

30th November 2023

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Hosting the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) Activities

We were successful in our expression of interest to take on hosting the SEMLEP Activities on behalf of the other Local Authorities in the South East Midlands, with services including the Growth Hub and the Careers Hub. This is a great opportunity and puts West Northamptonshire Council in the role of hosting regional activities and will deliver closer working relationships with the Hubs, as well as stronger liaison with the 5 neighbouring authorities.

We were extremely keen to secure this role, as the largest unitary authority in the area with the highest number of residents and employers. It was of particular importance to safeguard the SEMLEP functions and maintain their momentum in terms of delivering impactful initiatives benefiting the regional economy.

We are also involved with the wider Oxford-Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership activities and the Central Area Growth Board. Hosting the SEMLEP activities showcases our dedication to driving economic growth in this area ..

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF)

We have £5.4M of UKSPF and £1.3M of REPF Funding for building pride place and increasing life chances. Projects continue to progress, such as:

- The launch and award of numerous VCSE grants to West Northants organisations
- The appointment of a Community Developer leading on our partnership with British Cycling Ltd
- Dedicated business support through the “Build Your Business” scheme delivered by the BIPC
- Decarbonisation support through the “Towards a Net Zero West Northants” project delivered by the Sustainability Team
- Support for employers to offer apprenticeships, work experience and grow their workforce delivered by the South East Midlands Careers Hub
- Launch of the Vulcan Creatives scheme to enable potential entrepreneurs to establish dynamic, creative businesses in West Northants

Full details of live and upcoming initiatives can be found on our website – www.westnorthants.gov.uk/funding

External stakeholders and partners were engaged to hear about the progress to date and to input into future activities UKSPF can be utilised to deliver. This included input into two upcoming tender opportunities to manage and deliver funding for businesses across two important areas – a £325,000 Decarbonisation tender and a £325,000 Business Growth tender.

Both projects will include expert business advice as well as match-funded grants (£300,000 of grants additional to the tender values).

Ongoing work has taken place to inform the People & Skills funding of £1.5m for 2024/25 to upskill the local labour market, address economic inactivity and address the barrier that poor health can impact on employment. In partnership with Public Health, a workshop explored this funding and potentially future funding to consider how the funds can have valuable impact in line with existing resources in the area, Local Area Partnerships and the work of the Welcome Spaces and Customer Services hubs. It is intended that once a definitive list of needs and desired outcomes is compiled, a call out for projects to address these will be launched.

It is anticipated that capital grants through the REPF will be soon be launched to address two specific remits within eligible rural areas – Transportation & Rural Business Growth.

Working in partnership with colleagues in Community Safety, Engagement & Resettlement and Highways, the project is being finalised to align with the wider community grants framework and alignment with the Local Transport Plan. It is intended that grants will be offered to VCSE organisations, along with UKSPF funding, enabling organisations to offer transport options to address specific needs within South Northamptonshire and Daventry.

For the Rural Business Growth funding, the scheme will mirror the former LEADER funding to provide rural businesses with capital funding to realise their growth potential. The grants will be match-funded and businesses will be able to work with an external delivery partner to understand the process to secure the funding and utilise it to have the greatest level of benefit for their organisation.

Place Vision

The Vision has been presented at numerous internal and external stakeholder forums and meetings to date. It has been received extremely well and continues to be amended as more input is provided. Working closely with the Communications Team, the Economic Growth and Inward Investment Team are intending to deliver innovative engagement to source input and development of the Place Vision. This will include utilising different approaches to reach different audiences and will be implemented over the coming months. The Team are also exploring a variety of options to secure internal input from staff and Councillors which will be delivered in a phased approach to ensure the Place Vision is updated as input is provided and is a true reflection of a united vision for all.

As the Economic Growth & Inward Investment service continue to build upon this important document, it will become part of the strategy to attract inward investment into the area, as well as part of the story local people will tell when selling West Northamptonshire as a destination for all.

Supporting Local Businesses

The EGII Team partnered with SEMLEP's Growth Hub and the Careers Hub on Thursday, 7 September at the Northamptonshire Business Exhibition. They were inundated with businesses wanting to find out about the vast business support on offer as well as taking the opportunity to enter into a raffle to win a luxury hamper of local produce kindly donated by businesses in West Northamptonshire. The team received fantastic engagement from businesses wanting to donate items for their hamper allowing them to promote local suppliers, raise awareness of the local offer and create a marketing opportunity to shine a light on local shops and the area.

The winner of the hamper was Odette Mould, CEO of Harry's Rainbow (based in MK), they support children and young people in the Milton Keynes and surrounding areas, who have been bereaved of a parent or sibling. This event also provided the opportunity for Cllr Lister to speak to the businesses ahead of the Expo, informing them of our regeneration activities and upcoming funding opportunities.

The finalists for the Northamptonshire Chamber Business Awards were judged to select the winners, including for our two categories of "*West Northants Business of the Year*" and "*West Northants Sustainable Business of the Year*". Winners will be announced at an awards ceremony on 23 November, showcasing the best of Northamptonshire and providing an opportunity for the EGII Team to network and promote their free business support and upcoming funding.

Colleagues were invited to attend the exclusive 10 year celebration of MEPC running Silverstone Park at the Silverstone Museum. The event was a fantastic opportunity to network with stakeholders, partners and the occupiers of Silverstone Park. As a key partner, the EGII Team will continue to work with MEPC and promote Silverstone Park as a perfect location to invest and locate.

The EGII Team have made strong progress in building High Street revitalisation partnerships for Brackley and Towcester, between the town centre manager, High Street businesses, town councils and community organisations. Utilising S106 funding, this has meant that regular meetings are now being held to fully discuss and understand the key areas for improvements and how to raise awareness of all that our two market towns of Towcester and Brackley have to offer. Work will now focus on short-term actions and longer-term proposals for marketing the towns and providing focus on the town centres through events, activities and promotions. All with the aim of increasing footfall to support the many independent businesses and provide a vibrant town heart for the benefit of the wider communities.

The EGIIIT Team attended the WNSET (West Northamptonshire Social Enterprise Towns) Networking Event on 10th October at Delapre Abbey. The event provided an opportunity for local social enterprises to find out how to access the Northampton Social Enterprise Development Fund and to hear from the first grant recipients. The investment fund offers 2 types of investments – Start-Up and Build-it Up of between £1,000 - £5,000. The Social Investment 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 Northampton's diverse social enterprise sector.

The EGII Team continue to deliver activities to nurture business survival and realise business growth for all West Northants employers. The Team have been working closely with partners delivering initiatives such as the Federation of Small Businesses, the Universities of Northampton, Bedfordshire and Cranfield, BIPC, the Chamber of Commerce, Oxford Innovation and SEMLEP's Growth Hub. By working collaboratively, the ecosystem to enable employers to overcome barriers and develop sustainably within this area can be achieved. As the team continues to expand, working collaboratively to deliver impactful interventions to benefit local employers will be a priority.

Inward Investment

Attracting inward investment and supporting employers to expand and grow locally is a top priority for the EGII Team.

Tailored responses are provided for every inward investment enquiry, ensuring West Northamptonshire is showcased as the top investable opportunity. Recently the EGII Team have liaised with numerous employers looking to expand their existing presence within West Northamptonshire, as well as employers looking to relocate; this has included companies leading on decarbonisation, engineering and manufacturing.

Colleagues attended the “Future of the OxCam Region” Conference to ensure West Northamptonshire was recognised as an essential part of the Oxford-Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership and network with local contacts involved with realising the vast potential of this region.

As part of showcasing West Northamptonshire on a global map, the Team are strengthening relationships with international bodies and working particularly close with the Department for Business and Trade. Recently, the team engaged with a Director from Hauts-de-France to explore inward investment missions for West Northamptonshire and opportunities to collaborate, as well as import/export with the hauts-de-france region.

Supporting Local Employment

The EGII Team continue to deliver the multi-agency support service to enable residents to secure local, sustainable employment. Most recently, this has included expanding the West Northants Employment Support Service (WNESS) by hosting in-person sessions in Towcester Library every 2nd Wednesday of the month. This is a 6 month trial with sessions running until 14th February. The drop-in sessions are to help all local residents to access support, guidance and information to become employment ready, upskill and apply for local roles. This service is completely free and is being received extremely positively by the community. The in-person sessions are being led by the team alongside numerous employment support partners with an aim to help as many people as possible become employment ready and find the best job for them. Support includes job searching, updating CV's and cover letters, any training needs, volunteering, money advice and more.

As well as supporting the existing local labour market, the EGII Team are keen to deliver initiatives which support the future workforce. Working with the South East Midlands Careers Hub, EGII colleagues recently attended a Year 11 Mock Interview Morning at Wootton Park School. This was a valuable opportunity for learners to experience the interview process, ask questions and be inspired. The team are really keen to support the next generation and will continue to get involved in activities which inspire and inform the future workforce and the local career pathways.

Supporting the Local Visitor Economy

The Team led on managing Heritage Open Days, an annual showcase of local heritage and culture, celebrating our unique strengths in West Northants and inviting visitors to learn all. Feedback from local HOD surveys revealed that 74% of people felt the event made them feel prouder and more part of their local community while 87% said they learned something new about their local area from attending a Heritage Open Days event.

The next initiative to be championed to attract visitors and increase local footfall and spend will be Small Business Saturday on 2 December, in conjunction with Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Plans are being developed to inform local businesses of the support and opportunities presented by Small Business Saturday, such as free webinars, interviews and an interactive map for residents to find them.

The Team will also be working on marketing and engagement to promote for everyone to think and shop locally all year round and particularly in the run up to Christmas; this work is being supported by the Communications Team to achieve a dynamic and attractive campaign, utilising numerous social media platforms, video content and more.

Campaigns funded between West Northamptonshire Council and North Northamptonshire Council for Summer, Autumn and Winter with a clear call to action of “Visit Northamptonshire” continue to showcase this area. The digital campaign showcases local attractions promoting family fun days out and great experiences to have every Season across Northamptonshire. This activity is part of the plans for the future of working in partnership with North Northamptonshire Council to establish a public-private Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) that will lead on Tourism and the Visitor Economy for the County. This is a Visit England initiative and is being carefully explored to nurture the visitor economy, support local attractions and showcase the entire County as a destination to visit time and time again.

The final draft of the new Tourism Strategy is being worked on currently, having had extensive input from local stakeholders, attractions and businesses to inform over the last few months. With Visit England’s support, an Expression of Interest has been submitted for a Northamptonshire LVEP, setting out our intentions to explore this further once the strategy is live. The Team have been discussing the potential of this new LVEP with Visit England on a regular basis as well as meeting with existing LVEPs around the country as examples of best practice. It is intended the Tourism Strategy will be adopted in the new year.

BIPC

The Business and IP Centre Northamptonshire “Build Your Business” programme was officially launched at Brixworth Library on Wednesday 27th September. Councillor Daniel Lister, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth spoke about the wealth of opportunities and funding available in West Northamptonshire. James Elliott of BIPC Northamptonshire introduced the programme of support and Kate Coulson of local small business, Ena HR & Training spoke about her business journey and the support she’d received from BIPC Northamptonshire setting up her business. A key component of Build Your Business is the opportunity for aspiring local businesses under one year old to apply for a start-up grant of £2,000 to help towards business-associated costs. Businesses are invited to apply online for this financial boost, and successful applicants will not only receive this important funding, but also ongoing support from the experienced BIPC Northamptonshire team.

TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION & GROWTH

Market Walk

Plans for the conversion of the vacant former Market Walk shopping centre into a new leisure and foodhall destination continue to be progressed. Once complete, the space will host a series of independent food and drink traders, all with their own unique offer and feel, as well as a dedicated space for interactive games, and communal seating focused on a main stage for live music performances and entertainment.

Stack are preparing to submit the planning application at the end of November for its change of use with further design development and engagement with the councils planning and licensing departments taking place in recent weeks.

Greyfriars

Studio Egret West has been appointed by West Northamptonshire Council, via an open public tender process, to shape a bold and catalytic vision for 'Greyfriars' in Northampton's town centre.

This 14-acre site is the largest brownfield opportunity in West Northamptonshire. Since the demolition of the bus station, it has lain empty and derelict, severed from the heart of the town and Market Square by infrastructure, challenging level changes, and daunting passageways.

Studio Egret West will be lead architect, urban designer and landscape architect for the project with a wider team composed of Civic Engineers, Etude, Start Advisory and Craig White & Co.

Studio Egret West have led on large scale sustainable regeneration projects such as Mayfield in Manchester and Preston Barracks in Brighton.

The project is in its initial stages, as WNC seeks to work with experts to develop a masterplan and vision for the area which will outline how this can meet the needs of the local community and businesses. It is proposed that the initial outline plan will deliver a new high-quality homes, commercial uses, a new park, leisure facilities and a new coach interchange. A core element of the proposals is to improve connectivity within the surrounding area and provided enhanced walking, cycling and vehicle routes.

Engagement is planned with the public in November and December with a full consultation and showcase event planned for the Spring.

Abington Street Public Realm

West Northamptonshire Council is working in partnership with Kier Transportation to regenerate Abington Street and Fish Street in Northampton Town Centre.

As part of the project, Kier will carry out vital works to enhance and improve the appearance and paving of Abington Street and Fish Street through delivering new paving and seating, additional tree planting, enhanced landscaping, and the introduction of new lighting.

With investigatory works starting in September, and preparatory works set for November, once complete the project will positively revitalise one of the busiest commercial and pedestrian routes through the town's main shopping street.

Kier and WNC are liaising directly with businesses in the area to keep them up to date on the progress of works. As part of this, there will be a dedicated single point of contact for businesses throughout the project.

Vulcan Works Creative Hub

A £14 million hub for startup businesses in the creative industries and digital sectors has reached the final for two prestigious local business awards.

[Vulcan Works](#), which opened in Northampton in February, has been announced as a finalist in two categories at the [Northamptonshire Business Excellence Awards](#) – Land and Development Award and Innovation Award.

The awards are recognition of the efforts of the Vulcan Works team and West Northamptonshire Council, who not only part-funded the project but was instrumental in facilitating the development and appointed Oxford Innovation to manage the space.

The Land and Development Award acknowledges a construction project that has had a significant impact on the Northamptonshire community or economy. The Innovation Award recognises a business that has demonstrated originality and creativity through an innovation or idea, making significant contributions to an industry and society.

Vulcan works, a collaborative flexible working space, and Barclays have partnered to launch an Eagle Lab in Northampton.

The Barclays Eagle Lab aims to drive growth in the local economy by boosting the Northamptonshire eco system for start-up and young businesses, signposting them to a network of industry experts and mentors as well as growth programmes, events and workshops, and investors and funding streams.

The Lab will look to complement existing services offered by Vulcan Works' own Business Growth Manager, Darren Smith.

Barclays Eagle Labs' Eco System Manager, Owen Moran, will be based at Vulcan Works as part of a contract between the High Street bank and Oxford Innovation Space, which was appointed to manage Vulcan Works by West Northamptonshire Council.

Northampton Market Square

Works on the Market Square continue to progress at pace with the new paving now installed along part of the northern and eastern sections with work continuing in a clockwise fashion. Excavations and preparations in the central area have also been continuing with tree works and extensive ducting and housing for new electrical services taking place. Works for the water feature has commenced with the water holding tank being installed.

The manufacture of the market stalls is now 50% complete with these due to be finalised and delivered this winter with the lighting columns also due to be installed at a similar time.

35-45 Abington Street (Former BHS and M&S)

Essential work to remove asbestos in 35-39 Abington Street and 20-28 Wood Street and demolish the site ready for the development partner to come on board will move forward following cabinet approval.

WNC have been awarded a further £750k of external funding for the project from the brownfield land release fund to contribute towards the asbestos removal and the demolition of the buildings. This adds to the £9.7 million of government funding that has been secured through the Town Fund scheme towards the project which has funded the acquisition of the building, and the necessary preparation works.

Work to secure a development partner for the site is underway with the Expression of Interest stage now complete and the next stage of the procurement process commencing in November ahead of being able to announce our new development partner in the new year.

Daventry Masterplan

Architects and commercial agents have been appointed to develop a town centre masterplan for Daventry looking at projects that increase the vitality and improve footfall into the town, including improvements to public realm and greenery, links to the country park as well as the repurposing of vacant units and car parks.

There is early engagement planned in November with Members, businesses and the public to gain thoughts and feedback, a full consultation event will be planned for the New year.

Brackley Skatepark

Plans to deliver a new skatepark in Brackley are underway with contractors being engaged and site preparation and survey works taking place to finalise the designs.

24 Guildhall Road

Enabling works which focused on external areas were completed in September, this included with roof repairs and works to repair and paint the windows. The same principal contractor has been appointed to undertake the main works with mobilisation taking place and works commencing on this in October.

Works will now focus on the contemporary art gallery and the artist studios on the lower ground floors to allow NN Contemporary to move into the new space with the further areas on the upper floors concluding after this. The project is due to be complete in summer next year.

Four Waterside and Marefair

National regeneration developer, Cityheart has been announced as the preferred development partner to bring forward the Four Waterside and Marefair sites. Working in a joint venture partnership with West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) they'll deliver a transformational and ambitious scheme for the town centre.

Situated at the entrance of the town from Northampton's railway station, the Four Waterside and Marefair scheme is one of the largest brownfield developments in the county with two sites totaling five acres. Work is anticipated to start in 2025 to unlock this space, providing a new hotel, grade A office space for new and existing businesses, high-quality homes and improved paving and planting to elevate the area.

With nearly 20 years of experience, Cityheart has worked in partnership with councils across the country to rejuvenate towns and cities, including the £135 million Galleries town centre redevelopment in Wigan. This eight acre, highly sustainable mixed-use regeneration site will provide a new market and hotel, high-quality homes, leisure venues, co-working space and events space.

WNC has secured £1.5 million from the Towns Fund and £7 million from the Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone to help deliver the project which will contribute to the wider transformation across the town. This funding will enable the development to be brought forward and have a significant impact on the local economy with a projected £135 million gross development value.

The Towns Fund is part of the Government's plan for Levelling Up the UK economy and the Council has secured £24.9 million to invest into transforming Northampton's Town Centre.

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.

Multiply

Further work on has taken place to build momentum of the Multiply scheme, providing training and qualifications for West Northants adults aged 19+ in numeracy. A dedicated marketing company has been appointed to increase awareness and engagement of the full offer of Multiply, ensuring that the full community benefits. This will improve the programme's targeting of hard to reach learners and includes numerous activities including dedicated social media platforms for WNC Multiply. Adult Learning continue to be one of the key providers delivering courses for this programme and we expect to have additional providers appointed in quarters 3 and 4 to enhance and extend the offer.

Councillor Dan Lister

Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth