

**2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021**

### **Museums – Reporting Period 16 August – 15 October 2021**

The visitor figures for Northampton Museum & Art Gallery are remaining strong, with visitors running at 65% and Abington Park Museum at 55% of pre-Covid projections. This compares well to the wider sector which are still operating at between 13 – 40% of 2019 visitor numbers.

The museum service has started to introduce more in person events and activities as part of its public programme, with the Art History lecture series and Over 60's talk series both drawing good numbers. Transport Day returned to Abington Park Museum after a two year gap and drew major crowds, with 5,000 visitors attending the event and just under 3,000 passing through the museum.

The inaugural art gallery exhibition 'Chris Fiddes – Challenging Perspectives', a retrospective looking at the life and work of notable Northampton artist Chris Fiddes, ended its run, with just under 30,000 visitors passing through the exhibition. The exhibition was very well received and garnered a number of reviews in local and national news and arts publications. The next exhibition is the annual Northampton Town and County Arts Society exhibition, showcasing some of the finest artists working in the county.

The stunning atrium extension at Northampton Museum and Art Gallery that links the original museum to new galleries was the East Midlands regional winner in the Local Authority Building Control (LABC) Building Excellence Award for the 'best non-residential extension' category. The accolade was awarded to the project team, including Kettering-based firm GSS Architecture, Wildgoose Construction and West Northamptonshire Council. The project is now up for the National Building Excellence Awards, which will be announced in January 2022.

### **Supporting the Local Visitor Economy**

With the tourism and hospitality industry hardest hit in the pandemic, the Economy team have been working collaboratively with NNC and Northamptonshire Surprise to support the local visitor economy sector to bounce back, by raising the profile of the fantastic local attractions and businesses the area offers to residents and visitors and encourage staycations and tourism spend back into the area.

The Go Northamptonshire campaign was developed to deliver a focussed programme of marketing activity, including dedicated website pages and social media posts to target more overnight stays and increase visitor numbers to the area.  
[www.northamptonshiresurprise.com/go-northamptonshire](http://www.northamptonshiresurprise.com/go-northamptonshire)

### **Archives and Heritage Service**

The Archives and Heritage Service has been open to the public (by appointment only) since June. Average visitor numbers are steady, lower than before Covid-19 of necessity, but the overall customer feedback as to levels of service and staff helpfulness is all positive.

The core role of the service is to preserve archives for present and future generations for research, learning and enjoyment. This responsibility includes documents that may be 800

years old, as well as modern collections that are placed in the service's care every day. Since the service re-opened, many parish councils have deposited records with the service, for example. These will become important archives for the future – telling the story of local communities for future researchers. The service is also playing a key role by accepting in records from the various local authorities that no longer exist as the result of Local Government Reorganisation. Core records need to be selected and retained to enable the decisions and work of the predecessor councils to be accessible to residents now and into the future.

The key priority for the service currently is to address the precarious position in which it was left by the County Council, whereby budget reductions had left it unable to meet the basic standards of staffing expected by the national regulatory body. To serve both North and West Northamptonshire Councils effectively, the service's core staffing needs to be strengthened so that obligations on the authorities can be delivered, as well as offering good quality services for individuals and communities.

### **Home Adaptations / Disabled Facilities Grants**

The Team have started to see the increase in the number of enquiries and applications from residents across West Northamptonshire as the self-isolation and shielding response to Covid-19 are relaxed.

Year (April – Sept)	No of Enquiries	No of Grant Approvals
2019	182	48
2020	132	15
2021	168	43

The Team have responded by working collaboratively with Community Occupational Therapy to ensure that resources are available to respond to the increased demand. As referenced at the September 2021, Health and Wellbeing Board, additional Occupational Therapy resources have been brought into the team, and arrangements have been made with local providers to outsource the design and tendering of work if necessary.

The actual and committed spend for the provision of home adaptations for 2021/21 has already exceeded to total years spend for 2020/21. This remains within available budget spending and the allocation of funding from the Better Care Fund. Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, the teams have collectively supported the delivery of home adaptations to our communities of nearly £1m ensuring that residents that continue to live in their homes safely and with continued wellbeing.

The Team Managers have also been working closely with colleagues within the Health sector, and particularly the two acute hospitals, to ensure awareness of the Council's Housing Adaptations Policy, and the discretionary grant assistance to support clients being discharged from hospital with adaptation needs.

### **Private Sector Housing**

The Council continue to response to notifications of properties that are potentially Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO). Since April 2021, the team have completed investigations on 99 properties within the Northampton locality, with 62 of these premises being progressed to application for a HMO licence under the Housing Act 2004. However, over the same period the team have received notifications of 155 new property addresses considered to by HMOs for which investigations continue.

The Team continue to use all its available information to support the 'intelligence led' approach to Private Sector Housing, including HMO regulation, seeking to ensure that those properties that require licences are identified and brought into the regulatory regime.

### **BIPC service in libraries**

During November, the Library Service in the West launched 2 new Business and IP Centre Local spaces in Brixworth Library (2<sup>nd</sup> November) and Towcester Library (16<sup>th</sup> November). These are extensions of the main Business and IP Centre in the Central Library, Northampton.

We have been able to extend and enhance the offer through DCMS funding that the British Library BIPC network has attracted (around £700k over 3 years for the county). This has included employing two new fixed term business support advisors as well as creating and furnishing the two new local spaces at Brixworth and Towcester. The BIPC offers 1:1 support to entrepreneurs and those setting up as self-employed to get their SMEs up and running.

A range of workshops, webinars and events are offered throughout the year as well as opportunities for grant funding. The launch of the two new spaces will enable us to deliver these offers much more locally to customers across the West. The BIPC deliver a number of our KPIs and so far this year (Q1 & Q2) 19 new businesses have launched with some support from the service.

### **Northampton Racecourse Parkrun – Toilet Facilities**

Since April this year organisers of Northampton Racecourse Parkrun have experienced issues with access to the park's toilet facilities. This had resulted in the event organiser having to subsidise the cost for opening toilets from their own pocket. WNC's Sport & Leisure Team has stepped in to cover the costs to open these facilities December through to March. A longer-term solution will be set up in time for the new financial year. We are pleased to be able to support the Northampton Parkrun which attracts over 400 participants each week and is part of a national programme of weekly accessible 5k running events for all abilities and fitness levels.

## **Northampton Partnership Homes**

### **Housing Heroes Awards**

Following on from NPH's success in being awarded the UK Housing Heroes Awards in the category of "Team of the Year" (Local Authority/ALMO) NPH have been shortlisted (one of 7 finalists in the country) for UK Housing Homebuilder of the Year award. The winner will be announced on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> November. Being shortlisted for this accolade is a major achievement in its own right which recognises the aim to create a home and a sustainable community as opposed to simply building a house.

### **Working towards Carbon Neutral – Energy Efficient Homes**

NPH successfully bid for "Retrofit funding" under the government's demonstrator fund decarbonisation programme. The project to retrofit 150 homes in Northampton has been picked up by BBC Look East and was part of a BBC Special "Eco" programme which showcased WNC at the forefront of innovation in upgrading existing homes to make them energy efficient and working towards zero carbon. These homes are in the Kingsthorpe and Kingsley area are homes built in the early 20th century, which are expensive to heat and energy inefficient due to their construction type. WNC are one of only 16 Councils nationally who secured funding for this work and are consequently considered a trailblazer.

BEIS (the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy) have announced the launch of the Wave 1 SHDF (Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund) competition, which is the formal programme following the demonstrator pilot. The aim of this "Wave 1" of the SHDF differs from the innovation focus of the Demonstrator fund and seeks to retrofit a significantly greater number of properties than the Demonstrator by adopting a worst first, fabric first, lowest regrets approach. Wave 1 will offer scaled cost caps (depending on the starting conditions of the home) and will emphasise fabric improvements to ensure heat loss prevention measures are installed before other energy performance measures. On the back of the pilot project, using the lessons learnt staff from NPH and WNC have worked together to bid for grant funding as part of this programme, which if successful will see a further 429 homes upgraded. These homes are in Kingsthorpe, Kingsthorpe Hollow, Kingsley, Abington and St. James.

### **Improving Fire Safety**

NPH in partnership with Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) have developed and launched a Fire Safety App. This is believed to be sector leading and the first of its kind. This enables live recording of fire risk assessments and daily fire risk management. It has been supported and promoted by Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service and has been recognised as a "huge step forward" in fire protection.

In a drive to ensure sheltered housing is fitted with the latest and best safety devices, NPH are in the process of completing a project to install the latest smoke alarm technology devices in over 440 of the high-risk homes across Northampton. These smart devices enable NPH to monitor all aspects of the alarm's functionality remotely. Any issues are reported immediately and actioned round the clock. This means that vulnerable customers who are supported by lifelines are now even safer.

### **Reducing Repairs Backlog**

As a result of the Covid-19 lockdowns when only emergency works were completed NPH built up a large back log on non-essential repair works. This generated a request for over 2700 jobs, since the lifting of restrictions NPH have been working through this backlog which currently stands at 1619 jobs. To manage expectations all these works have been prioritised. Works are scheduled up to 2 months in advance with tenants with works being allocated to both NPH trades and external contractors with the aim to complete the backlog this financial year.

Councillor Adam Brown

**Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture & Leisure**