



Cabinet Member Report for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning

Northampton Borough Council

2nd March 2015

Regeneration

The economic and physical regeneration of Northampton was one of this Administration's key priorities on taking control of the Borough Council in 2011. All of the projects below have benefitted the residents of Northampton by generating inward investment, improving skills, modernising transportation links, creating more incentives for people to visit and generally supporting business in our town to create jobs and a thriving local economy.

Project Angel

Plans were approved in May 2014 to transform derelict land in the heart of Northampton into a new iconic headquarters and office building for Northamptonshire County Council, saving tax payers millions of pounds and generating a massive cash injection to the town centre economy. The building is due to open in autumn 2016 and bring 2,000 workers back into the town centre and the sod cutting ceremony took place on 10th February.

University of Northampton

In 2012, the University of Northampton announced plans to build a new single-site campus in the Enterprise Zone to capitalise on the links with research and innovation in technology. Plans were approved in July 2014 and the new campus is due to open in 2018.

Work commenced in December 2013 on a new Innovation Centre opposite the Railway Station which will provide premises for up to 60 small and start-up businesses and enhance the Enterprise Zone offer for the town. The Innovation Centre will open this spring.

In March 2014 the new Halls of Residence opened at St John's bringing 464 students to live in the town centre and making Northampton a true University town

Sixfields

The Administration worked with Northampton Town Football Club to facilitate the redevelopment of Sixfields Stadium and the surrounding area with a £12 million loan deal which was announced in July 2013. The planning application was agreed in October 2013 and work on the new Stadium started in June 2014. A further planning application for 255 new homes, a 100 bed hotel and retail units was agreed in December 2014 and the development work will be underway soon.

In September 2013, a new deal was announced by the Council working with Moulton College and the Rugby and Northampton Athletics Club to secure a new home for the town's athletics club due to the redevelopment at Sixfields. The deal sees the club move to Moulton College's campus to enjoy all the benefits of state of the art facilities to support the athletes train and compete. The new athletics track planning application was agreed in October 2014 by Daventry District Council and the sod cutting ceremony took place on 21st January.

Franklin's Gardens

A £5 million loan to the Rugby Club was agreed in July 2013 and plans for the extension of Franklin's Gardens were approved in January 2014. Work to expand the North Stand, to be known as the Barwell Stand, will take place later this year during the summer and will expand capacity to 15,500.

Church's Shoes

The Council supported Church's Shoes to enable the expansion of their factory in St James. The Council worked closely with the Homes & Communities Agency and private landowners to assemble a 4.5-acre site adjacent to the company's headquarters and allow Church's Shoes to move forward with the new facility which will create 140 new skilled jobs at the heart of the Enterprise Zone.

Carlsberg

In January 2012, Carlsberg announced the £20 million extension of its bottling plant, which was officially opened in March 2013 and created 30 new jobs.

Grosvenor Centre

It was disappointing that Legal & General did not take forward plans to expand the Grosvenor Centre so this Administration terminated the Council's agreement with them in July 2014 to allow new proposals for the Greyfriars site to proceed. The closure of House of Fraser was a big loss to the Centre, but the Administration welcomed the investment by Legal & General in refurbishing the current centre with new toilets, the refurbishment of Boots plus the opening of the new Next and Primark stores.

Greyfriars Demolition

Work to demolish Greyfriars bus station began in March 2014 after the opening of the new North Gate Bus Station. The site was secured and fenced while a detailed demolition and site clearance programme took place. The physical demolition of the building will take place on 15th March.

North Gate Bus Station

The new North Gate Bus Station opened in March 2014. The project was completed on time and on budget, and provides a facility to give visitors arriving by bus a suitable welcome to our town.

Castle Railway Station

The new Northampton Castle Railway Station began operation on 12th January 2014 with a visit by the Transport Secretary. Through effective lobbying by the Leader and Brian Binley MP, £10 million of Government funding was secured towards the £20 million redevelopment of Northampton Castle Railway Station to create an impressive new gateway to the town and the Enterprise Zone. Other partners, including Network Rail and Northamptonshire County Council, funded the remainder of the development costs.

Phase two of the new facility is currently underway and will see the demolition of the old station buildings and construction of a new multi-storey car park, making way for development of the rest of the station site. The new car park will have at least 1,300 spaces, around 350 more than are currently available, and there will also be a lift and bridge, offering passengers direct access to the ticket floor of the station. Once this is complete, the old car park will be removed ready for start on phase three, which will see construction of commercial and light industrial properties.

Heritage Gateway

The Administration is working with Northamptonshire County Council on long-term proposals to develop Marefair as an historic gateway to the town centre. The improvements would celebrate Northampton's medieval heritage, including its former castle and tell the story of Northampton's historic past.

Cosworth

The Council helped world famous high performance technology specialists Cosworth to expand their existing operations to increase their engine assembly and manufacturing capacity. The new £12 million Advanced Manufacturing Centre is the first of its kind in the UK and will manufacture components and assemble some of the world's most advanced engines to global automotive manufacturers. The new state-of-the-art 38,000ft² facility represents the next phase in a period of growth and development for Cosworth with support and backing from the Borough Council, South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership and the Department for Communities and Local Government. The project has created 70 new jobs and apprenticeships in the Enterprise Zone.

Abington Street Open to Traffic

In December 2014, work completed to open up the middle section of Abington Street to allow one way traffic from St Giles Terrace along Abington Street to Wellington Street, providing parking and dropping off points for businesses and shoppers, and increase footfall to help local traders.

Skatepark

Northampton Radlands Plaza skatepark opened in July 2012 and soon became one of the town's most popular attractions over the summer. Radlands Plaza quickly became recognised as one of the best skateparks in the UK, with hundreds of people of all ages visiting every week. The Outpost Café was opened there in August 2013.

Cycle CoNNeCT

Northampton's bicycle hire scheme was launched in July 2014 to create a low cost, convenient and sustainable way to travel about the town. The scheme was set up by the Council in partnership with Northamptonshire County Council and highways service provider MGWSP, the Brackmills Business Improvement District and the University of Northampton. The £150,000 initiative initially provided 50 bikes for public hire from 10 docking sites around the borough with the first 30 minutes of cycling are free, with every additional hour of use costing £1 up to a maximum of £5 per day.

Albion Place Hotel

Whitbread, Premier Inn's parent company, announced plans in January 2013 for a new 104-bedroom Premier Inn hotel and restaurant at Albion Place, which sits within the Enterprise Zone and the town's Cultural Quarter. The new hotel and restaurant will be developed on Council owned land and will create 50 new jobs on opening. Given its proximity to nearby theatres, cinema and shops, this will contribute to the regeneration of the area.

The Ark Restaurant

In September 2014, The Ark restaurant opened to provide a unique new addition to the range of food offers in the town. The floating restaurant was launched on the River Nene at Midsummer Meadow under a deal agreed with the Council.

Delapre Abbey

Restoration of this 900 year old historical site has been made possible by funding from the Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage and it was designated as the Council's top heritage priority by the Administration. It will provide a Visitor Centre, tours and exhibitions, plus space for functions such as conferences and weddings. A new Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust has been established and regular meetings are held with the Heritage Lottery Fund working closely with the Friends of Delapre Abbey.

The historic bell tower and clock at Delapre Abbey were lifted back into place on the roof of the stable block in March 2012 following a full restoration programme to put the clock back into working order for the first time in 20 years. The roofing work was carried out by local company Moulton Roofing, while the restoration of the clock and wind vane has been undertaken by specialist company.

Work was carried out on a £400,000 project in April 2014 to urgently repairs to the roof of Delapre Abbey. The project was jointly funded by the Borough Council and English Heritage, and was essential to prevent leaks into the building that has caused damage to the interior of the abbey. At the same time structural repairs were also carried out to the north wing of the building. A £200,000 grant was awarded from English Heritage's Historic Buildings, Monuments and Designed Landscapes Scheme. English Heritage makes this funding available for conserving and restoring the country's most significant historic assets. This Administration also committed £200,000 to the project to preserve this much loved treasure.

The Contractor, Robert Woodhead was appointed in December 2014 with construction set to start on site shortly. The future provision of a refreshment facility has been secured after agreement in September 2014 between Northampton Borough Council and the Friends of Delapre Abbey. The new permanent location will be within the 19th century stable block and this received planning permission in December 2014.

St Edmund's

The Council continues to work closely with the developers of the St Edmund's hospital and the proposals they are currently putting together to redevelop the site for specialised care use represent the best opportunity of bringing this key site back into use, which is something we are all want to see.

Cultural Quarter

The Errol Flynn Filmhouse art house cinema opened in June 2013. The 90-seat venue hosts the very best in world, independent, British and mainstream film, broadening the range of films available to view in the town and is a valuable part of the Cultural Quarter.

In June 2014, Cabinet approved plans for a new £6.5 million creative hub in the Vulcan Works building on Guildhall Road with the creation of 240 jobs and bring an old building back into use. The grade-II listed building was commissioned in the late nineteenth century by Henry Mobbs & Co to manufacture boot and shoe-making machinery. The plans will transform the site into an incubator for creative firms and offer space for 70 businesses. Planning permission was approved in January 2015 and funding was announced through the SEMLEP Local Growth Deal from Government the next day.

In December 2014, work was completed to improve Guildhall Road to widen the pavements, allowing space for outdoor café tables and street entertainment. There are now parking spaces on both sides of the road and more spaces will be created in the lower part of Guildhall Road with trees and other planting will enhance the area at the heart of the Cultural Quarter.

In June 2014 the Administration first announced plans for the Boot and Shoe Quarter. The 'historic core' of Northampton's boot and shoe industry in the Mounts area has been recognised by designated signs to mark its boundary, and work has been done to encourage the development of independent businesses, arts and activities in the area.

Boutique Hotel

On 17th February the Borough Council's Planning Committee approved plans for a new boutique hotel at 13 Guildhall Road. The hotel is expected to incorporate 13 luxurious double rooms, a café, serving hotel guests and other visitors, and an Indian restaurant. Northampton has needed a facility like this for some time, and it will be a wonderful addition to our Cultural Quarter.

Enterprise Zone

In August 2011 Northampton was awarded an Enterprise Zone by the Government. Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone is a major asset that has allowed us to attract millions of pounds of inward investment and create hundreds of new jobs in our town.

Free Car Parking

The Administration was elected with a manifesto commitment to provide free parking as an incentive to bring people back into the town centre and support local businesses. The Administration introduced an hour of free parking in October 2011 and, in April 2014, the four multi-storey car parks at St John's, St Michael's, Mayorhold and the Grosvenor Centre were designated as free on Saturdays and Sundays and for two hours on week days. Since then April 2014, the number of cars has increased by 40% with footfall increasing by 400,000. Parking remains free on Sundays and bank holidays in all Borough Council car parks.

Six state-of-the-art electronic traffic information signs were also installed around the town centre during December 2013 to provide parking details for drivers coming into the town centre and make it easier for shoppers to find their way to our premier car parks and take advantage of our free parking offers.

Business Improvement Districts

The Administration has worked closely with the Town Centre Business Improvement District and the Brackmills Business Improvement District which have helped with investment and events in the town centre and to improve the Brackmills Industrial Estate. Following the renewal by businesses in March 2014, the Council will continue to work constructively with the Brackmills BID and will work with the Town Centre BID on their renewal plans for the ballot later this year.

Market Advisory Group

The Administration set up the independent Market Advisory Group to look at ways to improve the vitality of the Town's historic market.

In October 2013, the Administration reduced rents for Market Square traders by 25 per cent. This move was in response to a call for more support for traders which came from the independent Market Advisory Group.

I would like to put on record my thanks to Raymond Everall, Dick Roberts and David Rudd who served as independent Chairs of the Market Advisory Group, and their work to help support the traders.

Business Incentive Scheme

In April 2014, the Council launched a Business Incentive Scheme to support local businesses to help fill empty properties and support small businesses through a range of grants. The scheme has awarded over £380,000 in grants, which has unlocked more than £1.7 million in private investment and helped to create 168 new jobs and brought business units and empty shops in the town back into use. In addition, the new Business Rate Rebate scheme gave qualifying retail businesses up to £1,000 in Business Rate Relief.

National Recognition

In March 2014, Northampton was named top for business according to the finance data specialist Experian. The key criteria measured were number of start-ups, rate of insolvencies, level of financial health and business turnover. Northampton was the only place in the country to achieve a score as high as 19 and the town achieved top marks for turnover, start-up and insolvency rates and dropped just one point for financial strength.

In June 2014 Northampton was recognised as being among the best places for supporting entrepreneurs and innovators with more small and medium sized businesses being set up here than almost anywhere else in the country. A government think-tank has placed Northampton as being one of the top ten places in the UK for new small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and also one of the top ten places where SMEs are successfully adopting high-growth strategies.

The Centre for Cities published its 'Small Business Outlook 2014' looking at the strength and performance of SMEs, which are a vital part of the national economic recovery. Northampton has one of the highest levels of new SMEs as more and more entrepreneurs take advantage of the benefits of beginning their new business in Northampton. The report also shows how more of our town's SMEs are also using high-growth strategies compared to other areas. This describes businesses that aim for quality rather than price, or deliver highly customised or bespoke products and services.

The latest Cities Outlook report from Centre for Cities ranks Northampton as one of the best places in the country for new business start-ups. It identifies that there were around 1,440 new businesses launched in the borough during 2013, placing it at number three in the UK.

The last four years has seen huge change throughout the town and massive regeneration programmes and it has been a delight to serve as the Cabinet member at the heart of it all. I would like to thank my Assistant Cabinet member, Jonathan Nunn, for his work throughout the last four years and especially his commitment to the Market Advisory Group.

Councillor Tim Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning