



Report of Councillor Dan Lister Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration & Growth, Culture & Leisure

18th July 2024

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic Growth Strategy

Work is underway to produce an Economic Growth Strategy for West Northamptonshire, this strategy aims to build on our region's strengths and take advantage of opportunities as we endeavour to deliver inclusive, sustainable growth of the local economy.

The strategy is currently in the early stages of development, with the priorities, data/evidence base and alignment with wider policies being scoped out. Officers, Members and external stakeholders will be engaged to assist with the development of the strategy. This work will complement the development of the Corporate Plan and Place Vision and will support policies to be included into reg 19 of the new Local Plan.

The Team is simultaneously inputting into the new brand/identity of the Oxford-Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership as well as progressing with partner local authorities an updated economic strategy for the South East Midlands (former LEP area). This is ideal timing as the golden thread throughout the local, regional and wider area will be coherent and in alignment.

Supporting Local Businesses

Now that the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership functions have moved over to be hosted by West Northamptonshire Council, expanding the remit of the Economic Growth & Inward Investment Service, the Team are keen to collaborate as much and as often as possible. Whilst the SEM Teams continue to cover the full region, they are dedicated to working as closely with the six local authorities to increase impact and strengthen partnerships. A dedicated page outlining the free business support in West Northamptonshire has been created showcasing the full offer to local businesses, including the Growth Hub, the Careers Hub and the Business & Intellectual Property Centre. See here - <https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/free-business-support/business-support>

The team are continuing to ensure there is a consistent spotlight on local employers and for this reason have sponsored the NNBN Business Awards and the Chamber of Commerce Business Awards. Both categories are for the "West Northants Enterprise of the Year" which could be a business or social enterprise. Entries are currently open with the awards finals taking place later in the year. The benefits of this sponsorship include collaboration with local support providers, increased awareness of the quality of local organisations, improved reputation of WNC as a local authority that is dedicated to supporting businesses as well as driving pride in place and showcasing West Northants as a destination where businesses thrive.

Working with the large employers within the area is essential to steering inclusive growth within the area and the newly created Inward Investment & Business Growth team (IIBG) are dedicated to developing impactful relationships with all of the key employers. A recent example

of this was having a joint meeting with the Department of Business & Trade and the SEM Growth Hub with a top employer in the area who has recently secured growth funding.

The team is also focused on enhancing and expanding local growth sectors and have been in conversations to support advanced logistics, engineering/manufacturing and working with partners such as Silverstone and the Silverstone Technology Cluster to ensure there is a robust ecosystem for businesses to grow and develop.

Inward Investment

The IIBG team were pleased to welcome a Chinese delegation of investors to West Northants, promoting the strengths of the area, the opportunities for investment and the desire to work collaboratively to increase importing/exporting. The visit was extremely positive and the team will continue to support opportunities to attract inward investment.

On 26 April, the team were invited to attend the ground-breaking ceremony of Yusen Logistics new 1.2million sqft headquarters at SEGRO Northampton Gateway. The £280m investment will be their largest global facility and is designed to achieve a BREEAM Excellent rating which will reduce carbon to net zero during the construction. An array of PV panels will be installed across the entire roof space of the warehouse and EV charging units will also be made available onsite to power Yusen Logistics UK's all electric company car fleet. The IIBG Team will continue to work closely with SEGRO as their site is developed, working directly with the occupiers and supporting relocating businesses.

Colleagues attended the UK's Real Estate Investment & Infrastructure Forum (UKREiiF) in Leeds to promote West Northamptonshire as the perfect place to invest and do business. With over 13,000 attendees the 3-day conference was extremely busy and the Team made sure to have as many conversations as possible, exploring the approach of other areas to place-market and pulling all eyes on to this area. In addition, the Team also co-ordinated a panel event during the conference on *Fast Paced R&D and a Revolution in Skills* with speakers including Silverstone Circuit, Prologis and the Arc Universities Group. The session was extremely well received and focused on detailing the capabilities within this area and why investors will thrive by coming to West Northants.

The Team also partnered with the Oxford-Cambridge pan-Regional Partnership and supported their pavilion and the launch of their Investment Prospectus. The prospectus showcases the strengths of the region and world-leading capabilities, as well investible opportunities such as the Sustainable Heat Network for Northampton. The IIBG Team will continue to work with the PRP to drive inward investment and increase success within this area.

Supporting Local Employment

The EGII Team, in collaboration with the LIVE Team, Northampton East Local Area Partnership & employment partners, joined forces with Weston Favell Shopping Centre on Friday, 24th May, to launch the Weston Favell employability hub. Attendees had the opportunity to receive free support with job searching, CV writing, interview tips, and money advice. The event was a triumph, attracting hundreds of local residents. Given its remarkable success, the "inclusive" hub will now become a regular event, continuing to provide invaluable employment support to local residents.

Supporting the Local Visitor Economy

The Visitor Economy & Tourism Strategy (VETS) team has been driving activities to progress the establishment of a Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) for Northamptonshire and has achieved many successes this quarter.

Firstly, the team brought together businesses, attractions and stakeholders across the County for a largescale event to officially launch the Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy and unite the industry to collaborate on initiatives moving forward. The event was sold out with over 130 delegates attending and many more joining the virtual live stream. This event was followed by a press launch with North Northamptonshire Council at the Discover Northamptonshire Hub at Rushden Lakes to showcase Northamptonshire as a must-visit destination and inform everyone the intention to expand this important sector at pace. Both of these events were delivered during English Tourism Week and had the full backing of Visit England, whilst a marketing campaign was also delivered to promote the local strengths and promote Northamptonshire to residents and visitors far and wide.

To secure LVEP status for Northamptonshire, partners and stakeholders have come together to input into activities and guide the process to submit an application for an LVEP. This has been extremely positive and the intention is to secure accreditation this financial year to ensure Northamptonshire receives any support and funding which Government makes available.

In line with the concerted drive to boost tourism in West Northamptonshire and grow the visitor economy, the VETS Team have been working on the effective co-ordination and promotion of the D-Day 80th anniversary celebration and the Heritage Open Days event later in the year. The team are also supporting colleagues with the Let's Rock Festival and A Perfect Day music event, engaging with employers, supporting marketing and inputting to ensure that the events achieve maximum pride in place for the community and has lasting social and economic benefits.

Brackley & Towcester Town Centre Revitalisation

Community banking teams have been encouraged to come to Brackley town centre to provide banking services from the Town Hall/Piazza in lieu of bank branch closures.

Traders of Towcester Farmer's Market have reported that the move to Sponne Arcade car park has increased footfall for them as well as the shops in Sponne Shopping Centre, and the number of market stalls has grown.

Events will be key in helping to bring a feeling of vibrancy to the town centres – so along with regular trails the team are working on events in the town centres: Towcester 15th June Watermeadows fun family tour with actors – to help support awareness of businesses in this area of town. This is delivered with support from local businesses, the Women's Institute (WI) and the libraries team. The team are also working with businesses in Sponne Shopping Centre to put on summer activities and games in the arcade – again to encourage young people and their families into town during the summer holidays. The intention is to work with other local charities/organisations to provide these activities and raise awareness of their groups at the same time.

A lot of work is going into planning a suite of summer activities in Brackley, potentially under the banner of Brackley Fringe and arranging open mic music/entertainment outside the town hall on the Piazza, particularly during weekends in August. The team are also starting to work with Brackley Town Council staff and with businesses, co-ordinating and building on last year's first Christmas Market.

The team are also working on reviving historical trails for both towns, in conjunction with local History groups, to coincide with Heritage Open Days in September.

To inform future activities, two surveys are live for Towcester and Brackley which have already received a strong response rate. This will give indication of whether initiatives that have worked in other towns are appropriate for Brackley and Towcester and will help businesses to understand their customers and what they want from their High Streets.

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

As we now focus on the final year of UKSPF including a current focussing on people and skills, projects continue delivering our commitments as set out in the Investment Plan across all three priorities areas to have a lasting impact in West Northamptonshire and build pride in place and increase life changes.

The priority areas are Communities & Place, Supporting Local Business and People & Skills.

- Recent developments of funding delivery include: Approving nine grants to rural businesses with a value of £532,659.29 - delivering economic benefits to rural communities and regenerating the economy with further a grant panel to assess the 2nd cohort of Rural grants in May 2024.
- To address rural transport challenges and connectivity, two businesses approved and awarded funding to meet this rural need.
- Growth and Innovation tender awarded to University of Bedfordshire to provide dedicated, expert support for businesses across West Northants along with match-funded grants to implement innovations and growth plans.
- Net Zero West Northants supporting businesses with their decarbonisation plans, 1st grant panel met in May to award decarbonisations grants to local businesses.
- Vulcan Creatives, Lift Off Grants launched end of January 2024 with its first cohort of creatives set to benefit from the grant scheme.
- People and Skills finally launched mid-March 2024, a combination of community grants and contracts to deliver on the £1.58m Skills funding looking to upskill the local labour market and create opportunities for residents to secure local, sustainable employment. Plans are already in place to deliver on three focus areas; Skills for Work, to be delivered in partnership with Adult Learning Team, Skills in Communities and Skills for Growth, as informed by our stakeholders and partners, including organisations with expert knowledge of specific needs of local communities in West Northants.

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

TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION & GROWTH

Greyfriars

Greyfriars will regenerate the site of the former Greyfriars Bus Station, East and West Island, Belgrave House, the Corn Exchange, Mayorhold Car Park, Victoria Street Car Park and Emporium Way. The 14-acre area is set to amplify a forgotten piece of the town into a new neighbourhood which will encompass multi-generational living, provide dedicated green space and entertaining space, while improving connectivity to the town centre with improved transport

routes. The first stage of public engagement was successful with over 1,500 responses received and over 500 people signing up to receive updates as the project progresses.

A significant number of comments were received regarding the bus station and how the public would like to see improvements to this, following this engagement the masterplan exercise was expanded to include the Northgate Bus Station and proposals to increase capacity and experience for users.

Stage two of the engagement, with the refined proposals, launched in early May and ran up until 9th June. As part of this the website was refreshed (ampnorthampton.com) and there was a public exhibition in the Grosvenor Centre on the 1st June where the proposals were warmly received from the public.

On Tuesday 4th June, we held a showcase event of the Greyfriars vision with members from the Northampton Forward Board, local businesses, and other stakeholders including national developers and the British Footwear Association. The event included a presentation from the architects Studio Egret West and then followed by an opportunity to view the model and engagement boards to find out more about the plans to transform this part of the town.

Marefair Heritage Park

Planning permission has been granted to transform Chalk Lane Car Park in Marefair, Northampton into a new park celebrating the heritage of the former castle and local area was secured in May. The space will offer open green space for families and the local community to enjoy, with new trees, play areas, heritage timeline poles, community gardens, pathways and lighting for everyone to enjoy.

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

This project is being delivered with money from the Government's Towns Fund. Pre construction negotiations are currently underway with a contractor with works due to commence later in the summer.

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

Works to strip asbestos from the former BHS unit on Abington Street commenced in April with the works due to complete in late Autumn. Once these works have been completed the demolition of the site can commence, with detailed scopes currently being prepared ahead of the next phase of works which will commence in winter 2024/25.

Work to secure a development partner for the site is underway with the second stage of the process now underway and submission expected in July.

Vulcan Works Creative Hub

The Vulcan Works celebrated its first birthday in May with the centre now home to 33 office based businesses and a further 27 coworkers. The centre continues to host a wide range of

networking sessions, masterclasses, and workshops for the business community with the centre being recognised with a series of awards since opening.

Most recently the Vulcan Works, has won an award for the positive impact it has had on the county since opening its doors with The Gold Positive Impact Award, this was presented at the [Northamptonshire SME Awards](#) ceremony on Thursday 2nd May, with judges praising Vulcan Works for 'innovating and adapting their business to not only thrive but benefit the wider community'.

Despite only opening to the public 15 months ago, Vulcan Works has quickly established itself as a crucial part of the local business community.

It has supported young businesses and startups in the digital and creative industries, not just with office, workshop and coworking spaces, but through organising events and offering nurturing business support. It has also linked up with some trusted national partners, such as Barclays and Natwest, and local business support organisations including the South East Midlands Growth Hub and Careers Hub, The Marketing Meet Up, Northampton BID, NNBN and Digital Northants to offer practical business support, networking and workshops. In addition to this, the centre launched its own incubation programme for entrepreneurs in January called Vulcan Creatives which is a programme funded through the UKSPF.

Abington Street Public Realm

Works have continued along both Abington Street and Fish Street with many of the areas now seeing resurfacing commencing across the site. Excavations for tree pits, areas of new paving, and new ducting are now underway. 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.

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

Northampton Market Square is really taking shape with many of the key features now installed across the square. The stepped seating, bespoke market stalls, lighting columns and much of the paving has now been installed with the works now focusing on the North West Entrance to the Square and the new water feature.

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.

A Market Development Plan was taken to Cabinet on May 7th which sets out the future viability of Northampton's markets, setting out opportunities for further improvements, and plans to boost trade and support existing traders at the new-look site.

Expression of Interest for stalls closed on 17th May with these now being worked through with prospective traders.

The new square is expected to be complete and reopen from 20th September; planning is underway for a formal opening event and celebration in October.

Market Walk

Plans for the conversion of the vacant former Market Walk shopping centre into a new leisure and foodhall destination took some great steps forward over the past few months with both planning and Licensing applications now approved. continue to be progressed. Stack also saw the successful launch of their latest venue in Lincoln towards the end of May.

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.

Former Bus Depot, St James' Road

Initial designs for the St James Depot site have now been developed taking careful consideration of the constraints of the site which include flood risk, heritage and contamination of the site.

Work on the costs and viability is now being undertaken.

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 was expected in June but is now not expected until after r the General Election.

Daventry Masterplan

The consultation for the Daventry Town Centre Masterplan launched in early May and ran up until middle of June. Proposals have been published with a survey to gather views for residents, visitors and stakeholders. A session with Daventry Town Council and West Northants Daventry Councillor's was held as well with a day in Daventry Town Centre for the public.

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.

CULTURE & LEISURE

Culture and Arts

The service's Arts & Culture Newsletter continues to grow its subscriber base, up to 1341 in June.

The Cultural Compact has formed as a CIC and work is underway to create a Founding Board. This will ensure independence and ability to move on strategic conversations and funding bids. The Compact are revisiting the strategic framework with opportunity for partners to update their input.

On Sunday June 16th, James Arthur will headline the very first A Perfect Day festival, an exciting new family-friendly event which brings the very best pop music to Northampton with a local slant – including the Britain’s Got Talent finalists Northants Sings Out choir. The group made it all the way to last Sunday’s final of this year’s competition after wowing judges Simon Cowell, Amanda Holden, Alesha Dixon and Bruno Tonioli throughout the competition.

Their performance of Fatboy Slim’s ‘Praise You’ during last Sunday’s final raised the roof, prompting some amazing comments from the judges, including this from Amanda: “The energy, the harmony, the joy, the choreography, the fact that in your VT you said you are ordinary people doing ordinary jobs, trying to hold it down, and then you come up here and you do a performance like that was insane.”

Leisure

The Sport, Leisure and Culture Consultancy (SLC) have been approved as the consultants to support the council through the leisure centre contract tender process. A project board is being set up with inception meeting scheduled for end of July. SLC has vast experience working with Local Authorities and delivering specification for complex multi-site leisure contracts.

The Councils’ Playing Pitch Strategy and Sports Facilities Strategy have been completed by consultants Knight, Kavannah & Page (KKP). These strategies will inform the future development of sports facilities across West Northants and support WNC Planning Team. Officers are working through prioritising and testing feasibility of the strategy recommendations. Strategy documents are feeding into the Planning assessment work which completes in June. Following this, all strategies will be made available via the WNC website.

The service continues to work with National Governing Bodies of Sport to develop participation programmes and facilities. Officers are working closely with the County FA to improve grass roots football facilities, exploring opportunities for new build 3G pitches and for clubs to benefit from pitch improvement funding. Through the British Cycling community development partnership support has been given to Fernie Fields Sports Club to set up a Limitless disability cycling club. The RFU recently launched their national IMPACT programme which aims to increase the number of women & girls participating in rugby from 40,000 to 100,000 by 2027.

The WNC Active Lives Strategy working group continues to move the strategy through the development phases. An evidence base being designed through JSNA Physical Activity Factsheet. Monitoring & Evaluation being designed through an M&E working group which includes NSport and UoN with the UoN commissioned to deliver a research project. The strategy has reached the mapping the “engagement opportunities” phase which will explore how the strategy captures the good practice, the gaps in provision and opportunities to improve ways of working. This will be captured through a series of service to service conversations which explore how WNC services impact on active lives outcomes through business as usual. Since the last Cabinet report the WNC Active Lives Strategy working group has presented progress update on 15th April to Place Overview & Scrutiny and provided a written progress update on 14th May to the West Health & Wellbeing Board.

LIBRARIES & MUSEUMS

The Business and IP Centre Northamptonshire service has completed delivery of year one of the UKSPF funded Build Your Business programme. By the end of the first year the service

had helped 64 'potential entrepreneurs', provided non-financial support to 58 enterprises and awarded 19 x £2,000 grants to fledgling local businesses in West Northamptonshire.

The Museum service attended the Museum & Heritage Awards on Wednesday 14th May. Although they didn't win their category for Best Temporary or Touring Exhibition, their entry of Punk: Rage and Revolution did receive a Highly Commended award. These global awards celebrate the very best in the world of museums, galleries and cultural and heritage visitor attractions, so this is a fantastic accolade. This has been the most well-attended exhibition since the re-opening of the museum and was real example of museums engaging with local communities to co-produce exhibitions.

The second "Histories of Northamptonshire" series of exhibitions touring Daventry, Towcester, Brackley and Weston Favell Libraries was based on the life of local poet John Clare and ran in April and May. This was a collaborative exhibition with the Central Library providing some materials from John Clare's personal library. Following feedback from the first exhibition the cabinets have been adjusted to a height which makes it much easier for children to explore the content of future exhibitions. The third exhibition is now installed in the four localities and this marks the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings by commemorating the part Northamptonshire people played in the operation. This exhibition was developed in conjunction with the WNC Armed Forces Covenant Group, museum military volunteer group and with the participation of people and groups from various events and activities run to capture stories and develop engagement.

Visits to the museum remain higher than expected with 44,892 visits in April and May. There has been significant interest in the current temporary exhibition "Vivienne Westwood: a personal collection" which runs until Sunday 9th June. This will then make way for our exciting summer exhibition "Titanic: Honour & Glory", opening Saturday 22nd June. This major exhibition explores the legacy of the world's most famous ship and includes genuine artefacts from the Titanic and her sister ships and memorabilia from the 1997 James Cameron movie. Voted one of the top five exhibitions in the United Kingdom by The Times, "Titanic: Honour and Glory" is one not to miss.

Daventry Library are working with the Rural West Local Area Partnership and Daventry Volunteer Centre on a pilot to provide digital upskilling for Job Seekers. Regular sessions are being held in the computer suite at Daventry Library on Friday afternoons with volunteers coaching attendees with digital skills focusing on employability (C.V writing, job searching etc.)

Adult Learning

For the 2023/2024 academic year, the total delivery of Adult Learning Services (ALS) in West Northants reached 2,372, showing a slight decrease from the previous year by 157 learners. This anticipated decline aligns with the strategic shift towards a more balanced curriculum, emphasising accredited learning alongside health and wellbeing courses. Currently, 55% of delivery remains in West Northants, with the remaining 45% in North Northants.

Attendance and retention rates in West Northants have held steady, with 80% attendance and 95% retention, both exceeding national averages. Learner satisfaction remains high, with 97% rating their learning experience as 'Good' or 'Outstanding'.

New accredited courses, particularly in Health, Education, and Leadership, have been successfully introduced in response to the Local Skills Improvement Plan.

Looking ahead, the Adult Learning Service is poised to launch a program of courses funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) with a focus on employability and wellbeing objectives. With an allocation of £328,468 from WNC until March 2025, courses will encompass ESOL for employability, IT skills, volunteering, creative courses, deaf awareness and many others.

Multiply (Government Funded adult numeracy skills programme) Overall, Multiply delivery for WNC demonstrates 922 substantive enrolments towards the end of quarter four against a target of 859 (107.3% of target achieved). In the last quarter ALS, Learning Skills Academy and Diversiti have continued to overachieve their targets. Non-substantive provision is currently steady with 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 first quarter 2024/2025.

Outreach activities in the last quarter increased by 467 compared to 455 for the first three quarters and envisage a tremendous growth due to marketing and promotional campaign developed in partnership with Florence and James, increased website traffic, Radio Advertisement, out of home digital street hubs across West Northants has seen increased enrolment across all partners. With the additional contract with Learning and Skills Academy awarded towards end of last year, this has contributed an increase of 182 substantive learners. 380 learners participated in Multiply courses directly with the ALS for financial year 23/24. This far exceeded targeted recruitment with courses directly impacting the numeracy skills of key targeted groups.

Councillor Dan Lister

**Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration & Growth,
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