



West Northamptonshire  
Development Corporation  
2004 – 2014

# A new beginning

For Northampton, Daventry  
& Towcester



**Designed by**  
*Kinetic Creative Ltd*

**Written by**  
*Iain Andrews*







WNDC

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Development Corporation  
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# A new beginning

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Foreword by John Markham

# A new beginning

*This review of WNDC actually reveals a compelling story about the evolution of West Northamptonshire. This includes how an ambitious, yet unassuming, county town started its renaissance as a hub of enterprise and innovation. It also charts how two nearby market towns started new chapters in their historic existence.*

When I became Chairman of WNDC in 2008, I soon grasped the scale of the opportunity in West Northamptonshire, as well as the gravity of the challenges. We were at the start of what was to become the deepest global recession in living memory. It was a daunting

period for the nation as a whole, let alone a relatively vulnerable corner of the south east midlands. Additionally, there were other, more long standing challenges. Located at the crossroads of the UK, the area had a rapidly growing population but ageing infrastructure that couldn't keep pace. It required major investment, as did the local town centres, which were simply not fulfilling their huge, latent potential. Northampton in particular, had suffered from decades of neglect, as commercial development had prospered in out-of-town locations.

Together with the local authorities, my predecessor

Keith Barwell had helped to lay the foundations for a Corporation that could tackle these challenges. Building on this work, my priority was to foster even closer ties with our partners and move into full scale delivery. Crucially, we also had to re-focus the organisation. Whereas our original priority had been housing growth, the situation now called for economic development and urban regeneration. Since then, we have made widespread progress, with major schemes underway in all three town centres, ranging from the new Northampton Railway Station to the Moat Lane development in Towcester. This review provides a full, public account of what

has been achieved to date, as well as the lessons that have been learned over the past 10 years.

Notwithstanding this progress, our job is far from finished. The work of WNDC will be completed by our local authority partners over the coming years. In this sense, the last decade represents just the start of a new beginning for Northampton, Daventry and Towcester.

A handwritten signature in white ink, reading "John Markham". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line that extends to the right.

**John Markham OBE**  
WNDG Chairman



# The Big Numbers

Around  
**£120m**

invested in West  
Northamptonshire

Unlocking the  
**£65m**

regeneration of  
Daventry town centre

Almost  
**2m sqm**

of commercial floorspace  
approved by WNDC's planning  
service, safeguarding  
thousands of jobs

Supporting a  
**£1bn**

regeneration plan  
in Northampton  
town centre

Driving the  
**£50m**

transformation  
of Towcester  
town centre



# 2004 – 2009: More homes and better jobs





*Ensuring the supply of new homes meets demand has been an enduring problem for the UK. Faced with daunting forecasts of an ever worsening housing crisis, the Government launched the Sustainable Communities Plan in 2003. It was the bedrock of a national aspiration to build new homes and attract jobs where they were needed most.*

Under this wide-reaching plan, four key Growth Areas were earmarked to ease pressure on the 'overheating' South East of England. With its ideal location and transport links, the potential of West Northamptonshire was quickly identified. As part of the Milton Keynes South Midlands Growth Area, it was tasked to deliver over 47,000 new homes and at least 37,000 new jobs in just 20 years.

To tackle this exceptional challenge, WNDC was mobilised in December 2004. It was one of just three Urban Development Corporations to be created around that time and the only

one outside London. This fact alone reflected the scale and profile of the opportunity in West Northamptonshire.

From the onset, WNDC needed to balance the needs of a national growth agenda with local concerns. Namely, ensuring quality design, securing funding for infrastructure, and prioritising new jobs alongside more houses. With these issues at the top of its list, WNDC worked in partnership with the local authorities to move from aspiration to action. This meant investing in local infrastructure ranging from the award winning Upton Flood Mitigation Scheme to the redevelopment of Northampton's Royal & Derngate Theatre. It also meant ensuring that the cost of new infrastructure was shared with developers. West Northamptonshire was to have one of the most advanced planning obligations strategies in the UK, eventually helping it to secure over £50m in developer contributions to infrastructure.

During this period, WNDC's planning service was a core component of the business, with over 25,000 new homes in live planning applications. Additionally, major commercial developments, ranging from the Avon Cosmetics European Headquarters to Sainsbury's Zero Carbon Distribution Centre at Pineham, were approved by WNDC. In total, the planning service approved almost 2m sqm of commercial development, safeguarding thousands of jobs, while raising the bar for design quality.

But the winds of change had only just started to swirl. An unprecedented change in market conditions would lead to a re-focusing of the Corporation's role, priorities and powers.



## **Right tools for the job**

# **Investment**

**WNDC made targeted investments to kick-start the growth and regeneration of West Northamptonshire**

# **Development**

**WNDC had a range of specialist powers, including the ability to acquire, manage and sell land and property, together with powers to develop, invest and provide business support**

# **Planning**

**WNDC had the responsibility to determine strategic planning applications in its area of operation**





## 2009 – 2014: Driving economic recovery

*As WNDC hit the halfway point in its plan, the political, social and economic climate was a far cry from 2004. Fuelled by an international credit crisis, a deep global recession was affecting investor confidence and development appetite. The challenge had shifted, and WNDC responded in kind.*

At the start of this final delivery phase, it was agreed that the Corporation's planning powers would gradually transfer to the local authorities. This meant it could focus on its leading priority – town centre regeneration.

Using its investment budget and specialist powers, the Corporation was charged with supporting 'The Big Six' regeneration projects in Northampton town centre,

while maintaining its work in Daventry and Towcester.

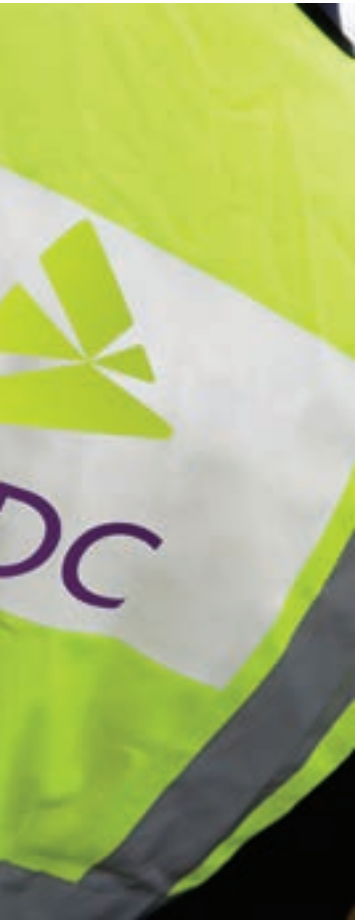
Together, The Big Six will increase the size of the town centre by more than a third over the next decade. They are interlinked projects, designed to modernise Northampton's transport hubs, drive footfall and attract new jobs to the town, as part of a £1bn regeneration plan.

Using the full breadth of its powers, WNDC has played a different role in each of the initiatives. At Northampton Railway Station, St Peter's Waterside and Avon Nunn Mills, it was at the forefront of delivery, working in partnership with organisations such as Network Rail. The remaining three

projects were led by the local authorities, with WNDC playing an important supporting role.

At the time of WNDC closing, all of The Big Six were either on site or fully committed. Meanwhile, the award winning redevelopment of Towcester and Daventry town centres was well advanced. Alongside these headline projects, there was an array of other initiatives that were already having a positive impact. They ranged from the Becket's Park Marina to the pioneering Construction Futures training scheme. Ultimately, in WNDC's final delivery phase local landmarks started to rise and barriers to progress began to fall.







# The Big Six

## Northampton Railway Station

A £20m gateway to Northampton,  
with better facilities and more capacity

## Avon Nunn Mills

Prestigious mixed use development,  
including a new University Campus

## St Peter's Waterside

Landmark new offices, including a  
state-of-the-art Innovation Centre

## North Gate Bus Station

Delivery of a new bus station, thereby  
enabling demolition of the Greyfriars Bus Station  
and future commercial development on the site

## Project Angel

A major office development being led  
by Northamptonshire County Council

## St John's

Spearheaded by Northampton Borough Council,  
the development of a new hotel, as well as a student  
accommodation complex





*Projects - The Big Six - Northampton Railway Station*

## **The new and improved Northampton Railway Station will be an iconic gateway to the town, with more capacity and better facilities.**

*Over five years ago, studies by WNDC revealed that the station was at capacity, while its facilities were out of date. Facing these facts, the Corporation set out to build the station that Northampton needs and deserves.*

It was a complex and lengthy process. After developing a masterplan for the site and meeting Network Rail's technical procedures, WNDC needed to secure major investment. Together with the local authorities, an extensive lobbying campaign was launched, which eventually captured a £20m funding package from a range of partners.

In June 2013, work on the new station got underway. It followed almost three months of intensive archaeological investigations, reflecting the fact that Northampton's medieval castle once stood on the site. A series of fascinating finds were discovered, ranging from a Saxon brooch to the footprint of a medieval building.

Through several detailed design features, the new station will respect this past, while looking to the future. It will be twice the size of the previous building, making a statement about the growth, ambition and confidence of the town. But it's just a sign of potential improvements to come. Network

Rail and the local authorities have the opportunity to deliver later phases of development, including a multi-storey car park. It would free up land for a 28,000 sqm office complex, creating a new commercial district in the heart of Northampton.





*Projects - The Big Six - St Peter's Waterside*

## **With its riverside setting, transport links and Enterprise Zone benefits, St Peter's Waterside is an outstanding development opportunity.**

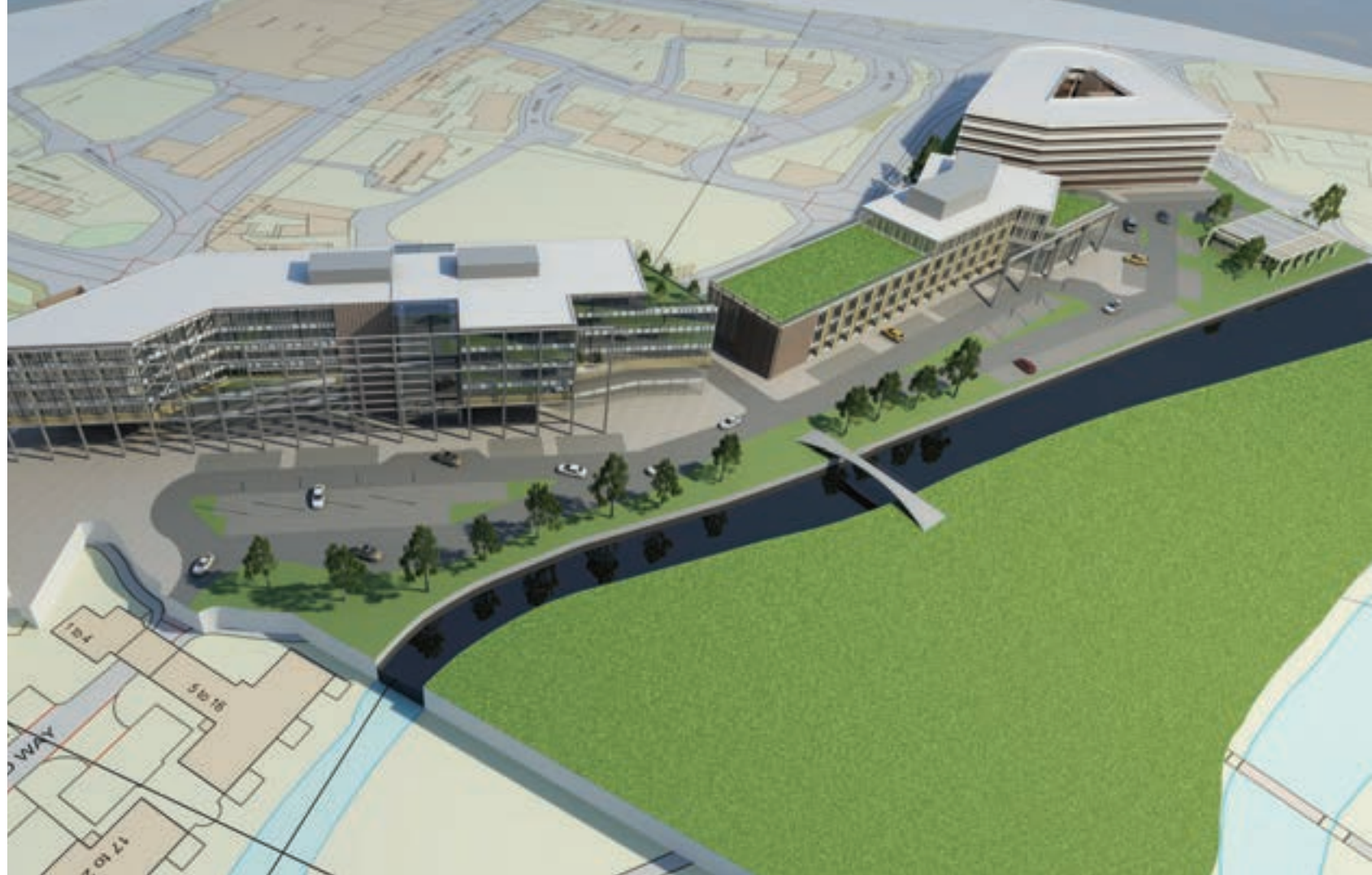
*Covering a stretch of brownfield land between the River Nene and St Peter's Way, the prominent site will house a flagship 20,000 sqm office scheme.*

Like many towns across the UK, Northampton has seen office development prosper in out-of-town business parks, hitting the vibrancy of the town centre. To combat this trend, the Corporation made St Peter's Waterside a leading priority. In 2013, it finished acquiring the series of sites that comprise St Peter's Waterside. This included a street of ten houses, four commercial properties and the site of a former 19th

century malthouse which was controversially demolished by the previous owners. In parallel, WNDC entered into a deal with National Grid, meaning that the neighbouring gasholder could become part of the riverside development.

When demolition works started in late 2013, it was a symbolic moment for the town and a clear signal of intent. After marketing the site to the UK's biggest and best developers, WNDC entered into a partnership with Kier Property in 2013 to realise its long-term vision for the site.









*Projects - The Big Six - Avon Nunn Mills*

## **Avon Nunn Mills will be home to a £330m University Campus in the heart of Northampton.**

*Overlooking the River Nene and open parkland, the huge brownfield site includes a disused cosmetics factory and a former power station.*

Breathing new life into this area of Northampton was a long-standing priority for WNDC. Originally, the landowners were pursuing plans for a major mixed-use development, including over 1,000 new homes. However, that proposal failed to progress and in 2012 WNDC launched a compulsory purchase order for the land.

Confronted with this action, the three main landowners came to a momentous agreement with the University of Northampton

and WNDC. Once the deal was agreed, the order only covered the land required for a new road through the site.

Mindful that Avon Nunn Mills has been largely derelict for decades, a series of contingency measures were agreed. They will be activated in the unlikely event that the University plans do not come to fruition. This includes the opportunity for a housing development led by the landowners, followed by a purchase of the land by WNDC's successor body. Essentially, the deal has guaranteed a fresh start for what is the largest site in the Northampton Enterprise Zone.



*Projects - The Big Six - North Gate Bus Station*

## **Not only is the North Gate Bus Station an outstanding facility, it removes an infamous barrier to progress.**



*Once described as like entering 'the mouth of hell' by famous designer Kevin McCloud, the Greyfriars Bus Station has always been a divisive building. It is an out-dated structure, that has long prevented the development of the neighbouring Grosvenor Centre. To kick-start the demolition of the Greyfriars Bus Station and unlock any subsequent development, a new transport facility was paramount.*

Working in partnership, Northampton Borough Council, Northamptonshire County Council and WNDC delivered the North Gate Bus Station. Rather than a brutalist structure, it is

a light weight and energy efficient building, making it far easier and cheaper to be maintained in the long run. Additionally, whereas the dark and cavernous bays of the Greyfriars retained exhaust gases and offered a gloomy greeting, the North Gate Bus Station provides a bright and attractive point of arrival.

Perhaps most importantly, the new station means the demolition of the Greyfriars Bus Station can commence, removing a notorious blockage on the long-term revival of Northampton town centre.



A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Chris Garden'.

**Chris Garden**  
WNDC Director of Regeneration  
and Development

**“I think the long-term impact of our work in Northampton is going to be tremendous.**

**The results may not be clear until around 10 years time, when people will be able to look around them and see the transformation that has taken place.”**



*Projects - The Big Six - Project Angel*

## **Nestled in Northampton's Cultural Quarter, Project Angel will help fuel the long-term prosperity of the town centre.**

*Project Angel is at the vanguard of efforts to boost footfall and support a centre of commerce in Northampton. The new headquarters for Northamptonshire County Council, will house around 2,000 employees and therefore bring people back into the town centre. Aside from regenerating a brownfield site, the scheme simply makes business sense. It will offer multi-million pound savings in running costs, while bringing an extra £12m into the town centre economy over a decade.*

WNDC provided technical support to the council to help make the vision a reality. The business case for the development was approved by the Council's Cabinet in 2012, with a view to construction starting in 2015.









*Projects - The Big Six - St John's*

**Neighbouring Project Angel,  
the **St John's** development is  
also designed to get Northampton  
buzzing again.**

*Northampton Borough  
Council has spearheaded the  
plans, which include a student  
accommodation complex, as  
well as a new hotel.*

The University of Northampton's £25m accommodation building has already risen on the skyline, whilst the hotel is not far away. As part of The Big Six regeneration projects, they will boost existing businesses in the town, not least the various heritage and cultural attractions in the immediate area.



*Projects - Daventry town centre*

**WNDC hit the ground running in Daventry town centre, led by the council's bold and ambitious vision for the area.**





*In 2006, the Corporation invested nearly £7m in a series of highway works and land acquisitions, paving the way for future development. This includes the Abbey Retail Park which opened in 2009, bringing new jobs to the town centre. As part of this scheme, a new working men's club was constructed, serving as a signature building on a key entrance into the town.*

But the most dramatic architectural statement was to arrive in the form of the £8.5m iCon Innovation Centre. Delivered by WNDC in 2011, the multi award winning building is a beacon for the low carbon economy in the UK and beyond. It provides office accommodation for firms working in environmental sustainability, while being a stunning exemplar of energy efficiency in its own right.

Nearby, the University Technical College is another example of Daventry's progressive plans. WNDC was one of several organisations involved in the project, which sets a new standard for vocational education, sharing the iCon's focus on green technologies and sustainable construction.

Despite the progress that has already been made, the full fruits of WNDC's investment will be seen in coming years. This includes a state-of-the-art library, backed by £600,000 from WNDC, which will be constructed along with the Mulberry Place retail development. The future is bright for Daventry.





*Projects - Towcester town centre*

## **The reinvention of Towcester town centre will showcase the historic heart of the town alongside modern facilities. This includes new public spaces, shops and offices.**

*WDC invested over £7.5m in the Moat Lane development, with work now well advanced. In 2010, the restored Bury Mount was officially launched, marking the first step in the plans. The ancient fortification which dates back to medieval times, is the centrepiece of the wider scheme. It neighbours the Watermeadows, a historic park which has been brought back into public ownership and restored for all of the local community to enjoy.*

In December 2013, work started on the latest and largest phase of Moat Lane. This includes the construction of a new civic building to house South Northamptonshire Council, as well as key public services including a library. The state-of-the-art facility will be up and running in 2015.

Meanwhile, the Towcester Brewing Company has moved into a unique new home at the old watermill. The local landmark has been given a new lease of life as both a micro-brewery and a visitor

centre. In the longer term, there is even more to come at Moat Lane, with new homes and offices planned for the remainder of the site. Collectively, all of these improvements are creating a town centre that is fit for the future. By championing high quality design, the award winning scheme has set a new benchmark for modern development in historic surroundings.





*Projects - Laying the foundations*

## **For towns to grow and flourish, they need a strong backbone. That's why WNDC prioritised core infrastructure in its early years, providing a springboard for a bigger and better Northampton.**

*Much of this work was through the 'Brownfield Initiative' - a joint effort by the local authorities, English Partnerships and WNDC to breathe new life into former landfill sites at Sixfields, Harvey Reeves Road and Ransome Road.*

Over £25m was invested by WNDC to clean-up the land and create a series of new road links across the south west of the town. This included Edgar Mobbs Way, Upton Valley Way North and the Sandy Lane improvements. The cash injection also helped

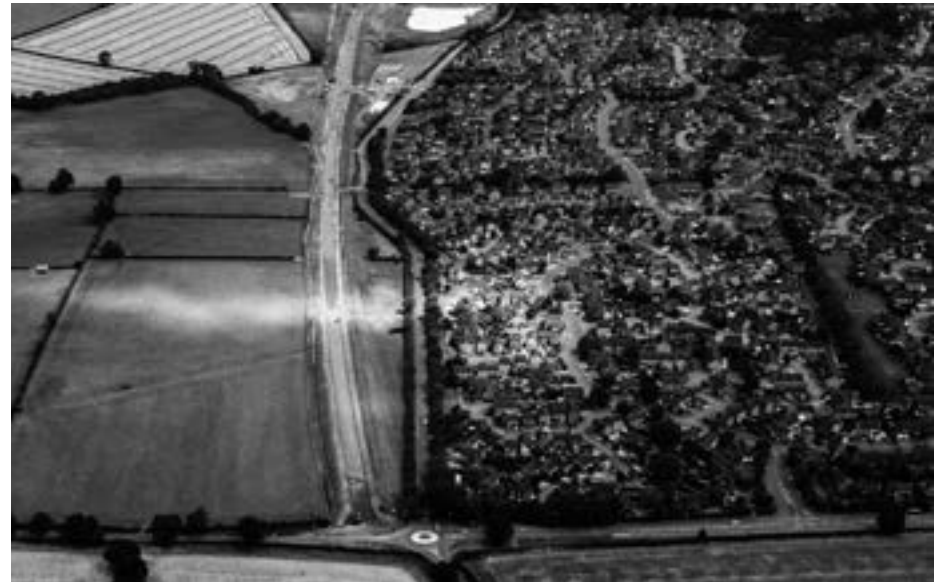
Northampton to boast some of the best flood defences in the UK. The Upton Flood Attenuation scheme was completed in 2008 - a decade after Northampton had suffered notorious and fatal flooding. Not only did the work safeguard the town against future disasters, it meant quality development was possible along Northampton's forgotten waterside.

As well as heavy hitting infrastructure, the Corporation supported smaller projects to make Northampton easier to get around. This included

boosting capacity at key transport gateways, such as the St Peter's Way roundabout and the London Road/Ransome Road junction. Additionally, it backed efforts to make Northampton a walkable town. Safer, more pedestrian friendly streets were created on the route from Northampton Railway Station to the town centre. Once it opened in 2009, the revitalised streetscape along Black Lion Hill, Marefair and Gold Street was celebrated in style with a lively street party.

Despite all of this progress, even more improvements are on the horizon, which will continue to be led by the local authorities. This includes a new transport link on a disused railway line bought by WNDC within the Northampton Enterprise Zone. Together, all of these projects have helped to lay the foundations for a resurgent town.







*Projects - A commitment to culture*

**With a burgeoning arts and cultural scene, there has been no shortage of colourful projects for WNDC to get behind.**





*In 2006, the Corporation invested £1.4m in the development of Northampton's cultural attractions. This included new visitor facilities at 78 Derngate - the internationally renowned property designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh. It also contributed to a multi-million pound refurbishment of the Royal and Derngate, cementing its reputation as the best regional theatre in the UK. Several years later, when plans for a new independent cinema at the theatre emerged, WNDC gave fresh financial support. The Errol Flynn Filmhouse subsequently opened its doors in 2013 to critical acclaim.*

Crucially, WNDC's involvement has extended beyond the star attractions to grassroots activities. The Northampton Arts Collective were consistently backed, firstly to create new gallery space at the old Fishmarket building, and latterly for their stylish home at 9 Guildhall Road.

Alongside these activities, the Corporation worked in partnership with the Borough Council to bring one of Northampton's oldest and most loved features to life. In 2010, over £300,000 was pledged towards a creative lighting scheme for the market square, making it a dazzling focal point for the town, long into the evening hours.



*Projects - Boosting business*

## **Boasting world class firms ranging from Carlsberg to Cosworth, Northampton's business community has been a leading light in the town's regeneration.**

*To encourage entrepreneurship and spark innovation, WNDC made a series of business boosting investments.*

In 2007, it helped the Portfolio Innovation Centre to triple in size. Based at the University of Northampton, the centre provides first class offices and a supportive network for up to 45 young design, digital and creative companies.

In another partnership between WNDC and the University, work started on an Innovation Centre at St Peter's Waterside in December 2013.

The £8.5m development will support budding social enterprises, building on the University's emerging reputation in that sector.

As well as encouraging fledgling businesses, WNDC backed efforts to attract more established firms to the area. Working with Northamptonshire Enterprise, it participated in a series of joint ventures designed to boost the level of office space available across West Northamptonshire. This included Heron House in Northampton, which was a high profile addition to the successful Swan Valley

Office Village. Meanwhile, in Towcester, it invested in the Axis 43 office scheme at Tove Valley Business Park. All of these projects were part of a pledge to make West Northamptonshire a better place to do business.







*Projects - Waterside renaissance*

**Whereas most towns treasure and celebrate their waterways, Northampton's waterside had long been a forgotten and neglected asset.**



*From the onset, WNDC recognised that headline projects like Avon Nunn Mills and St Peter's Waterside wouldn't regenerate the River Nene on their own. It needed to become a thriving community resource again.*

In 2009, WNDC invested £500,000 in Northampton's Connect 2 Greenways scheme, helping to provide 4 km of new walking and cycling routes along the river. The initiative, which was also funded by the Big Lottery Fund, has helped to re-connect the river to the everyday lives of local people,

whether they are commuting to work, popping to the shops, or simply just enjoying a riverside walk.

This new travel network was followed by the showpiece of Northampton's waterside renaissance; the Becket's Park Marina. Primarily funded by WNDC, the £2.5m facility opened in 2012 and has been a resounding success. It offers a base for up to 80 boats at a time, reflecting Northampton's pivotal place on the waterway network, where the Grand Union Canal meets the River Nene.





Projects - Stronger communities

## Building thriving communities means more than just bricks and mortar.

*Local people from all walks of life have benefited from the work of WNDC, not least through the Stronger Communities Fund which invested almost £1m in vital voluntary groups. The fund, which was managed by Northamptonshire Community Foundation, supported a host of groups spanning sports clubs, festivals, charities and community centres. Recipients ranged from the Northampton Sea Cadets to Inspiration FM.*

Aside from the fund, WNDC worked directly with several community groups. In 2008, the Northamptonshire Association of Youth Clubs set its sights high, doubling the size of its Kings Park Conference and Youth Centre. Part-funded

by WNDC, the centre can house 190 people, accommodating the 250 voluntary organisations that use the facility each year.

Knowing that safer communities are stronger communities, WNDC funded crime prevention measures at Brackmills - one of the region's premier business parks. In 2008, it enabled a bigger and better CCTV network, helping to halve the crime rate in just one year. Not only did this discourage criminal behaviour, it safeguarded investment in the area.

This blend of social and commercial success was also achieved by the Construction Futures training

scheme. Launched in 2009, the award winning initiative uses the planning system to secure jobs and training on construction sites. It was highly successful in the East Midlands, delivering over 3,000 weeks of training across more than 20 construction sites. In October 2013, WNDC transferred ownership to leading social enterprise Fusion21, meaning Construction Futures still lives on today and is expanding across the UK.







A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Paul Quinn', located in the bottom right corner of the page.

**Paul Quinn**  
WNDC Senior  
Regeneration Manager

**“Construction Futures is one of our most successful community projects and is leaving a lasting legacy.**

**There are a lot of young people working in the construction sector today who wouldn't be had they not been introduced through Construction Futures.”**



**“West Northamptonshire  
Development Corporation has  
proved to be a success story.”**

**European Institute of Urban Affairs, December 2013**

# Lessons Learned

*After a decade of delivery, spanning three towns and a myriad of projects, much can be learned from WNDC's experiences. To capture these lessons in an independent and informative way, the European Institute of Urban Affairs conducted some research towards the end of WNDC's existence. It included interviews with over 30 key stakeholders from the public and private sectors, as well as data analysis and a literature review. The results were illuminating.*

Based on the evidence, WNDC had mixed fortunes in its first five years. It started to make an impact in Daventry and Towcester town centres, but made slower progress in Northampton, while struggling to meet its overall housing targets. However, the following five years saw widespread improvements being delivered in unison as the regeneration of the area exploded into life. There were several reasons for

this, including a re-focusing of the Corporation on urban regeneration projects at its midway point. New leadership and better partnership working were also crucial factors.

But the research was about more than WNDC; it offered important insights about Urban Development Corporations in general. In the light of these findings, The European Institute of Urban Affairs recommended to Government that:

- UDCs remain part of the urban regeneration policy 'toolkit' as there will still be instances when they are the most appropriate policy response.
- UDCs are likely to be needed where there is a tightly definable urban challenge of such complexity, specialised

nature, scale or intensity that a special purpose vehicle of this type is necessary.

- Other types of vehicle are likely to be more appropriate in planning and developing major new settlements and delivering comprehensive growth programmes.
- UDCs should preferably be locally initiated and controlled but given favourable access to Government resources.
- UDCs that are local authority-led can still be attractive to the private sector and deliver results.
- UDCs could be part of a menu of options offered to urban areas as part of City Deals.



Afterword by Peter Mawson

# Completing the Journey

*Major regeneration programmes may well be likened to marathons, but I think our final stretch has certainly been a sprint.*

In our concluding year, our investment activity has reached a five year high, but most importantly, so has work on the ground. Northampton in particular, has emerged as a hive of construction activity with the £1bn regeneration plan in full flow. This is the culmination of almost a decade of intense planning and preparation by WNDC and the local authorities.

Supported by Government, serious investment in land, infrastructure and development has been at the roots of our progress. I'm conscious that £120m is a significant sum of public money, yet it is dwarfed by the investment that is following from the private sector. Alongside

our catalyst funding, the use of specialist powers, including compulsory purchase orders, has been a decisive factor. This is especially true in the midst of an economic downturn, when confidence is a precious commodity.

Nevertheless, without having the right people involved, this money and power would have been toothless. At WNDC, we were fortunate to have a carefully crafted group of specialists, who came together as a team with the local authorities. Equally importantly, we were passionate about the job at hand, taking pride in the changing face of West Northamptonshire. I would like to thank every person involved in the regeneration of West Northamptonshire over the past 10 years. This extends way beyond the walls of WNDC, across all organisations, sectors

and locations. It especially includes the local community, who despite understandable concerns about their evolving surroundings, have got closely involved in the plans.

So, what comes next? After all, it is no secret that some of the area's biggest improvements are yet to come. One of the benefits of working in partnership for so long, is that little momentum will be lost. Together, the local authorities will continue to deliver a shared vision for the area, alongside a resurgent private sector.

As we have seen over the past 10 years, a programme of this magnitude takes a long time to plan and deliver. However, great strides have been made and the finishing line is now in sight. We are proud to have been part of the journey.



A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Peter Mawson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Peter Mawson**  
WNDC Chief Executive





