

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

17 January 2023

CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR HOUSING, CULTURE & LEISURE – COUNCILLOR ADAM BROWN

Report Title	Active Quarter Northampton
Report Author	Peter Cox, Interim Head of Sport & Active Lives, peter.cox@westnorthants.gov.uk

Contributors/Checkers/Approvers

West MO	Catherine Whitehead	05/01/2023
West S151	Martin Henry	05/01/2023
Other Director/SME	Jane Carr, Director of Communities & Opportunities	16/12/2022
Head of Communications	Becky Hutson	03/01/23

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Outline of the Active Quarter

Appendix B – Outline of a place-based marketing approach

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report seeks West Northamptonshire Council’s (WNC) formal endorsement for establishing a pioneering place-shaping ‘Active Quarter’ in Northampton. The report defines:

- 1.1.1 How the Active Quarter can improve people's health and wellbeing through the transformational use of existing green, water and urban spaces, at the same time uniting communities, aiding regeneration and improving safety.
- 1.1.2 The Council's role as part of a collaborative partnership of key public, third sector and private sector stakeholders, who have come together around a shared ambition for the Active Quarter.
- 1.1.3 The alignment between the ambitions of the Active Quarter with the Council's key priorities, strategies, and national policy.
- 1.1.4 How contribution of £10k funding will accelerate the development of Active Quarter strategic plans and alignment towards delivering 'Live Your Best Life' shared ambitions of the Council and other local partners working together to improve health and wellbeing in West Northants.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The vision is to create an Active Quarter – an identifiable place supporting wellbeing and active lifestyles in Northampton focused on the south-west area of the town, encompassing Midsummer Meadow, Becketts Park, Delapré Abbey, Delapré Park, Golf Centre, Brackmills and the neighbouring Pocket Parks (see map in Appendix A).
- 2.2. It would bring multiple benefits for communities in terms of health, environment, safety, regeneration, culture, tourism, heritage and civic pride.
- 2.3. The Active Quarter will deliver an important contribution towards the 'Live Your Best Life' shared ambitions through leading collaborative working practices and creating an identifiable place for wellbeing and active lifestyles.
- 2.4. The Active Quarter ambition is to become a pioneer for community engagement, active travel, green social prescription, the custodianship of accessible green, water and urban spaces and as a place for sports participation and performance.
- 2.5. The Active Quarter is supported by a collaborative group of stakeholders. Early adopters were The University of Northampton, Delapré Abbey Preservation Trust and Northamptonshire Sport. Subsequent organisations to have joined include Brackmills Business Improvement District (BID), Public Health, British Cycling and elected member and officer representation from West Northamptonshire Council.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - 3.1.1 Note the content of this report.

- 3.1.2 Endorse continued support of working collaboratively with partners, towards achieving the Active Quarter ambitions outlined within the report.
- 3.1.3 Note the ‘in-principle’ funding contribution from Public Health of a single payment £10k to support evidenced-based research, develop the Active Quarter (AQ) communication and engagement strategy and align AQ ambitions with WNC’s strategic priorities.

4. Reason for Recommendations (NOTE: this section is mandatory and must be completed)

- 4.1 To update on the Active Quarter’s achievements and future ambitions.
- 4.2 To demonstrate the Council’s support of the Active Quarter opportunity to work with partners in the creation of a hub for wellbeing and ‘place’ for pioneering health and wellbeing interventions.
- 4.3 To update on the ‘in-principle’ investment from Public Health funding to support the work to achieve the ambitions.

5. Report Background

- 5.1. The proposed Active Quarter creates an identifiable place for active lifestyles and wellbeing in the heart of Northampton. It covers an area of over 900 hectares (Appendix A). This footprint of land contains extensive areas of green and blue space that has the potential to be reactivated, as it contains miles of footpaths and cycle routes, sport and leisure facilities, and spaces that could bring significant health, social, cultural and economic benefits. Of the 900 hectares, approximately 90% of the land is owned by West Northamptonshire Council.
- 5.2. A wide array of facilities are already located within the Active Quarter: Midsummer Meadow and Becketts Park; The River Nene; Delapré Abbey; Delapré 18 Hole Golf Course and Driving Range; Delapré Park; Northampton Bike Park; Becks Meadow and Barnes Meadow Nature Reserves; Radlands Skatepark; Nene Whitewater Centre; Northampton Rowing Club; Water-Skiing and Fishing Lake; Northampton Marina; Hardingstone and Brackmills Pocket Parks.
- 5.3. Early discussions around the concept of the Active Quarter began in August 2020 through an informal collaboration between a small group of interested parties including The University of Northampton (UON), Delapré Abbey Preservation Trust and Northamptonshire Sport. The initial ambition was to work together to consider how to bring to life a part of the town considered to be a hidden gem, through the prism of healthy active lifestyles and wellbeing.
- 5.4. Subsequently organisations to have joined this conversation include WNC and West Northants Public Health services, Brackmills BID and British Cycling.

- 5.5. The Active Quarter is regarded by all those involved as a shared ambition, one in which each stakeholder could deliver some of their own objectives themselves but that, by collaborating and working in partnership with others, including the community, so much more could be achieved. To that degree WNC's role is to enable, support and give permission.
- 5.6. The group recognised the value that urban greenspace can bring. The Parks Alliance estimates that for every £1 invested in urban green spaces, urban communities receive £7 in wellbeing benefits. This helped to set of guiding principles for the development of the Active Quarter:
- That partnership, **co-creation** and collaboration by key stakeholders was fundamental for the approach, a pioneering model for the transformation of place
 - That new activities and infrastructure should be **co-designed** with the community.
 - That **wellbeing and active lifestyles** should be at the heart of the approach
 - That it should seek to help **transform** an area of the town that has great potential to be a pioneering place while ensuring no negative impact on nature or biodiversity.
 - That **tackling inequalities** (health, socio-economic and educational) should drive planning and delivery.
 - That **measurement, evaluation and learning** should be threaded through future work.
 - That it would inform **blueprint** for a scaled-up approach and a wider roll-out to other parts of the county and country.
- 5.7 The ambitions below are framed around three over-lapping themes, a definition of which is given below:
- Place:** The core infrastructure within the area such as trails, tracks and rights of way; access roads/routes; cycling and walking; use of the lakes; visibility/ lines of sight; signage and waymarking; bridges and access points; benches/barbecues.
- People:** The way people use and access the place to engaged in activities, sessions, events and usage set up within the area. This includes organised and informal activities, special events, festivals and regular community engagement.
- Identity:** The communication, marketing, information and messaging required to create an identity, perception, sense of civic pride and shape a place.
- 5.8 A significant amount of progress has already been achieved already, as described below. Partners have the intention to develop a pipeline of potential future ambitions for the AQ. It is recognised that this phase of future development will involve engaging the wider community through consultation.

Place :**Active Quarter Achievements**

- Recently opened award-winning Northampton Bike Park
- Waymarked Trail with 3km routes around Delapré Abbey and wider park
- New outdoor table tennis tables on the University Waterside campus
- Wheelchair accessible angling platforms around the water-skiing lake
- Improved footpath sections to the south-east perimeter of the lake
- Improved footpath between Delapré Abbey and the lake
- Trail widening work on the Delapré Park – Waterside Campus access route.

People :**Active Quarter Achievements**

- A 'Thriving Communities' Social Prescribing project in partnership with the General Practice Alliance one of 36 delivered in the country.
- Vibrant programme of visitor experiences at Delapré Abbey (Winter Lights Trail, Family activity in the grounds, Classic Car Rally)
- A partnership between Public Health Northampton and UON in developing a Waterside as an 'Active Campus' for staff and students
- Annual 5km mass participation running event around Delapré Abbey and wider park area
- Regular Pilates, yoga and wellbeing sessions in the Delapré Abbey Coach House.
- Funding and commencement of 4yr PhD research project established at UON to lead community and stakeholder engagement work and measure progress.

Identity:**Active Quarter Achievements**

- Informal Stakeholder Group formed to increase communication and co-ordinate efforts
- An Emerging Talent Centre developing girls and women's football established in partnership with Northampton Town FC, Northampton FA and UON and hosted at Waterside
- £10K of funding awarded for the creation of an interactive 'Active Digital Map' of the AQ and wider surrounds
- Pilot work in partnership with UON Graphic Design students in the design of possible Active Quarter logo, brand and digital assets
- £10K Knowledge Exchange Funding grant application to develop a theory of change and research plan for the AQ to ensure we measure wellbeing outcomes and engage in research with the community so their voice can shape the AQ.

5.9 As outlined, a significant amount of progress has already been made utilising existing capacity within the partner organisations. All are committed to continuing focusing their efforts towards the ambitions of the AQ. The collaboration of partners offers not only more opportunities but also greater potential success of accessing external funding including government, national funding bodies, lottery and commercial streams.

The AQ can deliver on many future ambitions through collaborative working, for example:

- Redevelopment of Delapré Abbey 19th Century Stable Block into a Wellbeing Hub. Development stage funding secured Summer 2022.
- Delivery of legacy programmes and community engagement providing added value to the council's ambition to become a recognised host for major sporting and cultural events.
- Working in partnership with Northamptonshire Community Foundation to establish an Active Quarter Fund that local groups within the Active Quarter area can bid into to support local projects that promote activity, wellbeing and connecting communities.

5.10 However, to accelerate the opportunity presented by the AQ some dedicated capacity is required to:

- Develop a suite of research that provides the AQ and partners with evidence base intelligence
- Drive engagement and co-design with the local community
- Develop and deliver a communication and place-based marketing strategy for the AQ that creates a clear identity, raises its profile and results in mass community engagement and participation (Appendix B).
- Align the AQ with the emerging Integrated Care System, Health & Wellbeing Forums and Local Area Partnerships.
- Align the AQ with West Northants Council strategic plans including, but not limited to, Sport and Leisure, Community Safety and Community Engagement, Regeneration, Economic Growth, Parks and Open Spaces, Highways, to ensure the best outcomes for West Northants.

5.11 In recognition of the contributing role the Active Quarter plays towards delivery of the below-mentioned strategies including the 'Live Your Best Life' ambitions, Public Health has, in principle, earmarked a £10k sum to achieve this reports recommendation 3.1.3. An application to PH funding will be required for assessment prior to confirmation of funding.

5.12 £10k PH funding will contribute as match funding towards unlocking capacity from UoN for 0.6 FTE place-based marketing specialist and a 1 FTE graduate intern who has a digital content creation skill set. Both of these posts are to be managed by UON on behalf of the Active Quarter.

5.13 By endorsing the Active Quarter ambition as per recommendation 3.1.2 WNC will allocate officer time (Interim Head of Sport & Active Lives) to support the AQ. The role of the WNC officer support will be to attend AQ meetings, to align AQ ambitions with WNC strategic plans,

champion the AQ as a pioneer location for projects and resources, feedback to WNC colleagues bringing in WNC expertise to the AQ group as required.

Strategic Links:

- 5.14 It is well evidenced that accessible, high quality, safe, open space supports the improved health of our population, the vibrancy of our place, the connectedness of our communities and regional economic regeneration and growth.
- 5.15 WNC has outlined in its Corporate Plan and Strategy Priority that it can only achieve its vision using partnerships and collaboration within our communities and with public and private partners. The Active Quarter will help WNC achieve the challenges of its six corporate priorities:
- Green and Clean (Create vibrant towns and villages, high quality parks and accessible green space for all)
 - Economic Development (Building on our rich heritage and increase visitors to our attractions)
 - Improve Life Chances (Increasing aspirations for young people and reducing hospital stays)
 - Connected Communities (improved transport and connectivity with emphasis on low carbon active travel)
 - Thriving Villages and Towns (Regeneration of core town centres and less antisocial behaviour)
 - Robust resource management (Financial prudence and financial probity)
- 5.16 In addition, the Active Quarter supports the delivery of the West Northamptonshire 'Live Your Best Life' shared ambitions to be achieved through the Integrated Care System (ICS) for the population to have:
- The best start in life
 - Access to the best available education and learning
 - Opportunity to be fit, well and independent
 - Employment that keeps them and their families out of poverty
 - Good housing in places which are clean and green
 - Safety in their homes and when out and about
 - Feel connected to their families and friends
 - The chance for a fresh start when things go wrong
 - Access to health and social care when they need it
 - To be accepted and valued simply for who they are.
- 5.17 The Integrated Care System has health inequalities front and centre of its approach. As part of this, at a neighbourhood level, WNC, alongside Health and Wellbeing Board partners, is developing Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) tackling the wider determinants of health at a community level, moving decision making closer to local people and local needs. The Active Quarter is a clear asset for the local LAP in its efforts to tackle inequalities.

- 5.18 WNC's Anti-Poverty Strategy commitment is to build resilient and supportive communities through investment in services that support health and social wellbeing, working in partnership with communities to develop local assets and build community resource.
- 5.19 Sport England's new 10 year 'Uniting the Movement' strategy focuses on the physical activity inequalities that prevail throughout society and makes having an 'Active Environment' as one of five Big Issues to solve by connecting communities, connecting with health and wellbeing and the provision of active environments.
- 5.20 The University of Northampton's ChangeMaker programme has Challenge #2 to "Make Northamptonshire the leading county in the UK for Health and Wellbeing".
- 5.21 Northamptonshire Sport's draft physical activity strategy for Northamptonshire (working title - 'Let's Move Together') details Active Environments are one of its six Key Enablers in helping people to lead healthy active lifestyles and goes on to prioritise the importance of activating the use of green and blue space. Delapre Abbey's new strategic plan places connecting people to improved wellbeing and environment within its priorities over the next 5 years, and the Master Plan for the next 15 years supports the Active Quarter vision.
- 5.22 National Lottery Heritage Fund evidenced the benefits of heritage, green space through their "Space to Thrive" report in 2020, delivering substantial funding streams to support this through the National Future Parks Accelerator programme, which has demonstrated the role green spaces can play in acting as drivers for public health and wellbeing improvement:
- Activators of environmental protection and climate change
 - Incubators for system change programmes
 - Green spaces as assets for change rather than liabilities
- 5.23 The AQ also supports the national policies of Heritage England, Department for Transport, Active Travel England and the Forestry Commission.

6. Issues and Choices

- 6.1. The choices available to the Council are as follows.
- 6.2. Option 1: Not to endorse the ambitions of the Active Quarter. This would remove the Council's support of an opportunity to create a pioneering place in the heart of an urban community that will champion community health and wellbeing. A further knock-on would be the loss of an opportunity to lever in significant amounts of external funding into West Northamptonshire. As an example, over £800,000 of investment has already been levered in.
- 6.3. Option 2: Approve the Council's support through endorsement of the report. This will demonstrate the Council's willingness to work in partnership with the Active Quarter. Officers

will work with the Active Quarter to strategically align the ambitions with WNC priorities for a collaborative approach that will champion community health and wellbeing.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources and Financial

7.1.1. Beyond recommendation 3.1.3 the approval of this report does not incur any new revenue or capital liabilities for the authority.

7.1.2. To turn some of the ambitions into reality could require the allocation of officer capacity as and when opportunities present themselves. It is considered that this commitment would not be excessive, and any contribution would have an appropriate return on investment. For example, delivering the Northampton Bike Park took officer support from the Community Development Team, Property & Assets Team, Regeneration Team, Sport & Active Lives Team and Legal Services, working alongside the capacity provided by other stakeholder organisations. This development has been an unbridled success.

7.2. Legal

7.2.1 There are no legal implications that would arise from the decision to approve the recommendations (3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.3).

7.3. Risk

7.3.1 There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

7.4. Consultation

7.4.1 To this point, there has been extensive engagement and consultation that has been linked primarily to existing schemes such as the Bike Park and the Green Social Prescribing project. Other examples include;

- Walk and talk interviews with park users to understand why they visit Delapré and the perceived impact on their wellbeing
- Observation of Delapré park footfall on the walking routes and the demographics of park users
- Public consultation on the delivery preferences for a cycling and walking hub at Delapré - unguided rides, bike hire, wayfinding
- Public consultation on wayfinding in parks to understand community perceptions of signage and what information signs need to include
- Development of park monitoring methods to identify what communities do and do not use parks.

- Development of an engagement survey to identify who and who does not use the AQ and reasons why, allowing for workshops about the themes identified in the survey
- Video recording of cycling and walking routes within Brackmills to act as a form of Google Street View so people can see where these off road routes go and what they look like
- Auditing Brackmills' walking and cycling routes for accessibility standard
- Developing a theory of change and research strategy to map how this can lead to improved population wellbeing and where community voice needs to be heard to inform decisions

7.4.2 In addition, co-design and collaboration with key regional stakeholders and members of the community is currently underway through PhD research at the University. One of the key principles behind the Active Quarter is community consultation as it will be the foundation of all future developments.

7.5. **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

There has been no specific consideration by overview and scrutiny in relation to this report.

7.6. **Climate Impact**

7.6.1 As described in the main body of the report, the impact on our climate is one of the key drivers behind the Active Quarter. Through the protection and enhancement of green open space, improved air quality, as a consequence of an increase in active travel options, volunteer groups helping to conserve and safeguard wildlife and biodiversity.

7.7. **Community Impact**

7.7.1. As outlined in section 5, helping to tackle some of the inequalities that prevail across the population is one of the key 'design principles' behind the Active Quarter.

7.7.2. Each workstream will base its approach on community insight, consultation and co-design. This will lead to delivery that is shaped around community need and that builds capacity within the communities themselves to deliver.

7.8. **Communications**

7.8.1. As outlined, 'Identity' is one of the key workstreams of the Active Quarter. Creating a name and 'brand' that makes sense to the public will be an early goal. An identity that stakeholders can rally around to work collaboratively in order to enhance the quality of our urban greenspace be that through, consultation, research, external funding applications, community project support funding, community activities, inclusive physical infrastructure improvements. WNC will work with and support partners to inform and engage communities about the benefits of the Active Quarter and promote the objectives and outcomes moving forward.

8. Background Papers

- 8.1. See Appendices A; outline of the Active Quarter
- 8.2. See Appendix B; outline of a place-based marketing approach