

Thursday 15th July, 2021

Acquisition of Avenue Campus

On 18 June WNC completed the purchase of the University of Northampton's Avenue Campus in St Georges Avenue, Northampton. The site has been purchased through the council's Housing Revenue Account as it is being acquired to increase the supply of affordable housing. WNC will be working closely with its housing arms length management organisation, Northampton Partnership Homes, to develop up to 170 new affordable homes on the site.

Restoration of Services

From 21 June, all of our council run libraries returned to their pre-covid opening hours. This increased capacity for customers to access those library services that we are able to deliver under current restrictions. Following Central Government announcements on 5th July, the Library Service Team are now working hard to finalise plans to re-open the service even further once restrictions are lifted further. The Communities Team are also working closely with our leisure operator partners to reopen our council-owned leisure centres as much as possible within a covid safe manner to support residents to improve both their physical and mental wellbeing.

Accommodation for people who are at risk of rough sleeping or have previously slept rough

In August 2020 Northampton Borough Council secured funding from Central Government through the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP). These monies have enabled the council's housing team, working in partnership with Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH), to purchase and refurbish fifteen 1-bedroom properties for rough sleepers. As at the end of June 2021, fifteen 1-bedroom flats across Northampton had been acquired and refurbished and customers had moved into all of the properties. These homes are being managed by NPH and the residents are being supported by a dedicated Tenancy Sustainment Officer. Taking into account the success of NSAP and a requirement for additional properties for rough sleepers, the Council has made a further funding application through the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme. A bid has been produced in collaboration between the council and Ministry for Homes, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG), Homes England and NPH, and submitted on 1 July (deadline for submission), subject to approval from Cabinet. The application is requesting capital funding towards the acquisition and refurbishment of a further ten 1-bedroom properties. In addition, MHCLG revenue funding is also being requested to fund a full-time tenancy sustainment officer to support the residents of the properties.

Beat the Street

Beat the Street is a community-wide programme which improves the health and wellbeing of entire towns and cities by getting people of all ages moving. Participants can pick up a Beat the Street card which contains radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology and tap them against sensors called 'Beat Boxes' located on lamp posts across the area. Players receive points for each box they tap and can even create or join teams which can receive prizes for tapping the most boxes; this motivates entire schools, community groups and businesses into

becoming more active. West Northamptonshire Council has been selected to receive Sport England funding to deliver Beat the Street in the Northampton area during 2021/22.

Northampton Museums

Northampton Museum & Art Gallery in Guildhall Road will reopen on 10th July having undergone an extensive £6.7m redevelopment programme. The museum has more than doubled in size, with the addition of a nine-metre-high glazed atrium extension, linking the original building to brand new galleries and activity space. The spectacular atrium includes a café and spacious outdoor terrace, which sits above the new Shoe Gallery, showcasing Northampton's internationally important shoe collection and the town's shoemaking heritage.

Three opening temporary exhibitions will feature alongside the permanent galleries at the Northampton Museum and Art Gallery. 'We Are Northampton' explores the town's heritage and character, through stories of notable residents, buildings, events, activities and clubs, while 'Challenging Perspectives' is an exhibition looking back at the life and work of notable and prolific artist Christopher Fiddes, who lives in the county. Finally, the 'Inspiration' exhibition examines the way artists look at the world around them and how this sparks their creative imagination.

The town's second museum in the grounds of historic Abington Park has been open since Saturday 22 May, with approved Covid-safe measures, including one-way systems, hand sanitising stations and social distancing.

Archives and Heritage Service

This Service is provided on a countywide basis for both West and North Northants. It looks after unique and irreplaceable resources that can reveal the history of our communities and the stories of those living and working in them over the past eight hundred years and more.

The Service has been doing an excellent job keeping its public service running during the pandemic, despite the fact that it is currently very short staffed. Researchers who are doing graduate and postgraduate studies, local history, family history and educational projects have been able to have their enquiries answered and research undertaken on their behalf throughout the lockdown period. On 1 June the service was pleased to be able to open its doors to the public once again, having been closed since December 2020.

Various precautions have been put in place to ensure that all staff and researchers are safe and that the archives themselves are not a potential means of the disease being spread inadvertently (as documents have to be quarantined after use). The re-opening has been very much welcomed by user groups including the Northamptonshire Family History Society and Heritage Forum, and individuals who have used the service have noted how safe they feel and how glad they are to be back. Those returning include the Service's volunteers who undertake indexing and other work to assist making archives more accessible. Over the years the volunteers have become friends and a support network for each other, so it has been positive for them to resume their roles.

Councillor Adam Brown

Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member Housing, Culture & Leisure