



September 2023

TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION & GROWTH

Greyfriars

Following a competitive procurement which received strong interest from 27 different architect practice, Studio Egret West have been appointed to lead on the development of a framework for the Greyfriars sites. Studio Egret West have been involved in similar schemes to Greyfriars such as Mayfield in Manchester and Earls Court in London.

Greyfriars is the largest brownfield opportunity within West Northamptonshire and this commission is a positive step forward to create a shared and co-created vision for the site. There will be an early consultation exercise this side of the new year to give the opportunity for the public, key partners and Members to contribute.

Vulcan Works

All small units at Vulcan are fully let by businesses in the creative and cultural industries. Barclays Eagle Labs have are now contracted and will be based at the Vulcan Works supporting and enhancing the business support offer, a Barclays Eco System Manager has been recruited and appointed and will be permanently based at the hub. The Vulcan Creatives business support programme is due to be launched in the Winter giving free business support to those in the sector.

The Vulcan Works is also a finalist in the Northamptonshire Business Excellence Awards for two awards – Land and Development and Innovation. The awards night is the 9th November.

Four Waterside and Marefair

Four Waterside site will see the development of Grade A office space, a new hotel and riverside residential on a key gateway site to the town centre. The procurement for a development partner is coming to an end with a report being taken to Cabinet in October to approve the appointment of a preferred bidder. Once approval has been given and the standstill period has ended, it will be made public who the chosen development partner is.

Marefair Heritage Park

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.

Following a positive public consultation event in late Spring, design development has continued responding to the themes and comments submitted in the consultation. The Council have also submitted a bid of £250,000 to the National Lottery Heritage Fund with the outcome awaited.

ADULT EDUCATION

This quarter saw the end of the Academic Year 22/23. The service recorded a total of 7,589 deliveries across both North and West Northamptonshire with a total retention rate of 93%, higher than target and the national average. Achievement so far is currently sitting at 74% however we are still awaiting outcomes for 18% of learners so this is expected to increase to above target and above national average.

Over the course of the financial year to date (April-August) we have recorded 1294 learners, up from 1140 the previous year. 60% of these learners have been based within West Northamptonshire.

Our Funding and Accountability Statement was approved by board this quarter, submitted to the DfE (Department for Education) and was accepted by the ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency). This document is a formal document that is a new mandatory requirement for all ESFA funded providers with an allocation in excess of £1m, our allocation is circa £2.5m. The document links closely with the LSIP (Local Skills Improvement Plan) and details the approach to the curriculum offer for the Adult Learning Service in 23/24.

The Adult Learning Service has requested a voluntary Health Check from the FE Commissioner team and this has been granted. This is a new support offer for the Adult and Community Education Sector from the FE Commissioner team who have previously only been involved in General Further Education Colleges. The FE Commissioner is a highly regarded agency that sits directly under the DfE and work alongside Ofsted and the ESFA. They have specific powers to act on behalf of the Education Minister and can apply intervention or support where required. The purpose of this 'Health Check' is to seek external, high level, scrutiny over the Service's current position and seek guidance that our newly produced four-year strategy is in line with national expectation, local need and fit for purpose. This is a high-level visit which will include input from members of Corporate Leadership, Elected Members, ALS staff, external stakeholders and board members. It is hoped that this will offer a very good platform for the Adult Learning Service to continue its rapid strategic development.

We are pleased to announce that the service has been successful in gaining accreditation from the nationally recognised awarding body NCFE/CACHE to offer accredited qualifications in Childcare/Education and Health/Social Care, as well as a range of professional updating short courses. This has been the culmination of an intensive four month approval process with an awarding body that is widely regarded as the gold standard of qualifications in Care and Education. We are now undergoing a recruitment process for suitably qualified staff, and we hope to have provision up and running by the end of October 2023. These courses are to be offered in direct response to the LSIP and the national priorities for skills.

The service is currently undergoing its end of academic year financial closedown with full details to be presented in due course. We are expecting to show a loss for the academic year 22/23 however this was planned and is fully covered by the Adult Learning Service reserve fund. The reasons for the recorded loss are largely related to accommodation costs, removal of some central subsidiaries and investment in strategic development to meet the skills agenda. As noted, this loss was planned for and expected. Along with reviewed strategies to staffing and accommodation in exploration, we have clear financial and curriculum planning in place for academic 23/24 to reverse this and show a positive contribution back to the reserve fund.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

In addition to the internal projects already taking place, it has been agreed to fund two new initiatives:

- Careers Hub Partnership – Partnering with the South East Midlands Careers Hub to enhance the bridge between employment and education and further support local schools and businesses. Having worked closely with the Careers Hub/Careers & Enterprise Company for numerous years, this initiative achieves numerous priorities in terms of supporting the future workforce, raising aspirations for career opportunities, supporting employers and raising the profile of West Northamptonshire as an area to work, live, learn and thrive.
- Vulcan Works Creative Entrepreneurial Scheme – Building on the robust offer being delivered within our Vulcan Works by Oxford Innovation, funding has been allocated from UKSPF to expand the Vulcan Works Creative Entrepreneurial Scheme to provide kickstart grants to start-up businesses. This funding will add to the non-financial support being delivered at Vulcan Works for numerous cohorts of entrepreneurs to start businesses locally and utilise Vulcan Works as a prime location for their business.

Numerous funds will be tendered to create opportunities for local partners and experts to benefit from the UKSPF and deliver initiatives on our behalf to support and grow local businesses, addressing decarbonisation and scaling up business growth locally. Information on live projects and funding allocations can be found on our [dedicated webpage](#).

Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF)

Year one funding of the REPF has now been received and delivery approaches have been discussed internally to align the capital grants for eligible rural businesses and transport organisations with existing funds.

It is anticipated that the business funding will be added to from UKSPF to provide capital grants and non-financial support to eligible rural businesses with 25% of the funds being utilised this financial year and 75% in 2024/25. The Economic Growth & Inward Investment Team are beginning to liaise with stakeholders/partners relevant to this type of funding to ensure it is delivered in the most beneficial way to support eligible rural businesses.

The capital grants to address rural transportation will be explored in terms of impact, community need and consideration of the Local Area Partnerships. Working with the Community Engagement and Highways Teams, this will be explored to have the greatest level of benefit to the individual communities eligible for this funding within West Northamptonshire.

Place Vision

The West Northants Place continues to be developed by the EGII Team to ensure that it is an ambitious range of aspirations for West Northamptonshire to be agreed with internal and external stakeholders, including public engagement. The Vision will be developed further and then taken for input, endorsement and commentary publicly. The narrative of the Vision focuses on the existing strengths of West Northamptonshire and ambitions that will make the local area even more extraordinary. The themes of the Place Vision are:

- *Extraordinary Places*
- *Extraordinary People*
- *Extraordinary Enterprises*
- *Extraordinary Destination*

Supporting Local Businesses

The Economic Growth and Inward Investment Team continue to support local employers to start, scale and succeed in West Northants. The Team were thrilled to celebrate the two West Northants winners of the 2023 King's Awards for Enterprise, both based in Daventry – *Viridian Nutrition Ltd* and *Brian James Trailers Ltd*.

On the topic of celebrating local employers, the Northamptonshire Chamber Business Awards were launched which include two categories sponsored by the EGII Team – *West Northants Business of the Year* and *Sustainable Business of the Year*. The winners of all of the awards will be announced in November. Last year's first ever winner of our *West Northants Business of the Year* category was won by *Pilkington Communications Ltd*.

Direct engagement with employers and business support providers is a top priority for the EGII Team to remain engaged with the local business community and champion our free support offer. This quarter the Team have directly responded to over 50 business enquiries and attended events such as the new *Northants International Trade Forum* and the launch of the *Vulcan Works*.

Colleagues have been involved with the development of the new We Are Northampton brand and engagement with the Northampton Forward Board to discuss capitalising on Northampton's strengths and how employers in Northampton and the wider West Northants can grow locally, delivering economic prosperity within the region. The EGII Team are also delivering the Northampton Social Enterprise Fund to support social enterprises and social activity within Northampton to benefit the local community.

Supporting Local Employment

The EGII Team are exploring the expansion of the West Northamptonshire Employment Support Service (WNESS) by working with colleagues such as Public Health, Community Engagement, Safety and Resettlement, Anti-Poverty and others, including the Local Area Partnerships. The services of the WNESS, delivered by external organisations completely free to all residents in the areas, are available to upskill residents and enable them to secure local, sustainable employment, The EGII Team also support employers through the WNESS to publicise vacancies and utilise the skilled local labour market for recruitment.

This quarter the EGII Team brought all of the partners of the WNESS together to ascertain opportunities, challenges and innovative ways of delivering support and reaching different demographics, particularly residents that are economically inactive and not accessing Universal Credit. The EGII Team will continue to develop the WNESS, utilising funds from S106 and UK Shared Prosperity Fund to have the greatest level of impact to the community within West Northamptonshire.

In partnership with the Careers Hub and Prospects, the EGII Team supported an event for those already or at risk of becoming Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), including parents and carers to showcase opportunities to upskill or secure employment, benefiting local residents at risk of becoming vulnerable. The team have also directly responded to over 30 direct enquiries for employment support, including CV support and starting new businesses within the area.

Supporting the Local Visitor Economy

The EGII Team have partnered with North Northamptonshire Council to develop a Tourism Strategy for the County to combine the strengths of the two areas and plan activities to increase visitor numbers and spend, as well as enhancing the reputation of Northamptonshire as a destination to visit. The strategy has been drafted following robust analysis, consultation and engagement from stakeholders and partners across the tourism industry and the County to ensure the Tourism Strategy is ambitious, innovative and capitalises on the existing strengths within the area whilst planning for largescale future

growth. Themes within the Tourism Strategy include sporting excellence, the natural offer, heritage and more. The Northamptonshire Strategy will be presented for adoption later this year, once the draft has been endorsed by the visitor economy industry and partners.

As well as planning the strategic direction for this industry, the two Councils have partnered to deliver a largescale marketing campaign for the Summer, Autumn and Winter to promote Northamptonshire as an attractive destination to visit from visitors far and wide. The campaign is being delivered by local organisation *Northamptonshire Surprise* and includes marketing resources across numerous platforms, targeted activities and showcases the vast offer of the region. Attractions and businesses have been engaged with to be involved in the campaign and work in partnership to benefit the industry and the region; already this scheme has been very successful in raising awareness of the local offer and altering the perception that there isn't an extraordinary offer already in this area.

Planning for Heritage Open Days, the EGII Team have been engaging heritage attractions across West Northamptonshire to participate in the initiative taking place in September. This has included ongoing marketing and engagement for tourism partners to collaborate and showcase the unique strength this area boasts in terms of heritage and culture. Information on this event can be found on the West Northants Heritage Open Days internet page.

Councillor Daniel Lister

Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth