

Thursday 30th June 2022

The Library Service

The Libraries have been working with colleagues in the Ukrainian Resettlement team to set up some initial welcome sessions that are taking place in libraries. These are a chance for sponsors and Ukrainian arrivals to meet each other, WNC staff and partner organisations who can help and support them with their settlement process. Sessions have taken place or are scheduled at Brackley, Brixworth, Daventry, Duston, Northampton Central and Towcester libraries. Some of these have developed into regular drop-in support sessions at the library where access to wi-fi and free computer use along with the knowledge of library staff are proving invaluable to the attendees. Public Health colleagues are also working with us to timetable sessions for the mobile vaccination unit to visit these libraries at key times to ensure take up of vaccinations by Ukrainians.

During the week beginning 30th May, all the libraries held celebration events for the Platinum Jubilee, engaging with local communities and schools to produce artwork for display in the libraries. Activities ranged from theatre visits to tea parties and picnics, craft activities and quizzes. The libraries will host a touring digital exhibition of art produced as part of WNCs "Queen of Arts" project.

As part of a 3-year DCMS funded programme the Business and IP Centre Northamptonshire launched a new round of Kick Start grants for Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in their first year of trading. Successful applicants will receive a £2,000 grant for business expenses, a year's free membership with the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), and ongoing support from the BIPC Northamptonshire team. Shortlisted applicants will be required to attend a panel event, where they pitch their business to a group of local business experts. Details of the grants and a new set of case study videos from Northamptonshire SMEs who were successful in the previous round can be found at www.bipcnorthamptonshire.co.uk

Housing

Improving energy efficiency - LAD2

The LAD2 scheme is a government funded project to improve the energy efficiency of the homes of people on lower incomes. The scheme is managed and overseen by the Greater South East Energy Hub who sit within the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority but are funded by BEIS. BEIS provide the funding for the whole project. Working in conjunction with Northampton Partnership Homes (NP) we have been allocated £82,500 to upgrade 15 homes with air-source heat pumps (ASHP). These ASHP are being installed into homes that have also benefitted from the social housing decarbonisation fund (SHDFD).

Housing strategy

Work is well underway in the drafting of a new West Northants Housing strategy. The formal consultation on the draft themes and priorities closed on the 24th May. This followed some very productive workshops with internal teams, stakeholders and elected members. There were 594 responses in total, with 257 respondents completing the whole questionnaire, and 337

partial responses. We are currently collating these responses, along with the feedback received at the consultation events – stakeholder session and the Member session.

Homes for Ukraine – Accommodation Checks

The private sector housing teams across the three localities have continued to ensure that accommodation visits for the Homes for Ukraine resettlement scheme are undertaken. Government guidance supports an obligation on the Council to ensure that properties being volunteered to the scheme are safe. To date 300 properties have been volunteered to the scheme, and 222 of these have been visited and inspected. The majority of properties have been found to be suitable, with a small number having recommended improvements particularly around gas safety inspections and smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. However, a small number have been found to be unsuitable with serious safety defects or failure to comply with property licensing, the team are taking further action to resolve these defects and licensing requirements.

Improving Housing Standards and Enforcement Action

In March 2022, the team undertook ‘days of action’ in part of Semilong ward in Northampton. These ‘days of action’ involve a multi-agency response from the Council, partnered with Northamptonshire Police, Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue, and other Government Agencies to actively engage with residents to understand and take action to resolve housing, environmental, and behavioural concerns that impact their wellbeing. The team identified a range of issues for which continued responses from all partners continue. These ‘days of action’ form an integral part of the Council’s response to ensure the wellbeing of all residents and are targeted based on intelligence held by the Council and its partners.

Home Adaptations

At the West Northamptonshire Health and Wellbeing Board on the 7th June 2022, the Council’s Interim Head of Private Sector Housing, reported on the success of the Home Adaptations and Community Occupational Therapy Team in responding to residents home adaptation / disabled facilities grant requests of the previous year. The papers of the meeting are published, but the team should be congratulated on their achievements in addressing the backlog in cases from 2020/21, a year heavily impacted by the Covid pandemic. In summary, the Council committed to send £3.5m supporting 256 residents to continue to live at their home.

Sport & Active Lives

The Queens Baton Relay

Birmingham 2022 is hosting the 16th official Queen’s Baton Relay – a journey which brings together and celebrates communities across the Commonwealth during the build up to the Games.

On Sunday, 10 July, Northampton will officially welcome the Baton with a jam-packed schedule of family friendly events, stalls and the chance to take part in a variety of sporting games and activities.

The Relay will begin at Marefair outside Sol Central at **8am**, before travelling up Gold Street and on to George Row, then into St Giles Square before a photo shoot outside the Guildhall. The Baton will then travel down Guildhall Road, St Johns Street, Swan Street, across Victoria Promenade and on to Becketts Park, across the new pedestrian bridge and into the University of Northampton campus, ending at University Way at approximately **8.30am**.

Members of the public, schools and families are invited to get involved with the celebrations and embrace the arrival of the Baton, taking the opportunity to experience the buzz of Birmingham 2022 in our community. Join us for a morning of family friendly events at the UoN campus from 8am - midday.

Find out more, at: <https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/events/queens-baton-relay> .

The Sport & Active Lives team are leading the event planning working closely with WNC colleagues and external partners to ensure a safe and activity packed event. WNC Comms team will launch social media promotion this week. A comms assets pack has been written to provide event partners the tools to support promotion of the event.

Playing Pitch Strategy and Facilities Planning Model

The Playing Pitch Strategy provides a strategic document that will detail the existing resource of sports playing pitches across West Northamptonshire. The strategy will make recommendation for facility preservation, improvement and new development based upon consultation with key partners and taking into account planned housing developments and population growth over the next 20 years.

This work will help WNC increase its understanding of our local facilities and inform our new strategies and support the Planning Team with negotiations for developer contributions and decision making for new build facilities/facility improvements. The strategy will also help the Council work in partnership with Sport England and National Governing Bodies of Sport.

The Playing Pitch Strategy will take up to 18 months for completion. It is hoped this work can start in Autumn 2022.

Northampton Bike Park

Due for completion on 10th August. The Sport & Active Lives team are developing a Governance Board with Northamptonshire Sport (NSport). The Board will support the delivery of the bike park and ongoing operational arrangements and development of the facility. WNC will be represented on the Board along with key stakeholders NSport (as facility operators), the developing MTB Club, Delapre Golf Club. Additional stakeholders will be introduced as appropriate to support a successful facility.

Museums

April saw exhibition changeover in the art gallery and temporary exhibition gallery with the *Valhalla – Life and Death in Viking Britain* and *British Wildlife Photographer of the Year* finishing. Both saw strong visitor numbers with 22,0000 visitors to Valhalla and 18,500 to British Wildlife Photographer of the Year.

Two new exhibitions opened *Japan – A Floating World in Print*, a captivating display of Japanese prints from the Edo and Meiji masters wood block prints, and *May The Toys Be With You*, an exhibition of the UK's finest collection of vintage Star Wars toys and original cinema posters from 1977 – 1985. Both have been very popular with over 11,000 visitors to *May the Toys Be With You* in its opening month.

Overall visitor numbers remain strong against a weaker national picture. April visitor numbers met target and May numbers overachieved by 35%.

Events across both museums continue to perform well, with 800 attending the Viking Mania event at Abington Park Museum and numbers for the Art History lecture series, focusing on Japanese art, continuing to grow.

The importance and national significance of the shoe collection continues to shine with the Head of Bespoke shoemaking for Hermes, Paris and Lobb, Northampton visiting the shoe collection to talk about best practise when looking after a shoe archive. Links with local industry continue to develop with a group of Dr Marten apprentices visiting for a talk on the shoe collection using shoes from the collection.

Our volunteers continue to grow, adding much needed capacity and breadth of skills and knowledge to the museum service. Over the last period the newly established group of military enquiry volunteers have researched and answered over 50 enquiries ranging from uniform styles to 'can you tell me what my grandfather did in the Regiment'.

Donations continue to come in across all collections. These included 8 pairs of shoes designed and worn by fashion designer Joe Casely-Hayford OBE and street furniture including bollards, drain covers, cobbles, and a small market stall from the soon to be refurbished market square.

The Cultural Compact.

The second meeting of the Cultural Compact Project Development Group took place in April. The Project Development Group is a time-limited/ interim body created to undertake the development of the Northampton Cultural Compact Outline Forward Plan. The ambition is to use culture to encourage economic growth; contribute to making Northampton a better place; rebalance cultural opportunity; upskill creative citizens; encourage artists' entrepreneurship; build social cohesion using culture; adopt best practice in cultural democracy and diversity; and transform the town's cultural profile.

Supporting the Local Visitor Economy

The Economy Team continue to support the Visitor Company and work with partners to promote local attractions, events and reasons to enjoy everything West Northamptonshire has to offer.

This included a highly effective marketing campaign for English Tourism Week (18-27 May) in partnership with the Communications Team. The celebration of attractions and reasons to love West Northants included content across all of our social media platforms and the creation of a WNC TikTok to target all audiences and utilise popular mediums for engagement. It may have been English Tourism Week, but this was a innovative showcase of West Northamptonshire to the world.

Ongoing plans are taking place to prepare for Heritage Open Days in September 2022, with a variety of businesses and attractions already signed up to take part, delivering events, tours and more. All of these free activities are publicised on the WNC website and will be built on each year, as the Economy Team celebrates heritage and culture in West Northamptonshire.

Archives and Heritage Service

Good progress is being made in terms of ensuring the Guildhall Road (Northampton) building is fit for purpose, thanks to much-needed support from staff within the division. Proactive maintenance work is being undertaken for the first time for many years and plans are underway for some major updates in terms of the building's environmental monitoring systems. These will be vital in ensuring that the archives can be kept in the right temperature and humidity into the future.

A key role of the service is ensuring that it collects appropriate records for permanent preservation that reflect the life of communities in the past and present day. Among those currently being worked on are the records of St Andrew's Hospital, the former private "lunatic asylum", as it was referred to at the time, for the county. These records provide a unique insight into treatment of patients over time, as well as providing a potential wealth of information for family historians. Work to assess and list them is currently being done in situ at St Andrew's with the aim of bringing the collection to the service in the autumn. This is a major undertaking.

Other archives received into the service recently include those of a number of Parish Councils, electoral registers, various school records, records of Northamptonshire Yeomanry, and papers relating to the Revd Wathen Wigg credited with starting Northampton Rugby Football Club, now known as the Saints.

Councillor Adam Brown

Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture & Leisure