that the visual appearance of shops and the quality of the retail offer directly impacts a shoppers’ decision to shop local.

The shop front is the identity of the shop - irrespective of the line of trade it pursues. It is also the single most effective marketing tool for most high street business. A well-ordered, tidy, contextual and cared-for appearance will almost always result in better business. Every shop front is also part of a wider urban context. It impacts on the way the host building is read and it contributes to the look and feel of the high street as a whole - even when a shop is closed and at night.

Like many town centres throughout the country, Rugby has faced its challenges, losing some national and international retail chains. Despite this, Ordnance Survey data has shown a significant increase in independent service businesses. Since 2020 19% increase in fast food outlets, 12% increase in pubs and bars, 39% increase in restaurants, 12% increase in beauty and personal services. This trend appears to be continuing as many of the premises currently vacant are under offer.

Every town centre high street has a distinct identity, defined by the character of the existing architecture. Our town centre has distinctive architecture – some of historical importance. This must be protected.

Any new businesses undergoing shop front improvements need to strike a careful balance between business needs, the building they sit within and the appearance and coherence of the street as a whole. In recent years this has not been addressed. One such example is the new mini-market on the corner of Market Place and Chapel Street.

In the absence of a Supplementary Planning document this business has been able to install intentionally obtrusively bright and compelling shop front advertising displays that has shown absolutely no coherence with the architectural style of the building or other shop fronts along the high street. This is not the only example.

Could Councillor Picker please confirm that our Town Centre Regeneration Working Group is actively working on the introduction of a Supplementary Planning document enabling Planning Committee the power to define the visual style of any future shop front designs – and that this forms part of the planned Development Strategy Service Plan?”

**Councillor Picker, Growth and Investment Portfolio Holder, to reply as follows:**

“The Council is actively working on a Shop Front Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and it is an identified task within the Growth and Investment Service Plan for 23/24. It will also appear in revisions to the Local Development Scheme when decisions about the review are Local Plan Review are made this Autumn. It is anticipated that the SPD will be ready for adoption, following the statutory consultation, process in Spring 2024.

Shop Front Improvements is also a workstream within the Action Plan for Town Centre Regeneration. In addition to the SPD other planning tools such as Areas of Special Advertisement Control and Regulation 7 Directions are currently being considered and options will be reported to both the Town Centre Regeneration Working Group and Planning Services Working Group.”