

21st March 2024

TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION & GROWTH

Abington Street Public Realm

The main construction works to redevelop Abington and Fish Street, Northampton started on Monday, 26 February.

West Northamptonshire Council is working with Kier Transportation to carry out vital works to enhance the appearance of Abington Street and Fish Street. Over the coming months they'll be installing new paving and seating, additional trees, feature lighting and planting to boost the appearance and setting of the area.

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.

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 works will be completed in winter 2024.

Northampton Market Square

Works on the Market Square continue to progress with works along the North and East side of the square now complete and visitors now able to the section connecting Abington Street to the Grosvenor Centre having opened in early March.

The cobbles used as part of the transformation of Northampton's historic market square have been retained from the previous paving where possible, and sympathetically restored to reuse as part of the regenerated space in banding strips running through the square.

Further progress has been made in February as the light columns for the site were installed and four of the permanent market stalls arrived and have been fitted. The remainder of the bespoke market stalls are due to arrive this month, which will be complemented by the semi-mature trees which will be planted.

The design, cladding and colours of the stalls compliment the surrounding rich heritage of Northampton's Market Square. These stalls are a bespoke design with unique features, designed specifically for the needs of the Northampton Market traders. They are made of heavy-duty steel frames with robust cladding, which provides a sustainable and robust product. They include automated shutters which provide customers with shelter when up and security for traders when closed; this high level of security was requested by traders, so they are able to securely leave their produce in the units.

As part of the works the contractor, Stepnell, have been engaging with businesses to add social value by upskilling our workforce and investing in small and medium businesses.

Ensuring West Northants captures social value for the community is something that the council is doing through all of our regeneration projects. This social value requirement means that investment from the Towns Fund not only enables us to deliver great projects such as the Market Square redevelopment, but some of this investment directly benefits communities across West Northants.

Delivering on these social value requirements has included partnering with schools to deliver engaging workshops, providing employment and placement opportunities as well as supporting local businesses to grow the local economy.

By delivering expert advice through workshops and webinars Stepnell developed expertise and upskilled the workforces of local businesses. This has provided the businesses with the knowledge to be able to better operate and compete as part of public and private sector supply chains.

To ensure that the benefits of investment in Northampton are felt across West Northants, Stepnell has committed to spending over £1.5 million with local small and medium businesses over the course of the Market Square project.

Old Black Lion

February saw the British Beer and Pub Association warning that as many as 750 pubs could close by this summer while drinkers in Northampton will welcome the news that a derelict historic inn is being brought back to life under the management of much-loved local brewer, Phipps NBC.

The Grade II Listed Old Black Lion on Marefair has been bought by West Northamptonshire Council and is being lovingly restored by the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) in a £3.5million project which will be at the heart of a local regeneration initiative. The Project is funded through a combination of sources including the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Towns Fund and West Northants Council.

When open later this year, the Old Black Lion will become the centrepiece of the 'Marefair Heritage Gateway' close to Northampton station. As well as refurbished bars, a new restaurant and sunny courtyard seating, the new facilities will provide a national base for the CCT and support more events in the neighbouring Grade I Listed St Peter's church which is in its care and has been kept open by local volunteers for nearly thirty years.

Greyfriars

The first stage of consultation was launched as part of the development of a masterplan for the Greyfriars area of Northampton Town Centre which includes the site of the former Greyfriars bus station, East and West Island, Belgrave House, Mayorhold Car Park, Victoria Street Car Park, the Corn Exchange and Emporium Way. This consultation ran from the 5th December through to the 7th January.

In order to reach the broadest audience possible, a number of engagement methods were utilised to communicate the consultation including leaflet drops, stakeholder events and

meetings, local press coverage, radio segments, billboards and social media adverts (Facebook, Instagram and Spotify)

The consultation received a very strong level of feedback with over 1,500 responses received and 548 of these opting to sign up for project updates as the work progresses.

The feedback from this first stage is now being incorporated into the next stage of designs ahead of further public engagement planned for the April when a draft masterplan for the area will be shown to the public.

Market Walk

Planning and licensing applications for the redevelopment of Market Walk have been made by the Stack with these now being considered by the relevant areas within the council.

Former Bus Depot, St James' Road

Having completed on the purchase of the Former Bus Depot site in early November the Council have now appointed architects to undertake design development for the site. This work includes careful consideration of factors such as flood risk, heritage and the surrounding uses and will lead to a vision for the site that will be finalised in late spring.

A bid into the Governments Brownfield Land Release Fund has been made for the site to help address issues with the remediation of the site ahead of the planned use for new housing on the site. An outcome on this application for funding is expected in late summer.

Daventry Masterplan

Engagement with local stakeholders including the Daventry Retail Forum and Daventry Town Council took place in November to help inform the direction for a new masterplan for Daventry Town Centre. The professional team have then been developing the proposals which will be shown to the public as part of a wide public consultation this spring.

This work will set out a range of areas where changes and improvements can be made to help Daventry meet the needs of the local population for many years to come and help tackle the continued threat from increased online and out of town shopping.

Through the local plan process we are also looking in detail at how both Brackley and Towcester will develop as towns building on opportunities for better connectivity and improvements into the town centres, services and businesses.

ADULT EDUCATION

We have had a successful start to the academic year with enrolments. Data from the start of the academic year (1st August 2023) through to 1st February 2024 indicates the total of actual learner starts as 3365 across both North and West Northamptonshire. This is a reduction of 609 (15%) from the same time in 2023. This is a planned reduction due to the removal of some courses delivered for leisure purposes only and is in line with the Adult Learning Service

strategic plan to increase courses that drive economic development. Of this figure 53% of learners are based in West Northamptonshire with the remaining 47% based in the North or other location. In addition to this figure 358 learners have had direct delivery of Multiply intervention by ALS across both North and West.

Following the work from the previous update on the FE Commissioners visit the service is now moving ahead with a formal transformation plan which will impact key areas including accommodation, structure, curriculum planning and data analysis. This transformation work over the coming months, moving the service into a financially viable position from the start of the 24/25 academic year. In addition, the transformation plan will aid the service in developing a more targeted curriculum offer placing personal and professional development at the heart of the offer demonstrating clear impact upon economic development.

Our new accredited courses started in January with 49 enrolments in the first 6 weeks of launch. The first cohort are already demonstrating achievement. This is a very positive step for the service and ensures that we are starting to meet the priority for the development of skills in areas of economic growth within the county. Other areas of celebration include the recent external moderation review by our new awarding organisation, NCFE, in which the service is recorded as low risk with positive feedback on delivery so far.

Multiply (Government Funded adult numeracy skills programme)

Overall, Multiply delivery for WNC demonstrates 507 substantive enrolments for the first three quarters of the financial year against a target of 859 (59% of target achieved). Target learners are slightly behind expectations due to poor performance by one provider, an action plan is in place and the provider is in intervention. ALS have overachieved targets offsetting some of the impact. Non-substantive provision is currently demonstrating 554 learners against a target of 400 giving a 139% delivery against target figure for the first 3 quarters, therefore we are projecting a significant over achievement in this area.

Florence and James Marketing and Learning and Skills Academy were awarded additional contracts to utilise FY2 allocation. This replaced Learning Curve who were awarded the contract for intervention 2 but could no longer deliver and relinquished the contract due to online delivery not being successful.

Website traffic has significantly increased with the activities of Florence and James which is leading to increased enrolments across all partners.

The focus for this year so far has been quality monitoring of all providers and performance monitoring of eVolve, mid-year review submitted and approved by the DfE, preparation for Audit and inputting enrolments for partners that don't have an MIS system.

ECONOMIC GROWTH & INWARD INVESTMENT

Service Restructure

We are dedicated to supporting local employers, attracting investment into the area and showcasing West Northants as a destination for everyone to live their best lives. For this reason, an intensive review of the service structure has been evaluated and a new structure has been established.

The new structure, which will include three sub-teams (Inward Investment & Business Growth, Visitor Economy & Tourism Strategy, Funding & Programme Delivery), will have clear focus areas to deliver a pro-active and dynamic service focused on driving inclusive growth for the local economy in an innovative and unique manner to achieve the best results for local businesses and residents. Recruitment is now live for new roles which will build on the existing strengths of the service to drive economic prosperity moving forward.

The team are now exploring the creation of a new Economic strategy to forward plan, forecast activities to increase life chances, better quality jobs and more visitors, investors and employers relocating to this area.

Supporting Local Businesses

As always, supporting local businesses is a top priority for the Economic Growth & Inward Investment Team, delivering activities to nurture new start-up's as well as enable growth in existing employers.

Activities this quarter are varied, including attending events and forums such as the Northamptonshire Logistics Forum to develop this vital industry to joining SEMLEP Growth Hub's Network & Learn to fly the West Northants Council flag and champion our business support services and funding.

A key success for local businesses was the Chamber of Commerce Business Awards, of which West Northamptonshire Council sponsored two categories, West Northamptonshire Business of the Year (won by Acorn Analytical Services based in Moulton Park) and West Northamptonshire Sustainability Award (won by Sedgebrook Hall based in Northampton). Out of the total sixteen categories, West Northants businesses were successful in nine overall.

The team has also been supporting the Mercedes-AMG Petronas F1 Team with their largescale expansion which has been awarded planning permission, increasing their workforce by an estimated 500 new employees. The Team have been meeting with Mercedes to discuss social value and local recruitment, ensuring maximum economic benefits from this exciting development. This has included working with the South East Midlands Careers Hub to explore how Mercedes can build on their extensive social activities to benefit as many local schools as possible and inspire the future workforce to consider careers in motorsport and engineering.

An essential part of driving economic growth and delivering impactful business support includes understanding the local market, the needs of local businesses and ensuring that we are engaging with the business community to steer initiatives. Therefore, the EGII Team have worked closely with SEMLEP on their biannual business survey for the region, whereby the Team secured additional questions and responses for West Northamptonshire. The insights of this survey will be very valuable when informing the future Economic strategy.

Inward Investment

A major success for the EGII Team was securing a high-profile female entrepreneurship event taking place in July 2024. Colleagues worked with the event organiser to move the event from Manchester where it has occurred for the last two years and instead host the conference in Northampton. The 2-day Female Founders Summit is described as a transformational, actionable, live experience that will leave a lasting impact on businesses. The EGII Team have sponsored the Summit by covering the costs for the conference to utilise venues across the area - the Royal & Derngate Theatre, the Northampton Filmhouse, the Northampton Museum, Vulcan Works, and Delapre Abbey. Keynote speakers currently include Mary Portas, Ife Thomas, Viviane Paxos & more to be announced soon. The conference will attract national and international visitors, therefore the EGII Team have worked with local hotel providers to offer special rates for delegates.

The Oxford-Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership are developing a compelling value proposition for the region to unlock international and private sector investment for the region's innovation-led economy, underpinned by environmentally sustainable and inclusive growth. Ekosgen will lead a team of consultants including Avison Young, Optimised Environments (OPEN) and Glass AI to deliver this project. The project will initiate a region-wide investment portfolio, creating a digital atlas of projects and strategic collaborations to match prospective investors to local investment opportunities. The Atlas will aid prospective investors' decision-making by acting as an interactive database that will provide the user with information about local strengths, opportunities and key existing assets. Colleagues in the EGII Team, along with the Regeneration Team, have explored potential options of sites in the area and ways to ensure that West Northamptonshire is recognised as a prime destination for investment within the Oxford-Cambridge region.

The EGII Team continue to engage with local developers and stakeholders to respond to inward investment enquiries and to identify opportunities to collaborate. For example, meeting with Cranfield University and the Open University to explore ways of partnership working for investors looking to relocate, to support business growth and to reference the skills strengths West Northants boasts at the centre of a robust ecosystem.

Supporting Local Employment

Members of the EGII Team have worked closely with Public Health colleagues and wider teams to inform a bid to Government's Work Well Partnership Programme (WWPP), which was led by the Integrated Care Board for Northamptonshire. The WWPP is a dedicated fund initially going out to circa 15 vanguard locations as a pilot to address the health barriers preventing residents to start, stay and succeed in work. Supporting local residents to overcome barriers, enabling them to live their best lives and secure local, sustainable employment is a top priority for the EGII Team. The outcome of the bid will be confirmed in April 2024.

The EGII Team continue to deliver the multi-agency support service to enable residents to secure local, sustainable employment. The West Northants Employment Support Service (WNESS) is continuing its in-person sessions in Towcester Library every 2nd Wednesday of the month). As well as the sessions, the Team have been working with their employment partners and hosting a number of workshops for local residents (including CV, interview skills & LinkedIn workshops).

Supporting the Local Visitor Economy

The EGII Team finalised the content of the Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy and had this adopted by Cabinet to progress activities to showcase the entire County as a destination to visit time and time again. The strategy sets out the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities to enhance and amplify the visitor economy across Northamptonshire. Also included is a draft action plan which is intended to be taken forward in partnership with private sector stakeholders as an accredited Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP), which is a public-private partnership to nurture and support tourism and the visitor economy, accredited by Visit England.

To maintain momentum, a partner workshop was held in December to discuss potential options of what an LVEP could look like for Northamptonshire and gauged appetite for a partnership approach working collaboratively. This has been received extremely positively and a largescale tourism event has been organised for 19 March to bring together industry and partners to celebrate English Tourism Week, to hear updates from Visit England, to back the new strategy and to work together moving forward.

In order to shine a spotlight on our local businesses, the EGII Team worked closely with the Communications Team for Small Business Saturday on 2 December, the national day to think local and support small businesses. The campaign included a diverse range of marketing initiatives and resources to promote all local businesses and the high streets and villages to residents and to visitors to utilise and support the local economy. Support was also provided to retailers and local businesses to grow, plan for 2024, engage more customers and increase footfall and spend locally. The EGII Team are dedicated to showcasing every local business to a local, regional, national and international audience in order to deliver economic prosperity for West Northants, whereby visitors stay and spend time and time again, spreading the word about everything that makes West Northants a must-visit destination.

Brackley & Towcester Town Centre Revitalisation

Throughout October to December the EGII Team has continued to focus on meeting and building partnerships with Town Councils, businesses, landlords and community organisations. These partnerships will allow greater communication and cooperation between different sectors of the community who all have a role to play in revitalising the town. It is expected that S106 Town Funds will be used to support Town Centre revitalisation in both towns, across a variety of measures that will tackle local priorities and initiatives. The team are currently preparing a Business Case for management of S106 Town Funds with the intention of developing a board/panel that can assess each application for Town Fund spend against the overall Town Centre Improvement Strategy.

Both Brackley and Towcester High Street Retailers groups, with the help of the EGII Team, put on successful Christmas family trails through the towns over the festive period, to encourage families to explore the town centres. It is planned to repeat these initiatives throughout this year.

West Northants Council have assisted with the move of Towcester Farmers' market to more central location at Sponne Arcade Car Park. Businesses are reporting higher footfall through the arcade on market days.

There are various initiatives which are currently been discussed and investigated, such as community hubs, marketing strategy, improvement to public realm, vacant property strategy High Street gift card/loyalty card schemes, national High Street campaigns e.g. Totally Locally, heritage trails and activities, town centre events and markets.

EGII Team have been working on an application to Cash Access UK for a permanent banking hub in Brackley. From 26th March, the last bank in Brackley (Lloyds) is closing its doors. An application is, therefore, underway for a permanent Brackley Banking Hub. The team have been asked by Brackley Town Council to help with the application and have so far arranged for Lloyds and HSBC to operate a temporary hub from Brackley Town Hall, one day a week. Barclays already operate a hub on alternate weeks from Sainsbury's car park, and the Team will be asking them to join the other banks in the Town Hall, encouraging greater footfall in the town centre. The Team have confirmed that they are also happy to assist with investigating options for a banking hub in Towcester.

The Team intend to engage further with the public through surveys to find out how local people want to use their High Streets and hope to source feedback on the planned initiatives. The Partnerships will also be starting to work together on a programme of events to improve town centre footfall.

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

As we pass the mid-way point of the three year UKSPF and the first 6 months of the two-year REPF, projects are being delivered across all three priorities area to have a lasting impact in West Northamptonshire. The priority areas are Communities & Place, Supporting Local Business and People & Skills.

Recent developments of funding delivery include:

- Allocation for Northamptonshire Partnership Homes to enable households to realise long-lasting benefits of energy efficiency measures, combating fuel poverty and climate change
- The launch of the rural transport scheme providing capital grants to address the challenges rural areas face in terms of connectivity
- The launch of the West Northants Rural Business Grants scheme, offering match-funded grants £2,500 - £100,000 to eligible rural businesses to grow, innovate and diversify. Following an expression of interest process, full applications have been submitted for a funding panel to review and award grants accordingly in the coming months
- Procurement completed to identify deliver partners for two business support & grant schemes – *Decarbonisation* and *Business Growth & Innovation*. Both schemes will provide dedicated, expert support for businesses across West Northants along with match-funded grants to implement innovations and growth plans. This scheme will launch imminently
- Internal and external engagement to inform the process to deliver the £1.58m of People & Skills funding looking to upskill the local labour market and create opportunities for local residents to secure local, sustainable employment. This scheme will launch in 2024/25
- The launch of the Vulcan Creatives scheme, an intensive scheme to enable local entrepreneurs to benefit from a vast range of support over a 6-month period, delivered by Oxford Innovation within Vulcan Works

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

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

In order to transition the SEMLEP activities over effectively and efficiently to West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) as the new host, we have worked diligently to establish processes to enable the smoothest procedure.

As of 1 April, WNC will host the regional functions for the South East Midlands area, working closely with the neighbouring authorities and the Growth Hub and Careers Hub. This will result in more opportunities for the Hubs and WNC to collaborate to work more strategically to deliver initiatives for West Northamptonshire businesses and beyond, resulting in greater levels of business survival and improved employability skills within the future workforce.

Utilising space in the dynamic Vulcan Works, the two Hubs will have a strong presence within West Northamptonshire, whilst continuing to deliver region-wide activities across all six local authorities in the South East Midlands.

Councillor Daniel Lister

Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth