

**Report of Councillor Daniel Lister  
Cabinet Member for Economic  
Development, Town Centre  
Regeneration and Growth  
October 2022**

## **Economy Team Summary**

### **Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF)**

Launched in September by DLUC and DEFRA, the REPF succeeds EU funding from LEADER and the Growth Programme, which were part of the Rural Development Programme for England and supports the Government's Levelling Up White Paper and Future Farming Programme. REPF funds capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure and will help to improve productivity and strengthen the rural economy and rural communities.

The REPF is integrated into the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and is a rural top up to UKSPF allocations. The REPF objectives sit within the UKSPF investment priorities for:

- **Supporting Local Business** – support new and existing rural businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of a wider benefit for the local economy. This includes farm businesses looking to diversify income streams.
- **Community and Place** - support new and improved community infrastructure, providing essential community services and assets for local people and businesses to benefit the local economy.

WNC has been allocated £1,161,812 over 2 years, 2023-2025 and will submit a WNC Rural Fund Addendum by 30 November 2022 to access the funding.

The Council is keen to secure input into the REPF Addendum and will be engaging WNC Members, a wide range of local partners and stakeholders, to support the development of the addendum and facilitate a discussion of needs and opportunities around the relevant investment priorities for West Northamptonshire.

There will be 2 online focus groups (thematic workshops) held on:

- Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> November – 11am until 12.30 – Communities and Place
- Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> November – 2pm until 3.30pm – Supporting Local Business

### **Supporting Local Businesses**

The WNC Economy team have been recognised at the inaugural Federation of Small Business (FSB) Local Government Awards and were awarded the prestigious 'best in the region' award for its support to the local small business community and was among 250 councils from across England, and was successful in winning the 'All round Small Business Friendly' regional category.

The awards were aimed at celebrating and recognising those who had made the biggest impact on local SMEs during the Covid crisis and beyond.

At the final, WNC was named as the East Midlands regional champion with judges being impressed by the council's communication with and promotion of SMEs, as well as practical support such as webinars, 1-2-1 support and the development of the e-commerce and tourism app; [Explore West Northants](#).

The Economy team's activities includes, attracting new businesses to the area, businesses looking for new premises, accessing funding, support to grow a business, networking opportunities, social media posts and producing a monthly business e-newsletter of latest news, local initiatives and opportunities, events and information.

### **Supporting Local Employment**

The Economy Team continues to provide a variety of employment support activities, working with residents and employers to ensure local vacancies are filled by local people.

The Economy team recently the University of Northampton (UoN) Careers Expo to promote the wide range of free employment support the team delivers. The team work closely with the UoN and this event supported UoN students to develop their employability skills to ensure they succeed in today's competitive market. Following the expo the team have been responding to a number of requests for employment support and requests to register for the team's monthly employment e-newsletter, which promotes the latest jobs fairs, vacancies, training opportunities and signposts to a variety of employment support partners the team works with.

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

The Economy team have been working in partnership with Northamptonshire Surprise and North Northamptonshire Council and recently launched the 'Go Northamptonshire' Autumn/Winter 2022 marketing campaign, which aims to raise the profile of Northamptonshire, attract day and overnights visitors and showcase the county as an attractive destination for Autumn breaks.

The campaign features well-known attractions like Silverstone, Wicksteed Park and Adrenaline Alley, the area's fantastic hidden gems, family days out for under £10 along with Northamptonshire's many and varied family-friendly places to visit, stay and eat.

The Go Northamptonshire campaign is a part of a shared commitment to supporting the local visitor economy and shines a spotlight on the wonderful days out, events and experiences available to residents and visitors of Northamptonshire.

## **Major Projects and Regeneration Summary**

### **35 – 45 Abington Street**

The council have completed the purchase of the former BHS unit 35-39 Abington Street Unit in Northampton Town Centre. The building has been vacant and occupied by low quality tenants since BHS went into administration. This building with the purchase of the Marks and Spencers next door that will form a new development opportunity in the town that will bring forward new modern retail/leisure units on the ground floor with residential above.

The council will now be looking at removing the asbestos from the BHS unit and then seeking to demolish the buildings ahead of developer being appointed.

### **24 Guildhall Road**

Cabinet approved the next phase of works at the innovative 24 Guildhall Road redevelopment project at the cabinet meeting on Friday, 23 September. Forming part of Northampton's Cultural Quarter, 24 Guildhall Road is set to combine innovation, contemporary arts and enterprise under one roof. The ambitious project, led by a partnership between WNC and NN Contemporary Art, has reached a new milestone in its timeline as the next phase plans were unveiled to Cabinet members at WNC this Friday.

Once complete, 24 Guildhall Road will offer a new mixed occupancy cultural centre for Northampton, with the aim of encouraging an ethos of cultural and civic engagement in the town. As the anchor tenant, NN Contemporary Art will occupy the lower three floors, with the upper two floors to be made available to lease to cultural organisations and creative businesses on completion.

### **Vulcan Works**

Originally a Grade II listed ironworks factory, Vulcan Works off Guildhall Road, were built in 1875 for engineering company Mobbs & Co and was later turned into a leather warehouse. The multi-million-pound renovation has turned it into a hub for new and growing businesses with 69 lettable spaces in the heart of the town's Cultural Quarter and Waterside Enterprise Zone.

Oxford Innovation, who have over 30 years-experience in managing similar centres, have been appointed to manage the Vulcan Works and provide expert support and knowledge to drive business growth and regional success

Mobilisation work has commenced with the recruitment processes now live for the new centre staff and the marketing of the spaces in the centre due to start shortly. Businesses who have already expressed an interest are now being contacted to see if the space would be a good fit for them.

### **Four Waterside and Marefair**

A Cabinet report was taken on 13<sup>th</sup> September which approved the business cases for Four Waterside and Marefair development sites. The funding secured through the Towns Fund and Enterprise Zone Business Rates Uplift will unlock a cleared 4-acre site opposite Northampton train station, transforming the gateway into the town centre.

Four Waterside will deliver much needed residential, high quality Grade A office space and a four-star hotel. Marefair will see the delivery of high-quality residential scheme as well as a heritage park celebrating and showcasing the rich heritage and history of the former Northampton Castle and Middle-Aged Saxon Settlement.

The procurement process for a development partner will now commence before the end of the year.

### **Levelling Up Fund**

We are still awaiting an announcement from government over our submission into the Levelling Up Fund that was made on 28<sup>th</sup> July, the final four projects that were submitted were: Moulton College Development of Animal Welfare Training Facilities, Weston Favell Health and Wellbeing Hub, Maggie's Northampton Cancer Support Clinic and Delapre Abbey Stable Blocks and Wellbeing Hub, this is currently being considered by government with an announcement expected around the time of the autumn budget statement.

### **Northampton Market Square**

Tender submission for the transformation of Northampton Market Square have been received with these currently being evaluated ahead of an appointment being made later this month.

Work on Market Square – due to start in early 2023 – will include resurfacing using high quality natural materials, a major new water feature, additional trees, new public seating, redesigned market stalls and a new lighting scheme. Works are due to complete in Winter 2024.

Work to relocate the market traders while the main works are undertaken continues with a planning application for the temporary location on Commercial Street Car park submitted earlier this month.

### **Sponne Arcade Car Park**

Jenkins Wier were approved as the contractor to begin works to increase the size of Sponne Arcade in Towcester at Cabinet in June. The works will see the demolition of the former co-op building in Towcester which has become vacant it has lay dormant for many years and has been subject to vandalism, break-ins, other anti-social behaviour. The project will see increased car park capacity, which allows for greater accessibility for disabled and family parking, motorcycle bays, a bicycle shelter, as well as landscaped borders, improved lighting, CCTV and seating along the main pathway that joins Richmond Road with Watling Street, a vital pedestrian link for the town.

Works are due to start on site on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2022 and finish in Spring 2023.

Councillor Daniel Lister

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