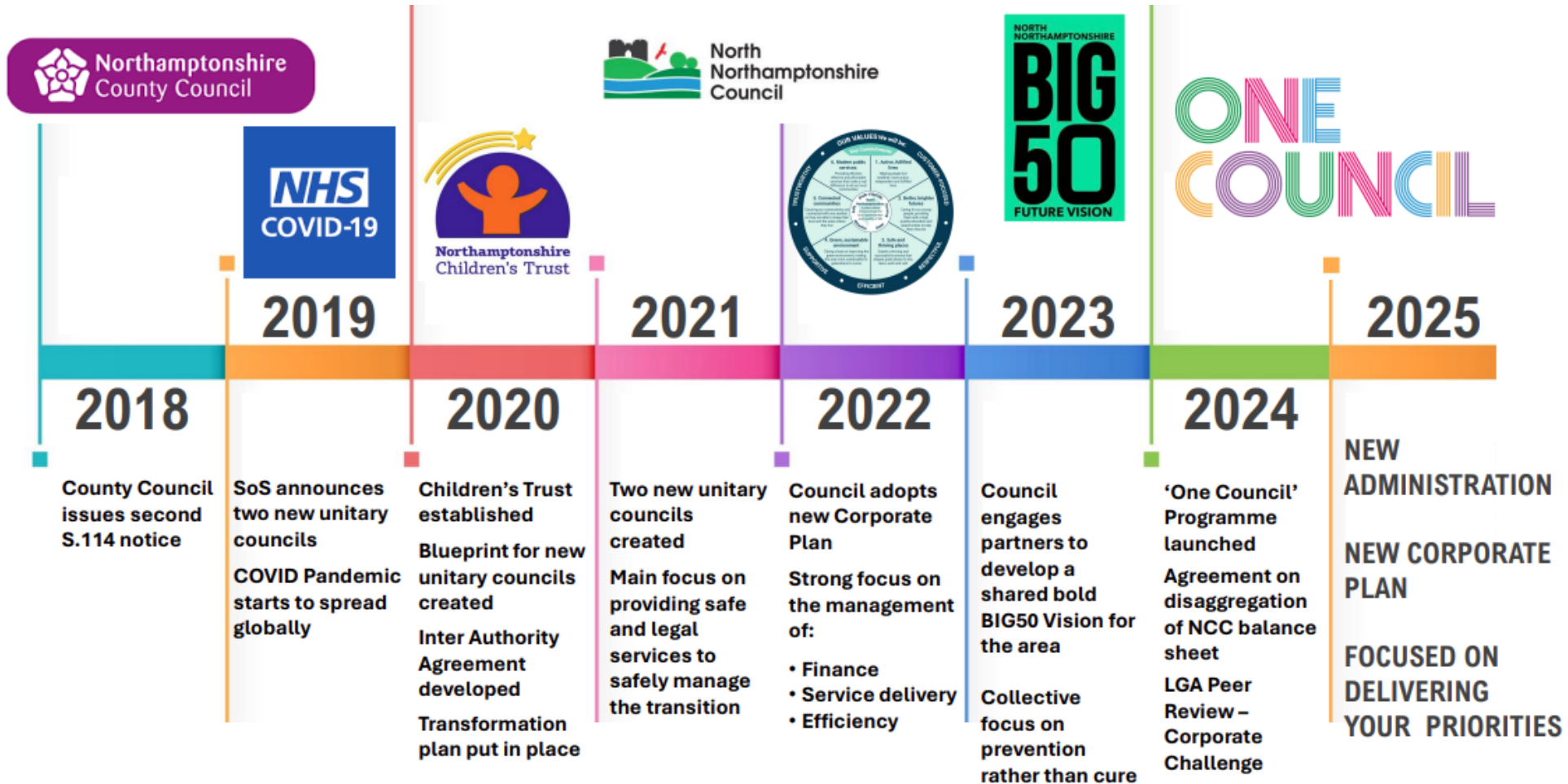


North Northamptonshire Culture, Tourism & Heritage: A Journey Through Reorganisation

Kerry Purnell – Assistant Director Communities & Leisure



Our History

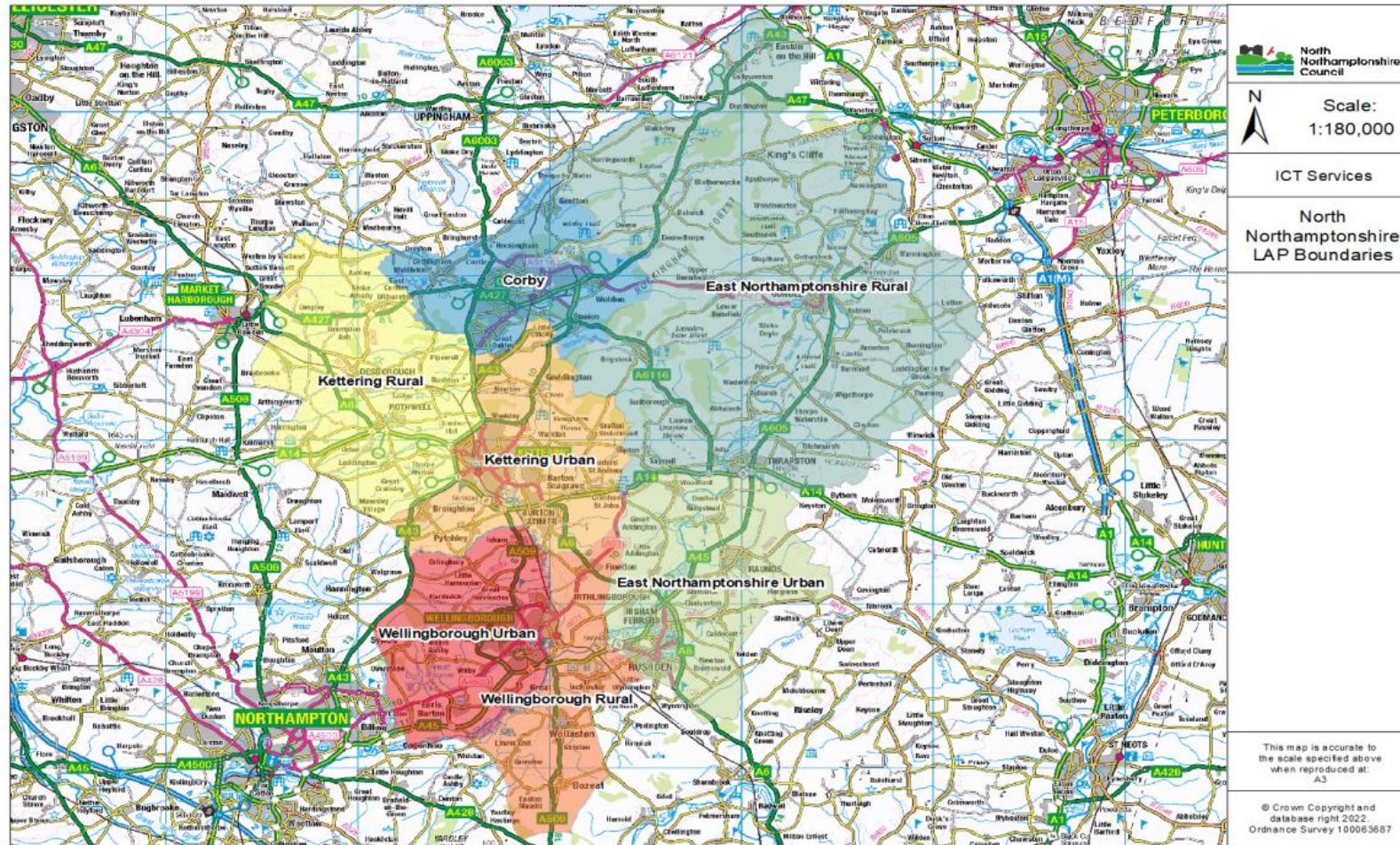


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HERITAGE

Sovereign Districts



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LGR processes

Future Northants programme

- Was largely led by the County Council but strategic leads were identified from across the councils for thematic areas.
- Culture, Heritage & Libraries were clustered together but the NH Library service was already under a significant transformation to a community managed library/statutory library structure so was dealt with separately.
- Working groups set up. Cultural group inc museum & archive leads from West NH as well archives, gallery & heritage leads from NN. Tourism was not in this theme.
- Discovery phase included collection of all service data: staff, costs, service offer, contract info, assets, transformation progs underway, transformation opportunities etc
- Some visioning as well as the as is position statements was done
- Proposals were presented to Shadow Council in Feb 2020.

Blueprint Options

- Complete disaggregation
- Lead Authority arrangement
- Host Authority arrangement

Inter Authority Agreements

Developed at last minute in Q4 2020 defining service, staffing
Finance splits not clear at this time some done 50/50 some by
population (53/47). Services not involved in these financial
decisions.



Transformation Issues

Context of the Transition (2021)

- The transition to the new council coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, with many staff working remotely.
- Meant a pause in the programme March to Oct 2020 with VD still set for 1/4/21. Meant **SAFE AND LEGAL** only.
- There was a strong need to maintain “business as usual” so that customers did not experience a drop-in service or quality.

Staff Experience and Morale

- Staff uncertainty of jobs and future roles.
- Staff experienced anxiety and uncertainty during the transition and needed support.
- There was an ongoing need for clear communication and consistent messaging to both staff and customers.

Structural and Team Changes

- Legacy resource for Culture, Tourism & Heritage was inconsistent if it existed at all.
- Ongoing changes to staffing and organisational structures as the new council developed its teams.
- Each legacy authority initially continued operating under its previous sovereign structures for services.
- Different management structures, priorities, and arrangements across the sovereign councils created inconsistencies.
- Gradual team building and introductions were needed to integrate staff from legacy councils.

Transformation Issues

Operational and Technical Challenges

- Migration to new IT and management systems created uncertainty and significant learning needs.
- Staff were unclear about who to contact for key support functions such as finance, HR, procurement, and IT.
- The loss of informal support networks—no longer having colleagues “in the next office”—made quick problem-solving more difficult.
- Pay and Grading – Staff assimilation
- Budget lift & shift

Big legacy capital projects not yet complete at Vesting Day

- £14m NHLF funded heritage destination renovation project at the Chester House Estate which had been delayed for a range of reasons including COVID was about 80% complete but dogged with lots of legacy issues [The Chester House Estate](#) Site finally opened Oct 2021
- The £4.5m Get Building Fund refurbishment & extension to Kettering’s Gallery, Museum and Library was contracted but ground had not even been broken [Homepage - Cornerstone Kettering](#). Site still not open- due Summer 2026
- Kettering Heritage Action Zone programme was about half-way through (completed 2023)



Transformation Positives

- **Greater Strategic Influence:** Larger authority can shape & deliver cultural, heritage & place shaping services with a broader vision & more consistent standards. Easier for key partners to have one strategic / operational conversation with a Unitary Council.
- **Cross-Cutting Opportunities:** Easier to collaborate across departments such as public health, libraries, leisure services, communities services, education, adult social care, children's services, planning policy, parks & open spaces, economic growth etc.
- **Improved Access and Inclusion:** Ability to develop services & offerings that reach more residents and address inequalities across a wider area. Easier to access good population health & other data & robust evaluation
- **Integrated Service Delivery:** Closer links with health, schools, VCSFE, Children's Trust, private businesses & business networks- e.g. NN BIG 50 programme
- **Innovation and Best Practice:** Easier to share & scale up successful initiatives across a wider network.
- **Stronger Partnerships:** More influence when working with external partners, national bodies & funders.

Strategic Transformation

Former Council CTH staff:

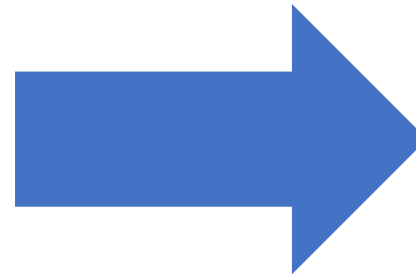
Corby - 1 heritage staff member

East Northants - 1 Tourism officer

Kettering- team of 6 + casuals
& volunteers at Gallery & Museum

Wellingborough- no staff

County Council- Doc Archive team of 5 + casuals / vols,
Archeaological archive 1 ARC Curator, Chester House team of 5 at that stage



Jan 2023 all disparate elements brought together into one service, one business plan under one visionary & commercially astute Head of Service

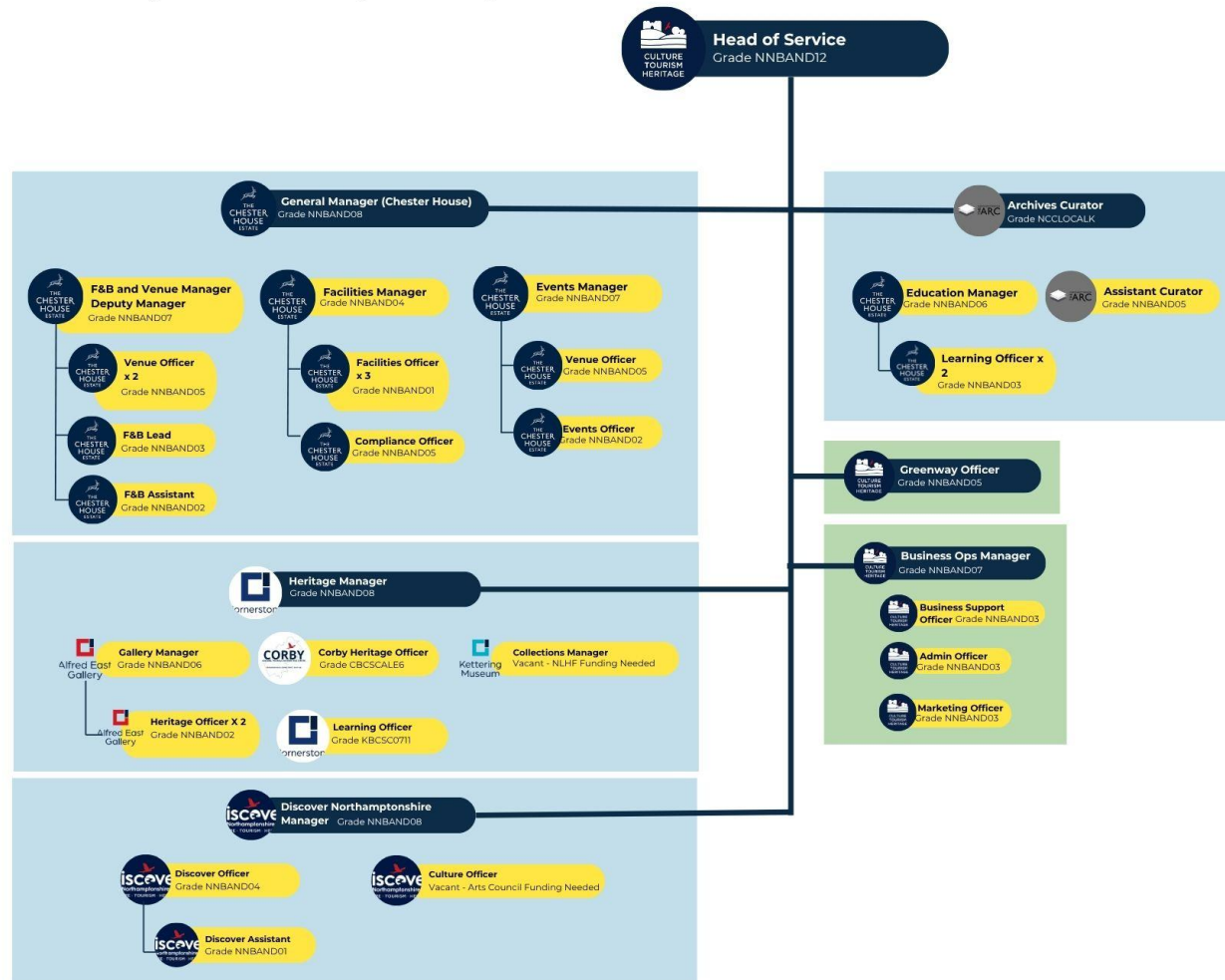


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Strategic Transformation

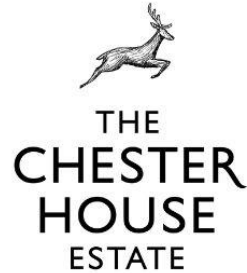
Contracted staffing structure - not including casual staffing



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NN Culture Tourism & Heritage Service Current Delivery



‘To create a new sustainable, efficient, and engaging heritage, cultural and tourism service that will shine a light on the outstanding assets we have within North Northamptonshire, whilst protecting and preserving heritage for future generations. Working with partners, we aim to improve and increase the tourism economy by developing infrastructure and introducing pioneering marketing strategies to attract inward investment and visitors’.



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NN Culture Tourism & Heritage Services Current Delivery

- Chester House Estate
- Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre
- The Cornerstone (Kettering Art Gallery, Museum & Library)
- Corby Heritage Centre
- Discover Northamptonshire Hub (Rushden Lakes)
- Local Visitor Economy Partnership
- The Greenway Project
- 3 x Theatre Contracts
- Land Based Management Contracts
- NN Cultural Strategy & Emerging Cultural Consortium/Partnership



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NN Culture Tourism & Heritage Business Plan



**CULTURE,
TOURISM &
HERITAGE**

2024/25
BUSINESS PLAN



CULTURE
TOURISM
HERITAGE



Maintaining a welcoming, free-to-enter estate that is open to everyone.



Protecting and enhancing our natural and historic landscapes for future generations.



Connecting Northamptonshire's residents and visitors with over 10,000 years of our local history and heritage.



Promoting health, happiness and wellbeing across the local community.



Placing the community at the core of every decision and action we take.



Safeguarding publicly accessible archaeological archives as a lasting public resource.



Delivering an inspiring, inclusive education programme for all ages and backgrounds.



Establish and foster partnerships both local and national which make a positive impact on the local community.



Supporting and growing local businesses, showcase regional produce and champion sustainable tourism.



Ensuring long-term financial sustainability through creative and dynamic commercial ventures.



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CULTURE
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People & Partnerships

Our collaborative model brings together public sector, private sector, VCSFE, charity, academic, education & funding partners

Our people are everything:
staff, casuals, volunteers

External funding is critical,
ensure ACE & NHLF are on
the journey with you

Commercial growth =
financial & operational
sustainability

Commitment to education
& learning

Year round cultural &
heritage engagement

Flexible use of all spaces

The Irchester Field School is our flagship partnership project, truly inspiring and empowering people of all ages through archaeological excavation and research, with a focus on Roman archaeology. All our activities are co-created, ensuring every team member can shape and lead, fostering a welcoming and accessible environment. We offer a wealth of programmes for volunteers, staff, students, schools, and young people, all built around local needs and interests, as we explore and celebrate the rich archaeological heritage of the Nene Valley and wider region.

The Irchester Field School is much more than just digging! We provide year-round learning programmes and events, including vital training in osteology (the study of human bones), Roman coins, pottery analysis, and environmental archaeology. Volunteers and students get involved in all aspects of research, investigating daily life in the past, from diet to the impact of diseases. Our research helps us understand the

challenges people faced and how they coped, uncovering amazing stories of resilience, ingenuity, and creativity from the Nene Valley and beyond. We also offer a dedicated learning programme for ages 7-18, allowing children to witness live excavations, handle real artefacts in our archaeology lab, and discover the stories told through human skeletons.

“

Thank you so much for letting our group become part of something that is truly extraordinary.

International Field School participant

”

“

This project clearly touched the lives of many different people from school children to volunteers to professionals. There was clear evidence of inspiring and empowering people focussed on the small Roman town of Irchester. Thousands of people benefitted from this project, exemplifying and promoting the role and value of archaeology. Well done!

*Council for British Archaeology,
Archaeological Achievement Awards
2024 Judges*

”



NATIONAL AWARD WINNING UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER PARTNERSHIP

Our partnership with the University of Leicester brings heritage to life at The Chester House Estate. This collaboration creates fantastic hands-on learning for all ages and enriches our community events, from lively Roman festivals to in-depth archaeological research. With the University's renowned expertise in archaeology, ancient history, and heritage, this partnership provides incredible academic and professional support, truly unlocking the site's unique potential. Together, we're transforming Chester House Estate into a vibrant hub for community-led research, learning, and public engagement, actively strengthening local communities.

The partnership directly supports Northamptonshire's Visitor Economy Strategy 2023-2030 by boosting visitor numbers, developing local skills, and showcasing inspirational places. It also helps the University strengthen its public engagement and inspire research that's genuinely relevant to our local heritage. Winning multiple national awards, this partnership delivers clear social, cultural, and economic benefits across the region, attracting both national and international attention.

“

This project has really stood out for the way it deepens public connection with place, making history and archaeology relevant for all sections of the community. It is a project that develops year on year, and is showing impressive results, not only in engagement, but also in non-educational outcomes such as public health and wellbeing.

The MJ Awards 2025 Judges commend the project

”



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OUR IMPACT

A STORY OF HERITAGE, COMMUNITY AND FUTURE

Social Impacts

Inclusion: Creating Tomorrow College graduates have a 100% employment success rate, significantly surpassing North Northamptonshire's average of 2.1% for SEN employment.

Accessibility: As a free-to-visit site with free parking, the museum has welcomed over 75,000 visitors since opening, making heritage accessible to all.

Wellbeing: Operation Phoenix participants' wellbeing improved from 3.75 to 7.75 out of 10 over one year.

Community: The Irchester Field School provides valuable hands-on archaeological experience for participants from all over the world.

Community Events: RomanFest is the largest free heritage event in Northamptonshire, providing a vibrant, accessible experience for the local community.

Education: Over 450 school classes (more than 15,000 children) have visited the estate since opening, with 100% of teachers indicating the programme engages children with their local heritage. The Learning Department was also awarded the prestigious Learning Outside the Classroom quality badge.

Economic Impacts

Employment: We sustain 24 full-time, 74 part-time/casual roles, and 2 full-time paid apprenticeships, contributing to the local job market.

Income Growth: The estate has seen a remarkable 288% increase in income over the last three years, with a plan to double current income by 2028.

Local Economy: Last year, 65.5% of our total expenditure was with Northamptonshire businesses, a figure we aim to increase to 85% by 2025/26.

Sustainability: Income generated from our commercial activity directly supports the estate's heritage and engagement work, ensuring long-term sustainability.

Investment: The estate was awarded £210,000 to secure its long-term sustainability and strategic growth.

Partnership Funding: The University of Leicester partnership secured £216,600 for pilot programmes and events, alongside £45,054 for locally relevant PhD research and community engagement.

Job Creation: Our partnerships provide a direct pathway to paid employment, as highlighted by Zec's permanent position within the catering team.

Environmental / Ecological Impacts

Conservation: The estate's work includes the careful management and conservation of the surrounding natural landscape, ensuring its long-term health and biodiversity.

Heritage Impacts

Research: The state-of-the-art Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre (ARC) has become one of the most successful in the country, attracting international researchers and solidifying the site's role as a centre for academic excellence.

Protection: The site protects and promotes 10,000 years of history, from the Mesolithic to the Roman period.

Accessibility: The museum's new interpretive displays and a rotating programme of pop-up exhibits give the public access to incredible archaeological objects.

Recognition: The pioneering University of Leicester partnership, which represents a significant investment of research and expertise, won a national Innovation in Public-Private Partnership award at the MJ Awards in 2025.

Award-Winning Partnership: The pioneering University of Leicester collaboration won a national Innovation in Public-Private Partnership award at the MJ Awards in 2025. This partnership also provides academic and professional support for over £5 million of North Northamptonshire Council heritage and cultural projects.

Grand Opening: The estate's grand opening was celebrated with a Royal Seal of Approval from HRH Princess Anne in 2022.

Looking Ahead: The Future of Culture Tourism & Heritage Services in North Northamptonshire

Our Ambition

- We envision a North Northamptonshire where culture, heritage, & tourism thrive together, igniting economic growth, fostering inclusivity, & nurturing a deep sense of pride in our shared legacy and in our communities.
- To celebrate the rich tapestry of our heritage, ignite a passion for culture, & invite visitors to experience the unique treasures that grace our area
- Our collaborative efforts with partners are geared towards revitalising the tourism economy through infrastructure enhancement & innovative marketing strategies, with the overarching goal of attracting investment & visitors.

2026 Onwards

- Kettering venue rebrand, business plan, mobilisation & opening Summer 2026
- Production of a North Northants Heritage Master Plan to include plans for the future of Kettering museum & for Corby Heritage Centre and all NN archiving facilities (NHLF bids & Towns Fund)
- Achieving museum accreditation for the ARC and Chester House

Looking Ahead: The Future Leisure Management in North Northamptonshire

- Growth and delivery of summer ARC/Chester House heritage engagement programme, including expanding the Irchester Field School;
- Delivering an options appraisal for the future governance of the Chester House Estate & potentially moving into a Cultural Trust model
- ACE funding to support establishment of new NN Cultural Consortium to drive delivery of the Cultural Strategy & lead work in the Creative Health space- working with partners on the Creative Health agenda within the wider Proactive Support and Integrated Neighbourhood Health model
- Continue to grow the commercial programme at Chester House including partnership with HMP Five Wells, Trapp'd Escape Rooms & a new Putt Pot Family interactive leisure space, maximising use of conferencing space & expansion of event & weddings programme;
- Continue detailed cataloguing of the archaeological archive at the ARC & start to get it online;
- Pride in Place programme mobilisation

Transformation Positives

Transitioning to a unitary authority is a journey, especially if you are delivering multi-million pound capital projects at the same time—patience is essential.

Be Positive, it takes time for the new Council to get the basics right..but with perseverance and teamwork, you will get there.

Hold true to your services, work to align them with corporate & System priorities

With vision, ambition & strong leadership you will thrive



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QUESTIONS



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CULTURE
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