



Report of the Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 24th April 2017

Unitary Status

NBC have been leading on the commissioning of independent work to assess the options for a possible future Unitary Councils model for Northamptonshire.

This work is being supported by financial contributions from other Districts and Boroughs in the county, and the contract for the work has been awarded by a panel from across the councils to Deloitte.

Deloitte will be assessing all aspects of local government in their work, including the cost to residents of different options, but with a strong focus on local representation which ensures the delivery of the best quality services.

Town Centre Traffic

Our commitment to lead on relieving traffic issues around the town centre, has led to a number of improvements being agreed with the County Council. Work is progressing on the regulations that are needed for these to be implemented, with a focus on the Drapery and Bus station area, such as Bradshaw Street being made one way, so that separate lanes are available to buses turning left and right, enforcement of the buses and taxis only restrictions on the Drapery to reduce the congestion, and alterations to yellow box junctions and signage. Other partners working with us include the Park Inn Hotel, who are using their alternative entrance off St. Katherine's Street, removing the need for their guests to use Sheep Street to reach the hotel.

We will continue to look for further ways in which traffic flows can be improved, to reduce the dreadful delays that we know some residents have had to suffer at peak times.

Delapré Abbey

It has been wonderful to see Delapre Abbey welcome visitors daily, following the opening of the café on 3rd April. I'm not sure there has ever been a better time for the Abbey in its nine hundred year history, not just because of the excellent condition the building is in following the restoration, but also because of the fact that so much of the building is now accessible to visitors, whether they are visiting the immediately accessible areas such as the café, or participating in something in the village hall area, or attending a wedding or corporate event.

We are now working closely with Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust to finalise the last remaining items of the restoration, which sit outside of the work of the Main Contractor, and of course focusing on the promotion of the Abbey and the operational plan so that the Abbey can be fully opened as soon as possible. I'm pleased to report that there are a significant number of bookings and enquiries for the use of the facilities, as this forms a vital part of the Abbey's future income and sustainability.

Governance

Neale Burns has joined the council to fulfil the Governance & Risk Manager role. This is on an interim basis for the time being, but it has meant that the important work of this role is underway. The 'Licence to Practice' training that those managing projects and budgets within the council must attend has also begun.

I have mentioned to Council before that we have an aspiration to move to an Independent Chair of the Audit Committee, and as a first step to progress this a report will be going to the Audit Committee for their consideration.

Economic Development

Amongst the recent activities in this area, we were delighted to run a business breakfast event on the Wellingborough Road on 17th March. This was driven by a number of new businesses in the area, including our hosts for the event; The Dapper Sandwich. It is a commitment of the Administration to continue to seek to work with businesses across the borough, and the enthusiasm amongst the businesses at this event was extremely encouraging, with future meetings due to take place on how we work together to improve the area.

The Council is a member of the Northamptonshire Business Alliance, an organisation set up to bring together key businesses and organisations to help shape the future of business in Northamptonshire, and I was delighted to recently agree with the Chamber of Commerce our continued commitment to being involved with the Alliance, and separately to attend an event with other members on 20th March.

It was a particular pleasure to be accompanied at this event by Stephen Hing, our new Director of Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning. Stephen has made a tremendously positive impact during his first few weeks in the job, and I would like to congratulate him on the way that he really has 'hit the ground running'!

Night Shelter

I recently visited the Night Shelter for the first time since it opened. This made me feel extremely proud of the positive and innovative work that the council is undertaking, with partners, in the area of homelessness. The way in which the Shelter is giving its visitors a welcoming and helping hand to take a positive direction with their lives, and the way in which they are responding to that help, is so very uplifting, and I am extremely grateful to all the volunteers and council staff who have dedicated their time to preparing, opening, and running the Shelter.

Other Activity

Amongst the many other things I have recently been pleased to be involved in are:

Meeting with St. James Residents' Association and members of the Management Team at the Doddridge Centre, to discuss with them ways of supporting further their work for the local community.

Being involved in the launch of the Northamptonshire Surprise tourism campaign, in which we intend to play an active part in the future.

Meeting with Community Spaces Northampton, to better understand the great work that they do, and how we can ensure the best possible working relationship between the council and CSN.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn

Leader of the Council