

March 2023**REGENERATION****Northampton Market Square**

The groundbreaking ceremony to mark the start of the transformation of Northampton's Market Square took place on Monday, 6 February. The works will use high quality materials throughout and will include bespoke fixed stalls, tiered seating and an interactive water feature.

The work to transform Northampton's historic Market Square will take place over the next 18 months.

While the multi-million pound redevelopment of Market Square works takes place the market will trade from Commercial St for around 18 months with traders not paying any rent or utility fees while they are based at their temporary new home.

Vulcan Works

The Vulcan Works officially opened its doors to businesses on the 1st February in a soft launch of the centre. During the run up to opening, the Council registered interests from an extensive list of businesses which Oxford Innovation are in the process of liaising with to organise visits and confirm spaces in line with businesses current contractual arrangements. There are a number of businesses who occupied the space prior to opening yesterday, and we look forward to welcoming many more over the forthcoming months.

Four Waterside

Four Waterside site will see the development of Grade A office space, a new Hotel and residential on a key gateway site to the town centre. The Procurement for a Development Partner on Four Waterside has commenced with the council now in dialogue with a number of bidders who wish to partner on the sites. This dialogue will now take place until June with the preferred development partner being announced in the Autumn.

Abington Street and Fish Street public Realm

Consultation on the planned works to Abington Street and Fish Street will commence from Friday 3rd March with residents, businesses, and community groups invited to have their say on plans to redevelop the public realm.

As part of the plans, the project will positively revitalise one of the busiest commercial and pedestrian routes through the town's main shopping street. The redesigned spaces will be better suited to the changing needs of shoppers with improved pedestrian access, new seating, planting, outdoor dining space and areas to encourage community activity.

The redevelopment will complement the wider regeneration of the town centre, including the Market Square Transformation and provide enhanced connectivity with the rest of the town. The consultation runs from Friday 3rd March until Thursday 6 April. As part of the consultation there will be public engagement events where they can see the plans and discuss them with the officers and architects working on the project being held on:

- Friday 17 March 10am – 4pm at the Grosvenor Shopping Centre, 2 Union Street, Northampton NN1 2EW
- Saturday 18 March 10am -4pm at Northampton Museum, 4-6 Guildhall Road, Northampton NN1 1DP

Marefair Heritage Park

We have also launched consultation to seek views on proposals for the Heritage Park along Marefair in Northampton Town Centre.

The work will see Chalk Lane Car Park in Marefair, Northampton transform into a Heritage Park. This will offer open green space for families and the local community to enjoy while celebrating the heritage of the area.

Marefair and the surrounding area has a fascinating and important history which includes archaeological excavation sites, historic local buildings such as the Old Black Lion Pub, Hazelrigg House, Castile Hill URC and St Peters Church and even Castle Mound, the site of the once famous Northampton Castle.

Castle Mound, where part of the castle used to stand, forms part of this new Heritage Park and we are looking to understand how we can best reflect the heritage of the area into the designs for the new park and share the stories of this area with all the people who visit.

People are invited to review the plans and have their say as the online consultation launches on Wednesday, 22 February. The link will be live until Friday, 7 April.

There will be public engagement sessions where members of the public can drop in anytime to view the plans and discuss with the officers and architects working on the project. These will be held on:

- Saturday 4 March from 10am – 4pm at the Grosvenor Centre outside the Primark unit on the ground floor.
- Wednesday 15 March between 4:30pm – 7:30pm at Springs Family Centre, 9 Tower Street, NN1 2SN

Social Enterprise Development Fund

West Northamptonshire Social Enterprise Town (WNSET) will be launching a new investment fund aimed at supporting the growth and development of social enterprises in Northampton. The WNSET Social Enterprise Development Fund is funded by Northampton Forward as part of the Town's Fund and supported by West Northamptonshire Council as a community-driven initiative that aims to provide funding and support for local social entrepreneurs to maximise the impact of the Town's diverse social enterprise sector.

The investment fund is designed to support social enterprises that are making a positive impact on the community and the environment, while also generating income and creating jobs.

The fund will provide investment capital to social entrepreneurs to start and grow their social businesses, with a focus on those who are addressing local social and environmental challenges.

The WNSET Social Enterprise Development Fund launch event, which will be held on 14th March at the University of Northampton, Waterside Campus, Learning Hub, will feature presentations by local social entrepreneurs, who will share their experiences and success stories. Attendees will also have the opportunity to network and learn more about the investment fund and the support available for social enterprises in the area.

Sponne Arcade Car Park

Works to increase the size of Sponne Arcade car park in Towcester continues on time and to budget. The works have already seen the demolition of the former co-op building, which had become vacant, laid dormant for many years and had been subject to vandalism, break-ins, other anti-social behaviour. The project will see increased car park capacity, which allows for greater accessibility for disabled and family parking, motorcycle bays, a bicycle shelter, as well as landscaped borders, improved lighting, CCTV and seating along the main pathway that joins Richmond Road with Watling Street, a vital pedestrian link for the town.

Works are due finish in Spring this year.

ADULT EDUCATION

Multiply Funding

Procurement took place in January for providers to deliver against the 10 interventions that were set out in the Multiply investment plan approved by Cabinet in September. Interventions will be delivered by Evolve Your Future, Diversiti, Learning Curve and West Northants Council Adult Learning Service. Interventions are all designed to upskill learners with numeracy skills and include numeracy programmes for employers, numeracy skills for parents, and numeracy for hard to reach learners. A range of informal learning and functional skills qualifications will be on offer designed to give learners the skills they need to improve their day to day lives and employability. Contracts have been signed and sealed in February and delivery against the interventions will start late March/early April.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

In late-December, WNC received approval of their UKSPF Investment Plan funding 12 government-provided interventions which align with the three investment priorities Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills.

Internal service areas are currently reviewing the criteria and eligibility for the UKSPF and identifying potential projects to deliver each intervention, including the necessary outcomes and outputs, to ensure the most impactful and beneficial projects are allocated the funding. The total £5.4m must be spent by April 2025 and it is WNC's vision to ensure this funding is used to create additionality to delivering pride in place and providing local residents with greater life chances. From community projects to business support and upskilling residents, WNC is dedicated to making the best use of this funding.

Rural England Prosperity Fund

Following the announcement of the Rural England Prosperity Fund in September, the Economy Team has pro-actively engaged with partners and stakeholders to inform an Investment Plan addendum to draw down this funding alongside the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

To ascertain how this £1.3m capital fund would have the greatest benefit to the rural communities within West Northamptonshire, the Economy Team hosted two workshops, an online consultation and numerous one-to-one's with stakeholders. Along with a robust dataset, this informed the submission of the Addendum in November which focused the funds on addressing rural transportation challenges and grant funding for businesses. DEFRA will review the submission and approve the addendum ahead of April 2023 when the fund is planned to commence.

Supporting Local Businesses

The Economy Team have secured a prestigious accolade in the first FSB Local Government Awards, winning the regional All-Round Small Business Friendly award. The Team submitted an entry to the awards for their ongoing business support during and following the Covid-19 pandemic which included a large-scale marketing campaign which was seen by millions, dedicated business engagement and the creation of the Explore West Northants App.

The Economy Team also supported the South East Midlands Start Up Programme networking event in December to promote our partnership with the University of Northampton and to champion business support and entrepreneurship. The Team are also liaising with another networking group, NNBN, to expand from North Northamptonshire into West Northamptonshire.

The Economy Team have continued to deliver pro-active business support and work collaboratively with partners to connect offerings and enhance resource for the community. This included an innovative Small Business Saturday campaign which utilised digital platforms to engage with employers and showcase why residents and visitors should support local businesses all year round.

This was followed by rebranding the Explore West Northants App for Christmas and a dedicated campaign to showcase local offers and promoting all businesses.

As the West Northants Local Plan begins to be developed, the Economy service has been actively involved in the drafting to ensure that the new Plan reflects the ambition for the economy and supports growth. The Team have already met with numerous colleagues in the Planning Policy Team to support this policy to be as effective as can be to foster economic prosperity in West Northants and maximise opportunities to attract inward investment and create high-skilled, highly paid roles for residents within this area. It is also important that the policy takes into consideration the needs of local businesses and supports the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Colleagues from the Economy Team continue to attend meetings and events to showcase the free business support available, as well as promoting the upcoming funding streams which WNC will be managing. These have included with the Chamber of Commerce, the Discover Daventry Retail Forum, Your Business Expo, BIPC Start-Up Day and more.

Supporting Local Employment

The Economy Team continue to deliver the West Northamptonshire Employment Support Service helping residents to secure local, sustainable employment and for employers to utilise the local labour market and fill vacancies.

The Team have been liaising with colleagues in the Anti-Poverty Team and will be sharing employment support information in the Warm Welcome Spaces and in Leisure Centres to raise awareness of this essential support. Information is already prominent in all West Northamptonshire libraries.

As the new Local Skills Improvement Plan begins to be created by the Chamber of Commerce, the Economy Team have already attended events and meetings to ensure that this document effectively bridges the gap between education and employment. In order to support employers to grow and utilise the skilled local labour market, the LSIP must be a tangible strategy with key objectives to reduce out-commuting, enhance employability of residents and tailor employment opportunities to the needs of the area. It is essential that the LSIP capitalises on our position within the Oxford-Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership and showcases West Northants in particular as an area ready for investment, where employers and the local labour market can thrive.

Supporting the Local Visitor Economy

The Economy team are working with colleagues in North Northamptonshire Council on the development of a Northamptonshire Visitor Economy Strategy. A stakeholder workshop was held in February to kickstart the engagement for the development of the strategy. The Strategy will be completed by the end of April.

The Economy team ran a “Shop local” campaign throughout November and December, working with the WNC Comms Team to create videos showcasing different employers across West Northants, promoting the area as a must-visit destination.

The *Explore West Northants* App continues to grow with more businesses and attractions utilising this free tool to promote themselves, along with offers, discounts and events. Partners such as leisure centres, libraries, town councils and more are also on the App to provide a digital community of what’s to explore in the area all year round.

The Team are continuing to develop the Visitor Economy and working with attractions and partners to grow opportunities in this area for visitors and to increase physical footfall. The ExploreWN will be branded throughout the year for different campaigns, most recently which promoted “Love Your Local Businesses” for Valentines and will soon be transformed to promote thinking locally for Easter.

Colleagues also specifically promoted employment opportunities and available support in the tourism/hospitality industries at a Careers Fair held at the University of Northampton to champion this sector as a priority for West Northants.

The benefits of supporting local businesses (which the Economy Team frequently advocate) can be found here - <https://westnorthants.gov.uk/supportlocal>

Councillor Daniel Lister

Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth