


Agenda Item No:	8	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	7 November 2025	
Report Title:	FDC Endorsement of Plan for Neighbourhoods Regeneration Plan for Wisbech	

Cover sheet:

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet endorsement of the Wisbech Town Board Plan for Neighbourhoods Regeneration Plan, which has been developed and provisionally approved by the Wisbech Town Board. The Regeneration Plan forms the submission of the Town Board to government to unlock £20,000,000 of endowment style funding across the next ten years from 2026 onwards for revenue and capital projects in Wisbech.
- 1.2 FDC has representation on the board via its membership and also acts as the accountable body for the funding, monitoring defrayal and managing governance of the funds in line with procurement and finance principles of the Authority. FDC is responsible for submission of the document on behalf of the Town Board.
- 1.3 The Plan represents the evolution of the previous strategic framework for the Long-Term Plan for Towns, aligning with national priorities for regeneration and local place-making. There is also an expectation that following the submission, the scheme will be rebranded again in line with the new Pride in Place brand from government.
- 1.4 Cabinet is being asked, as a partner of the Town Board, to endorse the Plan for submission to government by 28 November 2025, in accordance with the requirements of the Plan for Neighbourhood programme.
- 1.5 The Plan includes a draft 4-year investment plan, outlining proposed projects for delivery. This strategy remains flexible to accommodate changing local circumstances and priorities and projects can change as The Board move through the ten year delivery phase.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 The Pride in Place programme is a government initiative aimed at revitalising towns through targeted investment in infrastructure, public realm, community assets, and economic development.
- 2.2 The Wisbech Town Board has led the development of the Regeneration Plan, drawing upon local knowledge, previous consultations and ongoing planned consultation. This Regeneration Plan has been aligned with the national priorities for the Plan for Neighbourhoods programme.
- 2.3 Endorsement by Cabinet is required to demonstrate local authority support and partnership commitment, which is a prerequisite for submission to government.

- 2.4 The document has been endorsed by the Local MP which is also a prerequisite for submission.

3 Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 3.1 Endorses the Wisbech Town Board Pride in Place Regeneration Plan for submission to government by 28 November 2025.
- 3.2 Delegate authority to the High Street Project Manager, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder based upon recommendations of the Town Board, to make any necessary amendments to the Plan prior to submission, should local circumstances or ongoing consultation outcomes change.
- 3.3 Authorises officers to enter into all relevant legal and financial arrangements to bring the Plan into effect, subject to future Cabinet/Officer approvals as required.

Wards Affected	Wisbech Wards
Forward Plan Reference	KEY/28AUG25/01
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Samantha Hoy - Portfolio Holder for Town Board
Report Originator(s)	Matt Wright, Highstreets Programme Manager Simon Machen, Corporate Growth and Regeneration Advisor
Contact Officer(s)	Matt Wright

Background Papers	<p>Plan For Neighbourhoods Prospectus</p> <p>Wisbech Neighbourhood Board Regeneration Plan and 4 Year Investment Plan</p> <p>2023 Highstreets Task Force report - High Streets Task Force report 2023.pdf</p> <p>I Love Wisbech Report 2019 - Microsoft Word - Wisbech Public Engagement Summary Final Draft</p> <p>Wisbech Growing Fenland report - Wisbech Growing Fenland report.pdf</p> <p>Wisbech 2020 Vision - Wisbech 2020 Vision - Fenland District Council</p> <p>Wisbech Zencity Consultation 2025 - Plan for Neighbourhoods survey July 2025.pdf</p>
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Report:

1 BACKGROUND AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

- 1.1 The Plan for Neighbourhoods programme is designed to support towns in delivering regeneration that reflects local priorities in line with Government priority outcome areas. The fund focuses on 3 key outcome areas:

1. Thriving Places

This objective focuses on physical regeneration and placemaking. It includes:

Revitalising high streets and public spaces to make them more attractive, accessible, and functional.

Improving the safety and security of the town and the perception of its residents.

Improving local infrastructure, such as transport links, parks, and community facilities.

Encouraging investment in underused or derelict land and buildings.

Supporting sustainable development that aligns with local character and needs.

2. Stronger Communities

This objective is about social infrastructure and community resilience. It aims to:

Strengthen local networks and support services (e.g. youth centres, libraries, community hubs, leisure centres).

Support voluntary and community sector organisations to deliver services and activities.

Foster social cohesion by encouraging collaboration between residents, businesses, and service providers.

3. Taking Back Control

This objective is about local empowerment and governance. It includes:

Establishing Neighbourhood Boards that include residents, businesses, and local leaders.

Giving communities decision-making power over how regeneration funding is spent.

- 1.2 The Regeneration Plan aims to address these above objectives through a range of projects across the next decade, with initial projects (contained within the 4-year investment plan) principally aimed at physical and security-based capital and revenue-based investments.
- 1.3 Officers can confirm that the project contained within the 4-year investment plan are all covered within the government's "on menu" interventions and do not require further business cases, meaning in principal that they align with these objectives.
- 1.4 The 4-year investment plan contained within the Regeneration Plan outlines a road map programme for the initial delivery of circa £8,000,000 of spend across a range of interventions.
- 1.5 Submission of the endorsed Plan to government by 28 November 2025 is required to secure funding and support for implementation.

2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Endorsing the Plan demonstrates the Council's commitment to partnership working and local regeneration, aligning with corporate priorities around economic growth, community wellbeing, and sustainable development.
- 2.2 The Council, as a partner and accountable body responsible for submission is required to endorse the plan, ahead of submission.

3 CONSULTATION

- 3.1 Consultation on the endorsement of the Regeneration Plan has been made with the relevant FDC stakeholders including the Portfolio holder for the Wisbech Town Board whom has been sighted on the document.
- 3.2 Several rounds of public consultation over the past several years have been undertaken to inform the report.
- 3.3 These include:
 - Love Wisbech Report 2019
 - Wisbech Growing Fenland report
 - Wisbech 2020 Vision
 - Wisbech Zencity Consultation 2025

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Not endorsing the Plan would risk losing access to government funding and undermine the Council's role as a key partner in local regeneration and as a partner of the Town Board. This option is not recommended.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Legal Implications

- 5.2 Fenland District Council's role is to support and enable Wisbech Town Board to develop and deliver the plan.

The Town Board itself is recognised as the "decision-making forum," as stated in the [Government guidance](#).

It is the district council's responsibility to:

- work closely with Wisbech Town Board to develop and embed appropriate processes and controls for funding
- develop mechanisms that will empower it in realising its role and driving forward a community-led vision for change
- facilitate the development of plans and delivery of them while recognising the role of the Neighbourhood Board as decision-making forum.
- The district council is the accountable body for the funds with responsibility for compliance with legal responsibilities and ensuring the public funds are distributed fairly and effectively according to accepted principles that promote trust and good governance.
- The role of accountable body also ensures that funds are spent transparently and in line with procurement regulations. Fenland District Council ensures that a governance process is documented for each decision actioned by the town board.

5.3 Financial Implications

- 5.4 The General Fund Budget Estimates and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Report, agreed by Cabinet and Council in February, projects a financial shortfall for 2025/26 of £1.432m increasing year on year amounting to around £3.4m by 2027/28.
- 5.5 Although there are currently many uncertainties regarding the budget for 2025/26 and the MTFS, there remains a significant structural deficit which the Council will need to address.

5.6 Equality Implications

N/A – Equality considerations will be addressed at project level during implementation.

6 APPENDICES

- A) Plan for Neighbourhoods Prospectus
- B) Wisbech Neighbourhood Board Regeneration Plan and 4 Year Investment Plan
- C) 2023 Highstreets Task Force report
- D) I Love Wisbech Report 2019
- E) Wisbech Growing Fenland report
- F) Wisbech Zencity Consultation 2025
- G) Endorsement from MP's Office



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Guidance

Plan for Neighbourhoods: prospectus

Updated 16 June 2025

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Fund summary

Purpose: A £1.5 billion programme to invest in 75 areas over the next decade – a long-term strategy to fix the foundations of those places most left behind.

Type of fund: Un-competed.

Eligibility: [75 local authorities and communities](#) across the UK.

Funding available: Up to £20 million for each place over a 10-year period.

Important dates:

22 April 2025: Neighbourhood Boards confirm finalised membership and any proposals to alter their place boundaries.

Spring 2025 to winter 2025: Neighbourhood Boards submit their Regeneration Plan to MHCLG for assessment and approval.

From April 2026: Programme delivery funding released to local authorities, and delivery phase begins.

Foreword from the Deputy Prime Minister

Across the country this government is delivering our Plan for Change with a relentless focus on economic growth to raise living standards. The impact of 14 years of decline has not been felt equally across the country with too many neighbourhoods starved of the investment and reform they deserve. The result has been worsening deprivation, making the path to good growth all the more difficult in those places. Through the new Plan for Neighbourhoods, we are laying the foundations to make sure that nowhere is left behind in this decade of national renewal, and that everywhere has a role to play in our national prosperity.

Our country has all the raw ingredients to ignite growth. There's untapped talent and potential in every town, city, village and estate. But we also have people without enough to get by, and places and public services which have

been hollowed out. Opportunities are not shared out evenly and it's tough to make the most of the ones that are there. Barriers to better living standards have been put up, not taken down. People feel divided and disempowered, perceptions which are made worse by deprivation that for too long has been tackled with sticking plaster politics.

Communities have come up with their own grass-roots solutions. Opening foodbanks and warm-banks, shopping local to back high street jobs, and raising support through trade unions, charities and civil society bodies. Building strong connections so people have each other to rely on when times get tough. Heartening and impressive though these efforts are, the government has been missing in action for 14 years, leaving communities left behind and forgotten, left to fend for themselves. That's why this new government's driving purpose is delivering growth and raising living standards everywhere. This is why we are now investing up to £1.5 billion through this programme.

Our new Plan for Neighbourhoods is part of this government's plan to ensure that nowhere is left behind. It will help revitalise local areas and fight deprivation at root cause by zeroing in on 3 goals: thriving places, stronger communities, and taking back control.

No more sticking plasters; no more short-term fixes – rather, a 10-year plan that unlocks the potential of the places people call home. John Prescott's New Deal for Communities delivered transformational change, providing the stability of long-term funding, backed by the support of central government, to empower local people to take ownership for driving the renewal of their neighbourhood. Our Plan for Neighbourhoods takes this as inspiration, learning the lessons to tackle the opportunities and challenges presented to us today. It goes hand in hand with everything this government is delivering to rebuild our country: building new, safer social housing for the future, making work pay and ending the 'Whitehall knows best' approach by empowering local leaders to strengthen communities.

We know what works. Local change is best driven by those with the biggest stake. The Burnley Together project has seen a community grocer, cookery school and book exchange open in the former Lancashire mill town. In Hendon, the 'Back on the Map' residents' group has spent 10 years buying and refurbishing 120 of Sunderland's run-down homes and shops, alongside a package of community services to tackle poverty. In Yorkshire, the Live Well Wakefield group has helped 93% of clients improve health outcomes through early interventions and social prescribing.

Together, this government will work in partnership with people on the ground and local authorities to deliver in every corner of the country.

Introduction

The government is committed to rebuilding the UK and driving growth everywhere. The renewal required is more than just physical infrastructure, but also about repairing fractured communities, bringing people back together and ensuring people see a visible improvement in their communities. This is essential for restoring trust in government and sense of pride in place, ensuring people can meet their full potential. The evidence is clear that those [places with stronger social capital have higher educational attainment](https://demos.co.uk/research/social-capital-2025-the-hidden-wealth-of-nations/) (<https://demos.co.uk/research/social-capital-2025-the-hidden-wealth-of-nations/>), lower crime and faster economic growth.

To fix the foundations of those places most left behind, we need a long-term strategy to regenerate, underpinned by plans that address demographic shifts and cultural change.

No one knows the priorities of the community better than those who live and work there, which is why our Plan for Neighbourhoods will empower local people to take back control of their future with a long-term, flexible funding pot of up to £20 million of funding and support over the next 10 years.

Eligible local authorities

75 places across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have been selected to receive funding through this programme via 2 published methodologies: [methodology for first tranche](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/long-term-plan-for-towns-towns-selection-methodology-note) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/long-term-plan-for-towns-towns-selection-methodology-note>) and [methodology for second tranche](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/extension-to-long-term-plan-for-towns-place-selection-methodology) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/extension-to-long-term-plan-for-towns-place-selection-methodology>). The metrics used for selection included:

- indices of multiple deprivation
- population size
- healthy life expectancy
- Gross Value Added per hour worked

- skill level (NVQ level 3+ in England and Wales and above SCQF level 4+ in Scotland) – this metric was not used in Northern Ireland

The following list includes eligible local authorities for the Plan for Neighbourhoods, ordered alphabetically. The region or county is determined by [International Territorial Levels \(ITLs\) 1 and 2](https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/ukgeographies/eurostat) (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/ukgeographies/eurostat>).

Place	Local authority	Region or county
Accrington	Hyndburn Borough Council	North West
Arbroath	Angus Council	Eastern Scotland
Ashton-under-Lyne	Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council	North West
Barnsley	Barnsley Council	Yorkshire and The Humber
Barry (Vale of Glamorgan)	Vale of Glamorgan Council	South East Wales
Bedworth	Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council	West Midlands
Bexhill-on-Sea	Rother District Council	South East
Bilston (Wolverhampton)	City Of Wolverhampton Council	West Midlands
Blyth (Northumberland)	Northumberland County Council	North East
Boston	Boston Borough Council	East Midlands
Burnley	Burnley Council	North West
Canvey Island	Castle Point Borough Council	East
Carlton	Gedling Borough Council	East Midlands
Castleford	Wakefield Council	Yorkshire and The Humber

Place	Local authority	Region or county
Chadderton	Oldham Council	North West
Chesterfield	Chesterfield Borough Council	East Midlands
Clacton-on-Sea	Tendring District Council	East
Clifton (Nottingham)	Nottingham City Council	East Midlands
Clydebank	West Dunbartonshire Council	West Central Scotland
Coatbridge	North Lanarkshire Council	West Central Scotland
Coleraine	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	Northern Ireland
Cwmbrân	Torfaen County Borough Council	South East Wales
Darlaston	Walsall Council	West Midlands
Darlington	Darlington Borough Council	North East
Darwen	Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council	North West
Derry~Londonderry	Derry City and Strabane District Council	Northern Ireland
Dewsbury	Kirklees Council	Yorkshire and The Humber
Doncaster	City of Doncaster Council	Yorkshire and The Humber
Dudley (Dudley)	Dudley Council	West Midlands
Dumfries	Dumfries and Galloway Council	Southern Scotland
Eastbourne	Eastbourne Council	South East

Place	Local authority	Region or county
Elgin	Moray Council	Highlands and Islands
Eston	Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council	North East
Farnworth	Bolton Council	North West
Great Yarmouth	Great Yarmouth Borough Council	East
Greenock	Inverclyde Council	West Central Scotland
Grimsby	North East Lincolnshire Council	Yorkshire and The Humber
Harlow	Harlow Council	East
Hartlepool	Hartlepool Borough Council	North East
Hastings	Hastings Borough Council	South East
Heywood	Rochdale Borough Council	North West
Irvine	North Ayrshire Council	Southern Scotland
Jarrow	South Tyneside Council	North East
Keighley	Bradford Council	Yorkshire and The Humber
Kilmarnock	East Ayrshire Council	Southern Scotland
King's Lynn	Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk	East
Kirkby	Knowsley Council	North West
Kirkby-in-Ashfield	Ashfield District Council	East Midlands

Place	Local authority	Region or county
Leigh (Wigan)	Wigan Council	North West
Mansfield	Mansfield District Council	East Midlands
Merthyr Tydfil	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	South East Wales
Nelson (Pendle)	Pendle Borough Council	North West
Newark-on-Trent	Newark and Sherwood District Council	East Midlands
Newton-le-Willows	St Helens Borough Council	North West
Orkney Islands (Kirkwall)	Orkney Islands Council	Highlands and Islands
Peterhead	Aberdeenshire Council	North Eastern Scotland
Ramsgate	Thanet District Council	South East
Rawtenstall	Rossendale Borough Council	North West
Rhyl	Denbighshire County Council	North Wales
Rotherham	Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council	Yorkshire and The Humber
Royal Sutton Coldfield	Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council	West Midlands
Runcorn	Halton Borough Council	North West
Ryde	Isle of Wight Council	South East
Scarborough	North Yorkshire Council	Yorkshire and The Humber
Scunthorpe	North Lincolnshire Council	Yorkshire and The Humber

Place	Local authority	Region or county
Skegness	East Lindsey District Council	East Midlands
Smethwick	Sandwell Council	West Midlands
Spalding	South Holland District Council	East Midlands
Spennymoor	Durham County Council	North East
Thetford	Breckland Council	East
Torquay	Torbay Council	South West
Washington	Sunderland City Council	North East
Wisbech	Fenland District Council	East
Worksop	Bassetlaw District Council	East Midlands
Wrexham	Wrexham County Borough Council	North Wales

Our approach

The Plan for Neighbourhoods will drive growth over the long-term, a clean break from the competitive pots and sticking plaster cash of the past. The programme provides a new blueprint to bring communities together, allocating funding to improve living standards and give people in the 75 recipient locations more of a stake in their future.

To deliver this, the government will support the establishment of new Neighbourhood Boards, putting power in the hands of local people to address deprivation and regenerate their local area. Each board will, in partnership with their local authority, develop a 'Regeneration Plan', setting out its vision for the next decade alongside a more detailed 'Investment Plan' for the first 4 years of the programme.

This is about more than places simply having a plan, it is backed up by serious investment to turn that plan into action: prioritising funding into some of our

most left-behind communities to make everyday changes to build a fairer future for everyone. Many of those anchor institutions that tie communities together, like community centres, youth clubs, sports grounds and cultural venues, are gone. This programme gives communities the opportunity to bring those back to drive social capital and kickstart growth. We have an economy and society that works for some and not others. 49 of the 58 English towns are in the top 20% most deprived built up areas in the country. This programme focusses on those places that have been left behind for too long, which deserve to feel the benefits of investment in their future.

Across the UK, 53% of people feel it is important they can influence decisions affecting their local area, but just 27% feel able to do so. The number of adults involved in civic participation has fallen from 41% in 2020 to 34% in 2022, with those from poorest backgrounds and places the least likely to participate. This programme seeks to change that, giving people control over their local area, and confidence that their needs are being met.

Fostering stronger, more well-connected communities, where people trust each other and feel a common identity improves resilience, cohesion and safety, tackling economic and social marginalisation. This is true at an individual level and for a community as a whole, [research](https://demos.co.uk/research/social-capital-2025-the-hidden-wealth-of-nations/) (<https://demos.co.uk/research/social-capital-2025-the-hidden-wealth-of-nations/>) has shown that improved social connections will improve economic outcomes for individual children and reduce crime across a community. [Research](https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/publications/valuing-wealth-building-prosperity/) (<https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/publications/valuing-wealth-building-prosperity/>) is clear that trust in communities and institutions are both the cause and result of high productivity and higher wellbeing. By establishing good governance and greater social trust, this programme could trigger a virtuous feedback loop of higher productivity. A 10% increase in social trust can lead to up to 1.5% increase in productivity.

We need thriving places that support strong, inclusive, local growth, putting money into working people's pocket. This programme will aim to raise living standards, reduce social exclusion, spread opportunities for young people, improve health and wellbeing, build stronger and more cohesive communities and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in some of the most left-behind areas in the country.

We will provide communities with the resources and capacity to deliver on this, to offer support where it is needed and shift central government's role from one of delivery management to delivery support. Experience suggests more can be achieved when government takes a more proactive, supporting role and further information on this will be provided shortly. This will also reduce the need for towns to procure support individually and from third parties,

supporting the government's commitment to curb public sector use of consultants.

Learning from previous programmes

For the last 60 years, successive governments have tried to tackle community tensions and inequalities and improve outcomes in areas facing the biggest challenges.

The programmes have often been overly centralised, not recognising the unique approach needed by each place, and have not addressed how to bring people together, counter deprivation and support people to regenerate their local area. Too often decisions taken have driven a wedge between people and places. This has resulted in growing discontent with top-down decision-making that is out of touch with local priorities.

Whilst recent programmes such as Towns Deals and the Towns Fund sought to support communities and put local people at the centre of decision-making, [polling \(https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-202324-annual-publication/community-life-survey-202324-background-and-headline-findings#headline-findings\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-202324-annual-publication/community-life-survey-202324-background-and-headline-findings#headline-findings) shows that only 11% of people believe their area has got better to live in over the last 2 years, and 29% say that it has got worse. People feel like there are more tensions between immigrants and ethnic groups in society now, than in recent years. It is therefore essential that this programme draws lessons from what worked best in these previous programmes.

The New Deal for Communities, launched in 1998 across 39 locations around England and which later became part of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, was designed to close the gaps between acutely deprived areas and the rest of the country, focusing on 3 'place' related outcomes and 3 'people' related outcomes.

The 'place' related outcomes included:

- crime
- community
- housing and the physical environment

Whilst the 'people' related outcomes focussed on:

- education

- health
- worklessness

The independent evaluation of the New Deal for Communities

<https://extra.shu.ac.uk/ndc/downloads/general/A%20final%20assessment.pdf>) found that 'in many respects, these neighbourhoods [were] transformed' over the 10 years the programme ran and its successes are still being felt today. Between 2002 and 2008, communities in receipt of funding saw improvement in 32 out of 36 core indicators, including crime reduction, education and health, and a closing of the gap with the rest of the country. In some areas, the value for money for the programme was rated at 5 times higher than the government's investment.

There are 3 core pillars of the New Deal for Communities that contributed to its success.

1. Community empowerment and collaboration:

By encouraging local residents to take an active role in the decision-making in their communities, the scheme fostered improved social capital in each place. Bringing together local people with the government agencies, businesses and organisations that deliver change fostered relationships that lasted beyond the scheme's lifetime.

2. Long-termism:

By delivering funding over a 10-year period, the programme ensured that communities could focus on long-term solutions that built a pipeline of jobs and sustained change to local areas, rather than quick fixes. The length of the programme supported entrenched improvement in communities' capacity and capability to advocate for themselves and drive change. Beyond certainty over funding, this also enabled a long-term shared vision for place, helping to maximise strategic alignment and avoid fragmented investments both within this programme and other sources.

3. Holistic outcomes:

By taking an outcome-based approach, the programme enabled each place to address problems holistically. Communities could find solutions that addressed multiple themes: housing, education, health and employment.

Our Plan for Neighbourhoods emulates and builds on these principles of the New Deal for Communities.

Funding profile

Each community will receive funding and support totalling up to £20 million.
The funding will be split 75% capital and 25% revenue, to the following profile:

Grant type	2025 to 2026	2026 to 2027	2027 to 2028	2028 to 2029	2029 to 2030	2030 to 2031	2031 to 2032	2032 to 2033	2033 to 2034
Total revenue funding	200	382	256	432	432	432	432	437	437
Revenue funding (capacity)	200	150	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Revenue funding (grants)	-	232	256	432	432	432	432	437	437
Capital funding (grants)	-	360	1,736	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605
Total		19,537							

Note: For revenue capacity, £250,000 was provided over the 2023 to 2024 and 2024 to 2025 financial years.

Delivery funding will be released from the beginning of the 2026 to 2027 financial year, affording communities the time and space to embed the necessary governance structures, grow their presence within the local area and build local capacity and capability to be ready to hit the ground running. To facilitate this, an additional £200,000 of capacity funding will be released at the start of the 2025 to 2026 financial year to all recipient local authorities. This builds on the previous £250,000 grants provided to local authorities to establish Neighbourhood Boards and begin community engagement as part of the previous administration's Long-Term Plan for Towns programme.

Local authorities should consult Neighbourhood Boards on their preference for using this money, which could include:

- establishing and running the Neighbourhood Board, including any process to establish the board as a charity, community interest company, or other

bottom-up organisational model, to sustain long-term investment

- performing community engagement, which could include passporting money directly to voluntary and community sector groups to assist with engagement
- developing Regeneration Plans
- securing advice and expertise for Neighbourhood Boards for the technical elements of plan development and delivery, noting that support is available from the department and the guidance to curb public sector use of consultants
- ensuring capital and infrastructure interventions can hit the ground running, for example, by kickstarting the planning application process, securing architectural plans and obtaining legal advice, or any other activity that councils and boards consider will progress their plans

The accompanying [governance and boundary guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-neighbourhood-boards-and-place-boundaries/plan-for-neighbourhoods-governance-and-boundary-guidance) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-neighbourhood-boards-and-place-boundaries/plan-for-neighbourhoods-governance-and-boundary-guidance>) sets out more detail on the funding and spending rules – and additional information will follow in supplementary guidance to be published shortly. Communities are granted flexibilities with the spend, including the ability to borrow against what is a guaranteed revenue stream and roll underspends into later years of the programme.

Neighbourhood Boards should consider how best to use their funding to crowd in other investment and match funding, from other private and public sources.

We will confirm in due course detail of the additional support provided by MHCLG in the development and delivery of plans.

Timeline

February to April 2025:

- Neighbourhood Boards and local authorities receive a tailored data pack detailing metrics across the 3 strategic objectives, and polling on local sentiment around investment priorities for their area

- Neighbourhood Boards to confirm finalised membership and any proposals to alter the 'default' area boundary for spending in their community to MHCLG by Tuesday 22 April 2025

Spring 2025:

- MHCLG to review membership and boundary proposals and confirm to places whether acceptable
- Further guidance on fund delivery, tailored policy toolkits for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, Regeneration Plan submission, assessment and approval to be published
- MHCLG issues 2025 to 2026 capacity funding payment to all places

Spring 2025 to winter 2025:

- Neighbourhood Boards submit their Regeneration Plan to MHCLG for assessment and approval

From April 2026:

- First programme delivery funding payment to be made to lead local authorities, commencement of delivery phase
- MHCLG issues 2026 to 2027 capacity funding payment to all places

Fund objectives

The Plan for Neighbourhoods has at its core a partnership between the Neighbourhood Board and local government, supported by the UK Government. This partnership will drive growth by improving the physical and social infrastructure of their community and deliver tangible improvements to the everyday lives of these communities. To deliver the greatest impact, we

encourage boards to focus the funding and interventions into those neighbourhoods and communities within their boundaries that have the greatest need.

The board, working with the local authority, is responsible for producing a 10-year Regeneration Plan for their area, setting out the activity that will be pursued to achieve the 3 strategic objectives of this programme:

- thriving places
- stronger communities
- taking back control

By making progress on each of these objectives, local areas will drive forward the government's long-term missions.

Thriving places

People take immense pride in their local areas but too many of our high streets and estates have become neglected and left behind. Town centres and neighbourhoods must evolve and regenerate to better reflect the needs and habits of their community, and residents should have a greater say in how they're designed.

Every part of the UK deserves to have vibrant neighbourhoods and communities with busy high streets, a good range of local amenities, and high-quality physical infrastructure.

We also want the UK to be a country with world-class public services that work for everyone from the NHS and social care to schools, children's and youth services.

Take healthcare for example. The most disadvantaged places are most likely to experience the worst health outcomes – according to the Office for National Statistics in 2018 to 2020, [women in the most deprived areas of England can expect to live 20 years fewer in good health compared to women in the least deprived areas](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthinequalities/bulletins/healthstatelifeexpectanciesbyindexofmultipledeprivationimd/2018to2020#:~:text=In%202018%20to%202020%2C%20male,deprived%20areas%20(70.7%20years).) ([https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthinequalities/bulletins/healthstatelifeexpectanciesbyindexofmultipledeprivationimd/2018to2020#:~:text=In%202018%20to%202020%2C%20male,deprived%20areas%20\(70.7%20years\).](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthinequalities/bulletins/healthstatelifeexpectanciesbyindexofmultipledeprivationimd/2018to2020#:~:text=In%202018%20to%202020%2C%20male,deprived%20areas%20(70.7%20years).)).

Places should be able to design public services that are accessible, responsive, and tailored to local need. Investing in our young people's futures and in preventative measures now will ease pressure on services over the longer-term.

Case study: integration and co-location of health services

The Community Diagnostic Centre at The Glass Works in Barnsley, supported by Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council in partnership with Barnsley, the NHS and the Integrated Care Board, has significantly enhanced healthcare accessibility while contributing to the towns economic and social regeneration.

Opened in 2022, the centre has delivered over 100,000 diagnostic appointments, reducing waiting times for tests and screenings and cutting the backlog of appointments.

Strategically located in the town centre, it exemplifies a 'health on the high street approach', integrating healthcare into community spaces to improve access and reduce inequalities. Its proximity to public transport has minimised missed appointments, leading to a 22% increase in attendance for mammograms and a 24% reduction in 'did not attend' rates. By using retail units, the initiative aligns with national recommendations to use high street spaces for health-promoting services, attracting an additional 55,000 visits to the town centre, supporting local businesses.

This is an example for public sector innovation and partnership driving improved health outcomes and economic growth, improving patient care and fostering a greater sense of community.

Stronger communities

Resilience in some of the most disadvantaged communities has been eroded over time, and at its most extreme has opened up the space for the type of disengagement and division that fuelled the violent disorder seen during summer 2024. Recently [polling \(https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/three-four-say-britain-divided-public-say-problems-are-less-serious-than-us\)](https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/three-four-say-britain-divided-public-say-problems-are-less-serious-than-us) has found that 76% of Britons believe 'the UK feels divided' and fewer than half of Britons think of themselves as a member of a community, or part of a local group. We want to empower boards to tackle the root causes, rebuild relationships, and restore a

collective sense of belonging to their community, bringing people together so they can feel proud of their area and safe in their neighbourhood.

Tackling this division will have a direct, positive impact on growth. Improving social capital is a virtuous circle across many areas of public life. For example, where parents know each other, children skipping school is noticed and addressed more often, improving education outcomes and future earning potential. If the UK improved social trust to Nordic levels (an increase of around 30%), [research \(https://demos.co.uk/research/social-capital-2025-the-hidden-wealth-of-nations/\)](https://demos.co.uk/research/social-capital-2025-the-hidden-wealth-of-nations/) shows this could generate growth of £100 billion a year.

Case study: a community centre in Sheffield

Zest is a community centre located in Upperthorpe, Sheffield, where people can access leisure and swimming facilities, a volunteer-led library with computers, work and training advice, health and wellbeing services, early years services and youth clubs. The non-leisure facilities are largely free at the point of use, with the option to make 'pay-what-you-can' donations for some services, for example, meals at the Foodworks café, which served 6,000 hot meals last year.

Beyond facilities, Zest also delivers community outreach, support and guidance services, running a support line where residents can receive personalised information and guidance, either in person or over the phone, alongside employment advice, support for vulnerable adults and those with mental health problems and access to foodbank vouchers.

The holiday activities and food (HAF) project, one of Zest's programmes, supported holiday activities but in the Malin Bridge and Loxley area only 30% of eligible children were attending. By partnering with the local school and building on existing trust networks, they increased attendance by 400%, including families that were previously disengaged from school. This highlights the power of trust and collaboration in strengthening community ties.

Between 2023 and 2024, Zest's health and well-being services supported over 1,300 people, and their youth programmes engaged 213 young people, helping them build confidence and life skills. With a 50% increase in volunteering last year, Zest is helping to bridge the gap between the community and wider services, fostering a sense of belonging and relieving pressures on external resources to create a more cohesive and resilient community.

Taking back control

Talent is spread equally but opportunity is not. People want to be empowered and in control of their lives, to have a say over the future of their community. But this can feel a distant prospect when you are living payslip to payslip or stuck on a waiting list. The life chances of a child born in the North East today should not be so drastically different as to someone born in London.

We want to make sure children have the best start in life and that adults can live the life they want to. Whether that's accessing the skills required for emerging job markets as we transition to net zero or supporting the thousands of would-be entrepreneurs through their first steps into self-employment.

We will empower people to enter the workplace, workers to progress, and businesses to grow. This will in turn help kickstart local economic growth.

Empowered people will also have more of a say in how their local area is shaped, a central component of this programme and this government's vision for communities.

Case study: tackling employment challenges in Grimsby

In Grimsby, a community hub called Centre4 established the Ethical Recruitment Agency to address employment challenges in North East Lincolnshire.

They invest in training, temporary and permanent job placements, and supporting community initiatives aimed at local residents who struggle to find work through traditional means. This not only strengthens the local economy but also promotes social cohesion. Any profits are reinvested into enhancing local skills and personal development, alongside funding various community projects. As a not-for-profit organisation, the Ethical Recruitment Agency ensures that businesses benefit from dedicated and engaged staff through a tailored recruitment approach.

Its "Proud to Care" programme specifically helps people access opportunities in the care sector throughout North East Lincolnshire, providing practical support throughout the recruitment process. To ease the financial and logistical burden on employers, the agency covers the costs associated with recruitment and training and temporarily subsidises wages for the first 12 weeks of employment. This support system alleviates some of the challenges faced by local businesses, while simultaneously fostering workforce development within the community.

Case study: Coleraine Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership, Northern Ireland

In Coleraine, the Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership (NRP) Board are working to address the inequalities that result from deprivation. It does so by making a long-term commitment to communities, working together to jointly identify the best means to resolve the underlying causes of poverty. The Partnership draws members from local communities, voluntary groups, elected representatives, businesses, and public sector organisations. One project delivered by the NRP was the West Bann Regeneration project. This brings together and coordinate services that meet health, education and training needs in the local community. An early years programme, including creches, provides families with the support they need to engage with other services or employment. The project also provided low-cost business units and facilities for the use of the community. By bringing different services, the project better allows West Bann residents to pursue different opportunities.

Our Plan for Neighbourhoods is pursuing a broader set of strategic objectives than seen in the previous administration's Long-Term Plan for Towns. We want to empower boards to think about the challenges and opportunities their communities face in a more holistic way, learning lessons from the New Deal for Communities, with the scope to invest across a wider range of policy areas without needing to tie their activity back to just one rigid investment 'theme.'

Neighbourhood Boards

Neighbourhood Boards put local people at the centre of defining their town's future, with responsibility for developing their Regeneration Plan – in partnership with the local authority - to deliver the strategic objectives of the programme. They should bring together residents, local businesses, grassroots campaigners, workplace representatives, faith, and community leaders and those with a deep connection to their area. In consultation with their community, the board should generate a vision for the future of their area and set out a pathway to deliver that over the course of the 10-year programme (and beyond), considering opportunities to attract and combine new and existing private, public, and philanthropic funding streams.

We know that many communities will have existing board and governance structures already in place, most obviously 'Town Boards' established to deliver the previous administration's Long-Term Plan for Towns programme. Significant work went into setting these up, appointing independent chairs and

curating an appropriate membership of engaged and involved local stakeholders. We are clear that we do not want to undo work already undertaken.

All 75 boards must [confirm their proposed chair, membership and boundary](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-neighbourhood-boards-and-place-boundaries/plan-for-neighbourhoods-governance-and-boundary-guidance#confirm) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-neighbourhood-boards-and-place-boundaries/plan-for-neighbourhoods-governance-and-boundary-guidance#confirm>) by 23:59pm on 22 April 2025.

The accompanying [governance and boundary guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-neighbourhood-boards-and-place-boundaries/plan-for-neighbourhoods-governance-and-boundary-guidance) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-neighbourhood-boards-and-place-boundaries/plan-for-neighbourhoods-governance-and-boundary-guidance>) focuses on:

- accountable bodies and Neighbourhood Board roles and responsibilities
- governance structure requirements for Neighbourhood Boards
- the process and timelines to confirm their Neighbourhood Board arrangements and boundary to MHCLG
- geographical boundaries for places in receipt of funding
- the associated MHCLG review and approval process

Neighbourhood boards in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

The government has also committed to resetting relations with the devolved governments and close collaboration within communities and with wider government will make boards stronger and more effective.

In Scotland, Neighbourhood Boards should consider the policy objectives of the Scottish Government's [Regeneration Strategy](https://www.gov.scot/publications/achieving-sustainable-future-regeneration-strategy/documents/) (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/achieving-sustainable-future-regeneration-strategy/documents/>), which sets out Scotland's commitment to support the regeneration of the most disadvantaged urban and fragile rural communities and how the interventions delivered can complement Scotland's Town Centre First Principle and Town Centre Action Plan. We recommend that Neighbourhood Boards have early conversations with their respective MHCLG contact and the Scottish Government Regeneration Unit to consider opportunities to align objectives and maximise funding opportunities.

In Wales, boards should consider how their Regeneration Plan interplays with the objectives of the Welsh Government's Programme for Government, The Well-being of Future Generations, the Transforming Towns programme, the Future Wales planning framework, and other relevant programmes and strategies.

In Northern Ireland, boards should consider how their Regeneration Plan interplays with the objectives of the Northern Ireland Executive's [Programme for Government \(https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/publications/programme-government-2024-2027-our-plan-doing-what-matters-most-documents\)](https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/publications/programme-government-2024-2027-our-plan-doing-what-matters-most-documents), alongside other existing strategies and local development plans such as Council Community Plans and Local Development Plans.

Regeneration Plans

Places can now submit their Regeneration Plan (<https://apply.access-funding.communities.gov.uk/funding-round/pfn/rp>) to MHCLG. The deadline for submitting plans is 28 November 2025 at midday.

Read the [full guidance on Regeneration Plans \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-regeneration-plan-guidance\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-regeneration-plan-guidance), including a 10-year vision content checklist and information about how places can submit their plan.

Neighbourhood Boards must work with local people and the local authority to draft a Regeneration Plan. We know the challenges in places vary, and that it is the people living and working in these areas who are best placed to identify these challenges and inform the solutions. Boards should work in partnership with their respective local authority and, if relevant, ensure their Mayoral Combined Authority have been consulted on the plan.

The plan should outline the community's overarching vision for change over the next decade to deliver the strategic objectives of the programme, developed through grassroots engagement to reflect local people's priorities.

As part of the Regeneration Plan, boards will need to provide a more detailed investment plan for the first 4-year investment period cycle, which will include the interventions the board would like to pursue over the period and how that activity delivers across the 3 strategic objectives of the programme.

We know places have worked hard to engage their communities and develop their 'Long-Term Plan' for the previous administration's Long-Term Plan for Towns. That progress is not for nothing and should not be undone, nor should places undo their governance arrangements. Communities should feel empowered to build and adapt their existing plans - our reforms seek to build on and improve the previous programme with a new set of strategic objectives that are aligned to this government's plan to kickstart growth, to be delivered by a broader range of policy interventions. We believe this will give communities greater flexibility as to how and what they can deliver, without ripping up what has already been done.

Neighbourhood Boards will want the opportunity to iterate their proposals in response to community feedback, and establishing good governance and trust within the community takes time to build. Rebuilding capability and confidence within communities that decades of inequality, austerity and deprivation have eroded will not happen overnight. A core [learning](https://extra.shu.ac.uk/ndc/downloads/general/A%20final%20assessment.pdf) (<https://extra.shu.ac.uk/ndc/downloads/general/A%20final%20assessment.pdf>) from the New Deal for Communities programme was importance of including a 'year-zero' in all regeneration schemes, to ensure better outcomes at the end of a decade of investment. This means setting aside time to ensure that the foundations of the programme are secure, including employing the right people, selecting effective management systems, and establishing processes for community involvement.

That is why we have confirmed a further capacity payment of £200,000 in the 2025 to 2026 financial year. Recognising the differing levels of local capacity and development work required across the 75 communities, MHCLG will provide a wide window for Neighbourhood Boards to submit their Regeneration Plan to us.

Pre-approved interventions and list of powers

The Plan for Neighbourhoods represents a break from the competitive bidding process and micromanaging of previous regeneration funds. Instead, this is a model whereby Neighbourhood Boards are provided with a list of [pre-approved interventions](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-prospectus-and-tools/plan-for-neighbourhoods-pre-approved-interventions) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-prospectus-and-tools/plan-for-neighbourhoods-pre-approved-interventions>) and given the autonomy such that, if that activity can be evidenced as a clear priority of the community, it can be pursued without the need to provide a lengthy business case. MHCLG analysts have assessed all interventions listed and consider them to have a strong case for investment, value for money and benefit-to-cost ratio.

The activities listed range from eye-catching new developments to the bread-and-butter issues raised by people on the doorstep. To give boards as much flexibility as to how and what they can deliver we have more than doubled the number of interventions, providing examples where possible to indicate ideas for spend while empowering the community to come up with their own grassroots solutions. Unlike the previous administration's Long-Term Plan for Towns programme, the interventions listed are not explicitly tied to one theme – instead, we are giving boards the flexibility to consider how the interventions they wish to pursue can apply to any or all of the strategic objectives of the programme: thriving places, stronger communities and taking back control. Neighbourhood Boards do not need to explicitly link each intervention back to just one specific objective.

Similarly, this list is not exhaustive. We encourage Neighbourhood Boards to think innovatively and creatively about how to deliver the strategic objectives of the programme. Where activities fall outside the scope of the pre-approved interventions but the board, based on their community engagement, believes they are better placed to meet local needs, the board should seek to pursue these. This would require a business case to be agreed with MHCLG.

We are also providing an updated [list of powers](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-prospectus-and-tools/plan-for-neighbourhoods-list-of-powers) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-prospectus-and-tools/plan-for-neighbourhoods-list-of-powers>) (or 'policy toolkit'), which outlines existing powers available to communities and local authorities in England (and, in some instances, Wales).

We will separately publish similar toolkits for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, following consultation with the devolved governments.

We want to give boards and communities the tools and information they need to make informed decisions, empowering local people to have ownership over the future of their neighbourhood and local area. This is not about micromanaging, this is real devolution – the transfer of power and investment to where it belongs.

Community engagement

Undertaking meaningful engagement with the local community is a central pillar of the Plan for Neighbourhoods. Building trust and empowering the local community requires consistency, dedication and time, and evidence that people's priorities have been acted upon.

When it comes to communities having more influence over their area, it is important to ensure this is not dominated by those with the sharpest elbows. We are providing the time, space and funding to avoid under-resourced and generic consultation, to ensure Neighbourhood Boards hear from everybody, and include those from marginalised or deprived communities who typically may struggle to make their voices heard. These underserved groups include those whose socioeconomic circumstances, language or culture mean that they struggle to access 'usual' methods of engagement. Examples of this might be those experiencing homelessness, without access to the internet, who do not speak English or the elderly.

Community engagement should be iterative, so that people understand how their priorities are reflected in the plan. It should happen at regular intervals throughout the course of the programme, as the needs and priorities of communities evolve, and reverting to previously engaged groups to set out progress made, how their concerns and priorities were accounted for and enable the board to be held accountable for their delivery. Neighbourhood Boards should build on existing community engagement structures by mapping social infrastructure already present in their community and drawing on that expertise.

Case study: community-led regeneration

Co-operatives UK led the £1.455 million Community Economic Development (CED) programme, which empowered 71 communities in England to create locally driven economic plans. Through partnerships with groups like Locality and the New Economics Foundation, Co-operatives UK provided grants and technical support, helping communities develop sustainable, cooperative-led strategies. Unlike traditional top-down approaches focused on economic growth, CED empowered residents to shape their economies by generating wealth and jobs that stay within their communities.

Safe Regeneration in Bootle, Sefton joined the CED programme with ambitions to extend beyond their existing business incubation hub, aiming to significantly increase their impact and activities to benefit the broader economy. Their projects include:

- acquiring a derelict pub - purchasing from the brewery to create guest accommodation, a music venue and a gastro pub
- partnering with the Canal and River Trust to revitalise the nearby canal towpath, both to boost foot traffic and strengthen the local economy

This model of community-led, asset-based development allowed Safe Regeneration to drive sustainable economic growth tailored to local needs.

Case study: improving community outcomes across Wales

Building Communities Trust (BCT) is a third sector advocacy and umbrella organisation operating across Wales. Its core programme, Invest Local, aims to strengthen vulnerable Welsh communities by empowering its residents through community-led regeneration. Invest Local provides up to £1 million for a 10- year period, and the funding allocation is entirely community-driven as residents are given the opportunity to identify goals and develop activities that will bring positive change to their communities. An officer from BCT is assigned to each place to provide support, help build capacity, and act as an enabler.

Since 2016, Invest Local has helped improve community outcomes in 13 places across Wales. For example, in Trowbridge and St Mellons, residents used some of the funding to create a pantry. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the pantry proved an invaluable asset that made the community more resilient by providing an array of support services.

More than 60 volunteers worked around the clock to:

- purchase and deliver goods to households
- take calls on the helpline
- provide moral support
- help vulnerable individuals in-person when necessary (almost 300 residents were supported in these ways)
- create and deliver more than 350 'activity packs' to support the wellbeing of children and young people occupied during lockdown
- provide tailored assistance to vulnerable households facing various challenges such as bereavement or a risk of homelessness

Best practice for community engagement

As Local Trust notes, 'a one-size fits all strategy' will not work; however, we have set out some best practice that Neighbourhood Boards may wish to consider when planning community engagement.

Focus on those less likely to be heard:

The Plan for Neighbourhoods will be most effective if boards engage those who are not usually engaged in decision-making. At its heart, this programme

aims to address deprivation, so consider how you can best engage those who may not usually feel listened to.

Identify local assets:

Use local assets to build on existing strengths, and work with community groups who have existing relationships and expertise in community development to design engagement and ensure sufficient reach. Consider using allocated capacity funding to invest in these organisations to support engagement.

Make time for meaningful engagement:

When planning community engagement, ensure that enough time is allocated to allow for meaningful engagement with all sections of the community.

Actively listen to the local community:

Be comfortable in straying from a list of pre-determined questions. Let conversations flow organically and recognise when people aren't agreeing with diagnoses or preferred solutions - let different groups direct the course of the conversation.

Use your community to identify priorities:

This helps to ensure the plans are co-created with the community from the start.

Case study: Stranraer place plan

Stranraer was chosen as one of the places to be included in the Borderlands Growth Deal Place programme. As part of this, the town required a place plan to identify projects and investments. Many partners and members of the public felt that they had previously been 'consulted to death' with limited outputs, so the Stranraer Development Trust worked with a group of six community partners to broaden reach and build ownership.

They created a 'town team' that drew broadly from stakeholders and sectors in the community to develop the plan. When engaging the public, they also looked widely, building connections with through local activists and organisations. They undertook an inclusive 6-month consultation, meeting people 'where they're at' in schools, existing group activities and clubs and on the street, rather than insisting local people come to scheduled events. This resulted in a 5-strand approach with collaborative

decision-making and public voting to identify priority projects. 6 strategic projects are now moving into design for implementation starting in 2025 to 2026.

Target areas where engagement has been weakest:

Use your knowledge of where engagement has typically been weakest, and which groups might have been underrepresented in the past. Leverage relationships with community groups to establish how engagement could be improved to overcome barriers such as income, ethnicity, age, disability and language.

Be creative and present:

Go into the community. Hold engagement events in the spaces where people and communities meet, for example, the local high-street, youth clubs, pubs, schools and community centres. Maximise the opportunity to get the view from a broad set of residents that may not attend consultation events.

Use a participatory approach:

Encourage the community to participate in decision-making processes, such as participatory budgeting. This can act as a hook to engage residents, helping to identify local solutions and bring forward innovative ideas. Local authorities may be able to help advise on other tools they have used in the past.

Delegate roles to community groups:

Identify where ownership of the planning and delivery of Regeneration Plans can be given to community groups, facilitating improved local capability by bringing these groups into the planning and delivery process. Consider how partners of the Neighbourhood Boards, such as community organisations, can have a clear role in the process to drive interest in the programme. This could also include devolving budgets and delivery to community groups for neighbourhood priorities.

Case study: co-operation at the grassroots

Members of the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network (CCIN) are encouraged to suggest projects where they can work with other members to find cooperative policy solutions to the challenges facing local government. The CCIN work programme is divided into larger projects called Policy Labs, and smaller projects called Policy Prototypes.

Between 2019 and 2021, 4 councils worked together on a Policy Lab project to explore co-operative models for improving community engagement and delivering better local outcomes. The councils involved were:

- Burntwood Town Council
- North Herts District Council
- Stevenage Borough Council
- Sunderland City Council

Each council, despite differences in size and resources, adopted neighbourhood-level strategies to enhance services.

Burntwood focuses on empowering community groups to deliver services, while North Herts created a food network during the pandemic to ensure equitable food access. Stevenage implemented a Co-operative Neighbourhood Programme for collaborative decision-making, and Sunderland transformed an abandoned golf course into a community park through local engagement.

These models highlight how councils can collaborate with communities for more effective and efficient service delivery.

Case study: resident-led transformation in Lawrence Weston

The Ambition Lawrence Weston (ALW) initiative, based on a post-war housing estate in north-west Bristol, is a community-driven project supported by funding from Big Local and local partnerships.

Through a community development plan and a neighbourhood development plan, residents influenced policies such as ensuring that 50% of new housing is allocated to local families. ALW facilitates a community network of over 45 organisations, fostering collaboration on impactful projects such as a solar farm powering 1,000 homes and a planned wind turbine. These efforts have attracted over £5.5 million in investment, significantly boosting the local economy, and transformed the area through new infrastructure, improved transport links, enhanced facilities for young people and support for local businesses. By circulating wealth locally and empowering residents, ALW has created a stronger, more self-reliant community with lasting benefits.

Ensure continued accountability through ongoing engagement opportunities:

Make sure your community stays informed of developments during key milestones through email, press release, exhibition or in-person events.

Next steps

Placing communities at the heart of the regeneration process has defined previous successful government initiatives, including John Prescott's New Deal for Communities. By consistently investing time in good conversations with residents, leaders built trust and social capital within communities to ensure funding was spent on things that mattered to locals.

The Plan for Neighbourhoods provides the funding and support to build trust, drive growth and release the potential of 75 areas. Through the introduction of Community Right to Buy and further initiatives to support high streets and communities, we will see local leaders take back control, neighbourhoods revitalised, and communities strengthened up and down the country.



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Wisbech Regeneration Plan

Wisbech Town Board

30 September 2025

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Wisbech Regeneration Plan outlines our community's ambitions and proposals for transforming Wisbech into a place that we can be even more proud of. It builds on a keen understanding of what people want for the future, and of how we can shape the town to create new and better opportunities for everybody. It includes a four-year investment plan designed to speedily address existing concerns, and a wider ten-year strategy which will change how our residents and businesses live and work.
- 1.2 The Regeneration Plan is based on a series of comprehensive consultations with all parts of our community and explains how we will use the £20m Neighbourhood Plan to change our town. Our work has also been guided by our Town Vision, which reflects the aspirations of people who live, work and visit in Wisbech.



By 2035, Wisbech will emerge as a rejuvenated and vibrant town, celebrated for its safety, community and outstanding heritage. Our vision is to drive a comprehensive regeneration effort using historic and geographic assets such as parks, the river and the Town Centre. We aspire to create a dynamic environment where residents and visitors alike enjoy an enhanced quality of life and a renewed sense of community.

Wisbech will harness its rich heritage as a foundation for growth, integrating thoughtful design and development to revitalise public spaces, improve infrastructure, and boost local businesses. Our goal is to transform Wisbech into a more attractive and functional town, with modern facilities and improved connectivity that put Wisbech on the map. This will create jobs and skills for young people, and ensure everyone will share in our new prosperity.

Success will be measured through tracking the impacts of our regeneration efforts, including visible improvements in infrastructure and public spaces, increased economic activity, a surge in local and visitor engagement, and a reduction in anti-social behaviour. Indicators of progress will include rising property values, expanded business opportunities, positive feedback from the community and a reduction in crime statistics. Increased foot traffic in revitalised areas will reflect our success in creating a town that meets the needs of its residents while attracting new visitors.

By 2035, Wisbech will be a thriving, well-integrated town that proudly celebrates its heritage and embraces a future of growth and opportunity.

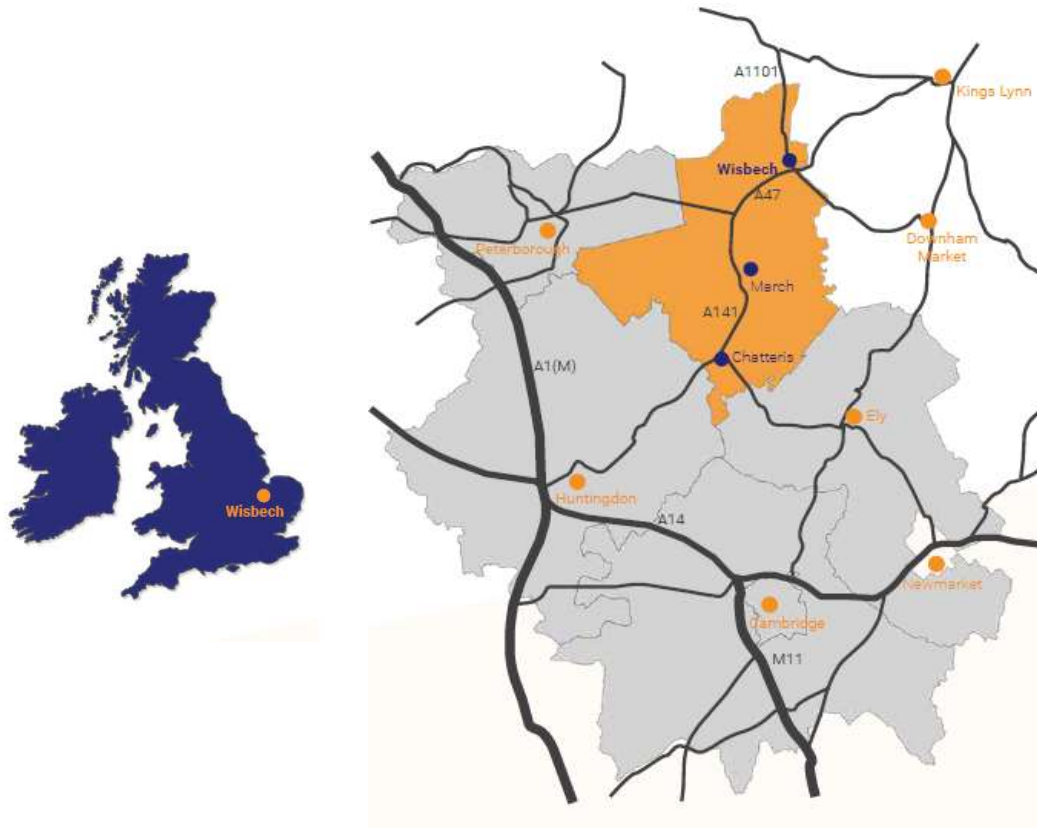


- 1.3 The Regeneration Plan follows the proscribed format laid out by MHCLG, and is arranged as follows:
- Local Context
 - Target Area
 - Vision for the Future
 - Strategic Case for Change
 - Alignment with other Programmes and Investments
 - Match Funding and Leveraged Investment
 - Community and Stakeholder Engagement
 - Governance
 - Assurance

2. Local Context

- 2.1 Located between Peterborough, Cambridge and Kings Lynn, ten miles north of March, Wisbech is the largest market town in the Fens, with a population of approximately 31,500. The town is an inland port located on the River Nene, which has long played an important role as a trading centre serving a wide rural catchment.

Figure 1 Wisbech Location



Source: Fenland District Council, Wisbech Masterplan 2022

- 2.2 In the absence of another city nearby the town is an important local centre offering retail, leisure and healthcare services to the area. The town draws commuters in from the surroundings, with key sources of employment including food processing industries, as well as manufacturing, logistics and storage. Wisbech suffers from poor connectivity due to issues with lack of public transport provision and inadequate road links. It is one of the largest towns in the country without a train station and has limited cycle infrastructure. Key arterial routes such as the A47 running east to west are predominantly single carriageway and are prone to closure and heavy traffic. The lack of connection to the wider region and beyond limits commuting opportunities and growth.
- 2.3 Wisbech has fantastic attributes to celebrate and build from including:
- A collection of some of the most impressive Heritage Assets in the county
 - A fantastic community that has proved resilient and proud through multiple generations
 - A central focus for the wider region across the Fens that has remained relevant since its origins

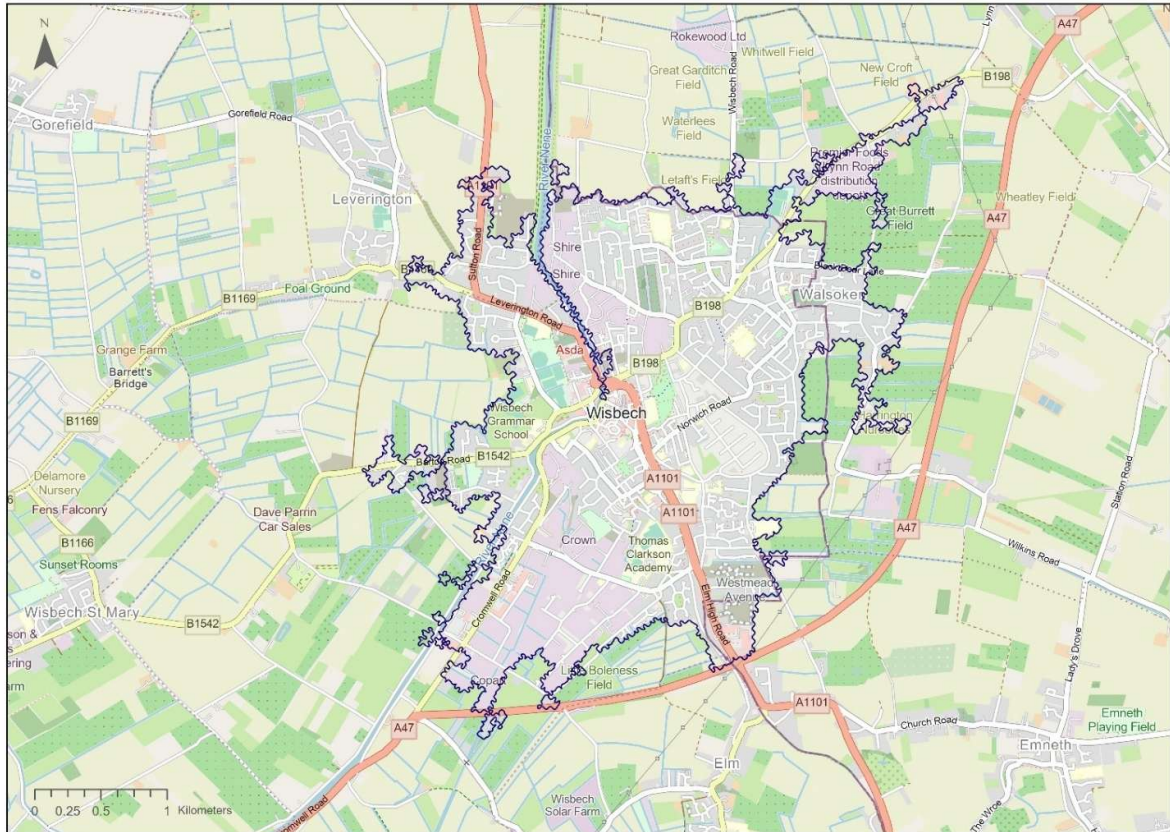
- 2.4 Like many towns there remains some challenges to overcome to reach the Town's potential. The Agricultural Industry is in constant need of change to suit modern methods of food production, and the change of industry demands have resulted in an increase in poverty rates within the area. There is a real skills deficit in the workforce, not helped by a lack of quality training provision. And like many town centres across the UK, the retail market has significantly changed leaving voids in the once busy high street. Wisbech has not been immune to these forces and the retail and cultural offer has somewhat deteriorated.

DRAFT

3. Target Area

- 3.1 The target area for the Regeneration Plan is unaltered from the boundaries suggested by MHCLG. The area includes the built-up town centre, surrounding residential areas and employment land extending to the A47. It excludes Leverington and other surrounding villages.
- 3.2 We can confirm that all priority schemes in the 4-year Investment plan and 10-year vision are contained within these boundaries.

Figure 2 Town Board Operating Area



Source: Generated from MHCLG data.

4. Vision for the Future

Our Vision for Wisbech

By 2035, Wisbech will emerge as a rejuvenated and vibrant town, returning to its status as a prosperous anchor in the Fens – celebrated for its safety, community and outstanding heritage.

Our vision is to drive a comprehensive regeneration effort utilising historic and geographic assets such as parks, the river and the Town Centre. We aspire to create a dynamic environment where residents and visitors alike enjoy an enhanced quality of life and a renewed sense of community.

Wisbech will harness its rich heritage as a foundation for growth, integrating thoughtful urban planning and development to revitalise public spaces, improve infrastructure, and boost local businesses. Our goal is to transform Wisbech into a more attractive and functional town, with modern facilities and improved connectivity that put Wisbech on the map. The town will be driven by an ambitious Town Board which will seek investment into the town at every opportunity. This will create jobs and skills for young people, and ensure everyone will share in our new prosperity.

Success will be measured through monitoring of improvements in infrastructure and public spaces, increased economic activity, a surge in public engagement, and a reduction in anti-social behaviour.

Indicators of progress will include rising property values, expanded business opportunities, positive feedback from the community and a reduction in crime statistics. Increased foot traffic in revitalised areas will reflect our success in creating a town that meets the needs of its residents while attracting new visitors.

By 2035, Wisbech will be a thriving, well-integrated town that proudly celebrates its heritage and embraces a future of growth and opportunity.

- 4.1 Our Vision Statement reflects the priorities and aspirations of local people. Success will be measured through monitoring of improvements in infrastructure and public spaces, increased economic activity, a surge in public engagement, and a reduction in anti-social behaviour. Indicators of progress will include rising property values, expanded business opportunities, positive feedback from the community and a reduction in crime statistics. Increased foot traffic in revitalised areas will reflect our success in creating a town that meets the needs of its residents while attracting new visitors.
- 4.2 By 2034, Wisbech will be a thriving, well-integrated town that proudly celebrates its heritage and embraces a future of growth and opportunity.
- 4.3 Our priorities for change are built on the following principles and ambitions:
- Making the most of what makes Wisbech great
 - Tackling negative perceptions and barriers to people using the town centre
 - Enhancing outcomes and opportunities for young people
 - Improving Wisbech's profile regionally and nationally
 - Making it easier for residents to choose sustainable and inclusive travel options

Table 1 Town Vision Ambitions and Aspirations

Goal	Description
Making the most of what makes Wisbech great	Maximising the value of heritage, tourism, open spaces, and supporting its active community.
Tackling negative perceptions and barriers to people using the town centre	Improving the town centre environment, including vacant sites, better amenities and cleanliness. Improving feelings of security and combatting antisocial behaviour, including improved activities and opportunities for young people.
Enhancing outcomes and opportunities for young people	Developing community sport and leisure facilities to promote active communities and reduce youth offending.
Improving Wisbech's profile regionally and nationally	Re-establishing Wisbech as a cultural centre and visitor destination.
Making it easier for residents to choose sustainable and inclusive travel options	Improving bus and cycle infrastructure, accessibility for the disabled, helping the town centre to become more inclusive.

Source: Wisbech Masterplan

5. Strategic Case for Change

Key Challenges in Wisbech

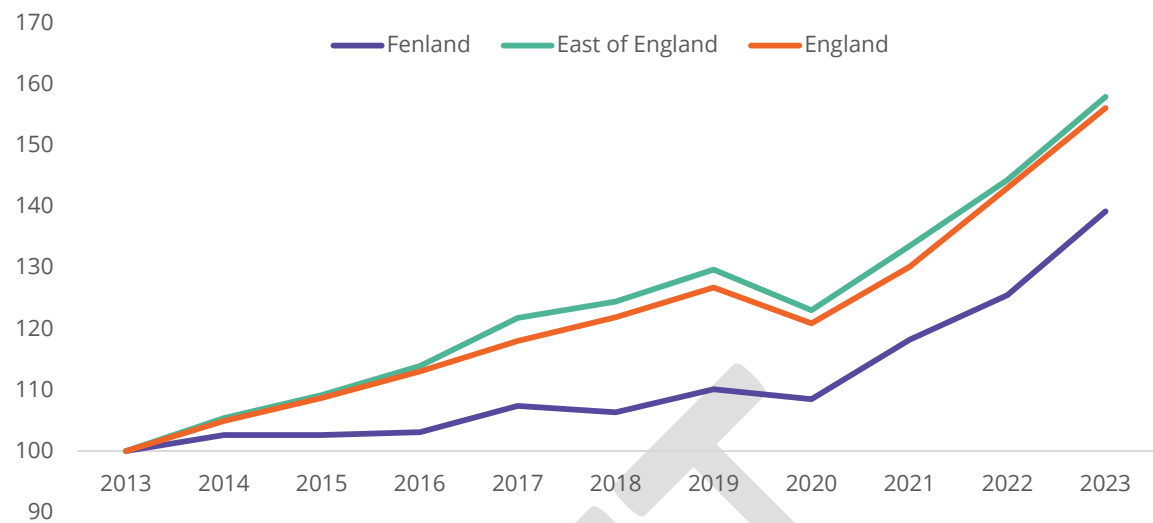
- 5.1 The evidence provided by the MHCLG clearly describes a town with a strong case for change. In almost all indicators, the town lags behind the national average. Yet there are also great opportunities for Wisbech. As shown by **MHCLG's Index of Priority Places**, the district of Fenland is a Tier 2 local authority and is ranked the 124th most in need of investment out of 309 local authorities in England. In terms of accessibility and travel, the area is severely disadvantaged, being the 71st most disadvantaged in the country.
- 5.2 Within Fenland, Wisbech faces a number of more specific challenges. Community consultation and independent assessment reveals a weight of negative perceptions about the town, often focused on a run-down town centre beset by anti-social behaviour. Despite this, Wisbech has much to celebrate and build from, including significant cultural and heritage assets, and resilient and active local communities.
- 5.3 Some of the key challenges faced by Wisbech are:
- **Ingrained economic disadvantage:** Low and slow economic growth, contribution and deprivation.
 - **A declining town centre and challenging viability:** Unable to capitalise on its historic and cultural assets.
 - **Lack of opportunities for residents and young people:** Unemployment is high, access to training and higher paid jobs is limited.
 - **Susceptibility to crime and poor social trust.**
 - **A relatively isolated economy.**

INGRAINED ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

- 5.4 Fenland has among the lowest productivity and GVA levels in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) and East of England region. GVA per filled job is just £56,675 in 2023, as opposed to the East of England average of £69,151, and the English average of £74,814¹. The gap between Fenland and the rest of the country has also been widening in the last 10 years to 2023.

¹ GVA per filled jobs data estimated using GVA data for 2023 (current prices) and employment data obtained from the Business Register and Employment Survey (2023) both available from the Office for National Statistics.

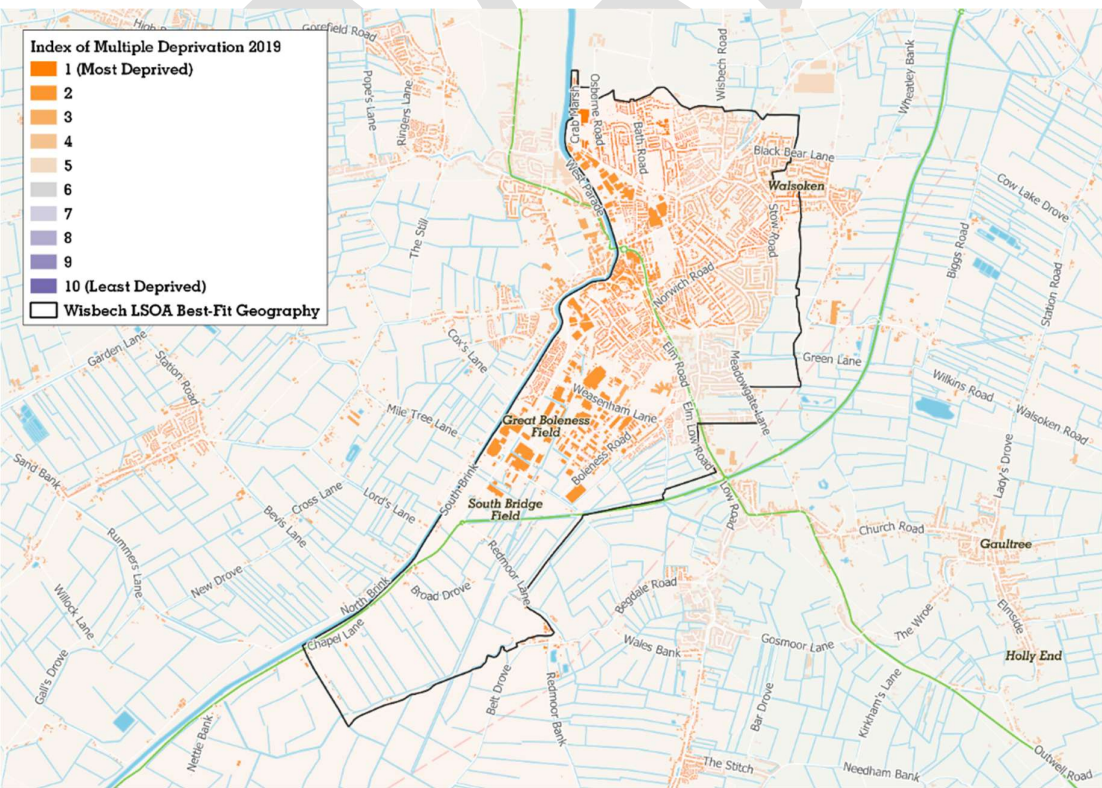
Figure 3 GVA Change 2013-2023



Source: ONS (2025), 2013-2023

5.5 Deprivation in Fenland is widespread, but particularly acute in Wisbech. 24% of workers in Fenland earn below the living wage, which is 4% higher than the East of England, and the national average (ONS, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (2020). Health (9 out of 12 Fenland neighbourhoods are in the 20% most deprived wards) and skills outcomes are particularly poor in the area.

Figure 4 Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2019



Source: MHCLG (2019), Indices of Multiple Deprivation

- 5.6 Survey results highlight that residents feel the local area is 'left behind' compared to the rest of the country. 63% respondents stated that they feel their area has been very left behind compared to the rest of the country.

Figure 5 Perceptions of Local Community



Source: Zencity (2025), 'Wisbech Survey Results'

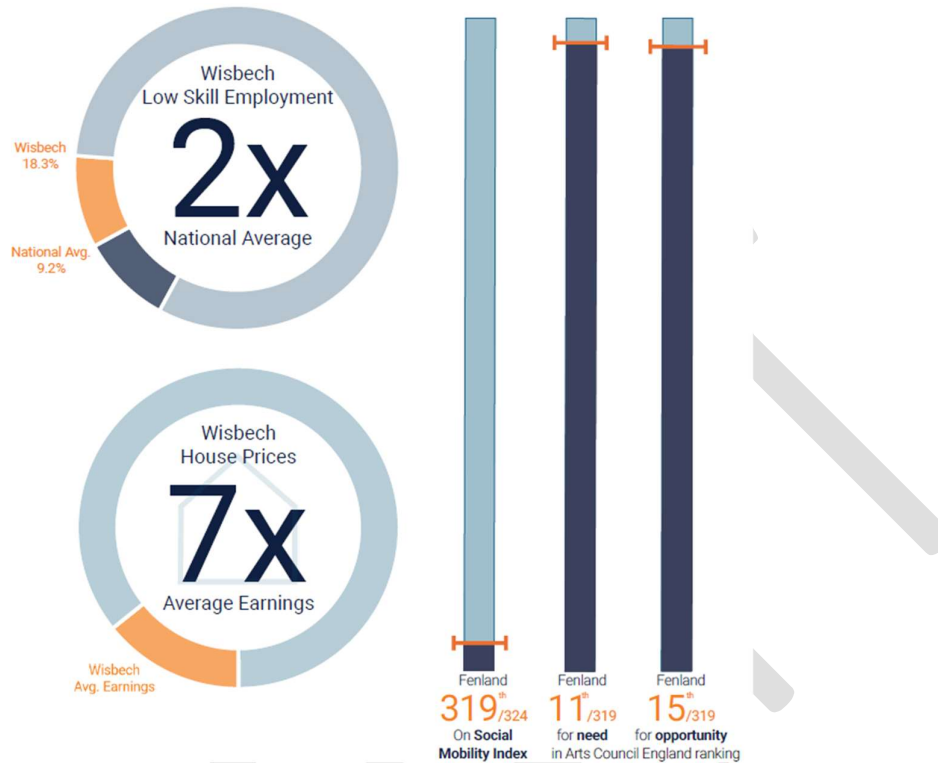
A DECLINING TOWN CENTRE AND CHALLENGING VIABILITY

- 5.7 Wisbech has proven many times in its history that it has all the ingredients to ensure financial and cultural strengths can be sustainable on a local level. But the town is performing poorly in relation to other centres in Fenland and the wider East of England area. The Place Index suggests a Fenland wide vacancy rate of just 6%, the position in Wisbech is much worse:
- In Wisbech Town Centre there are approximately 259 retail outlets. There are 57 retail units vacant (22%) in Wisbech, which is higher than the national average and considerably higher than the estimates used in the MHCLG Index of Priority Places.
 - On the basis of total floorspace, 27.8% of total floorspace is vacant compared to a national average of 16.1%.
 - Rental value in Wisbech is consistently (19%) lower than Fenland and the East of England for both office and retail.
- 5.8 Despite this, the town centre has many assets, such as a recently upgraded marketplace and many buildings of significant historic merit. These assets are currently not being capitalised upon, and as such vital opportunities to increase footfall in the town centre are being missed. Insights from Zencity highlight that, among respondents who are proud to live in their local area, the top reasons they are proud are "because of the green and natural spaces here" (73%) and "because of the culture heritage and history of the local area" (46%). Supporting and enhancing these characteristics of the area will be an important consideration for the Regeneration Plan.

LACK OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- 5.9 Unemployment is higher than the national average, and unemployment rates are higher than the East of England, and England by around 2%. Fenland has a higher rate of people working at occupational level 1 (18.3%) than nationally (9.2%) and lower rates at levels 3 and 4.

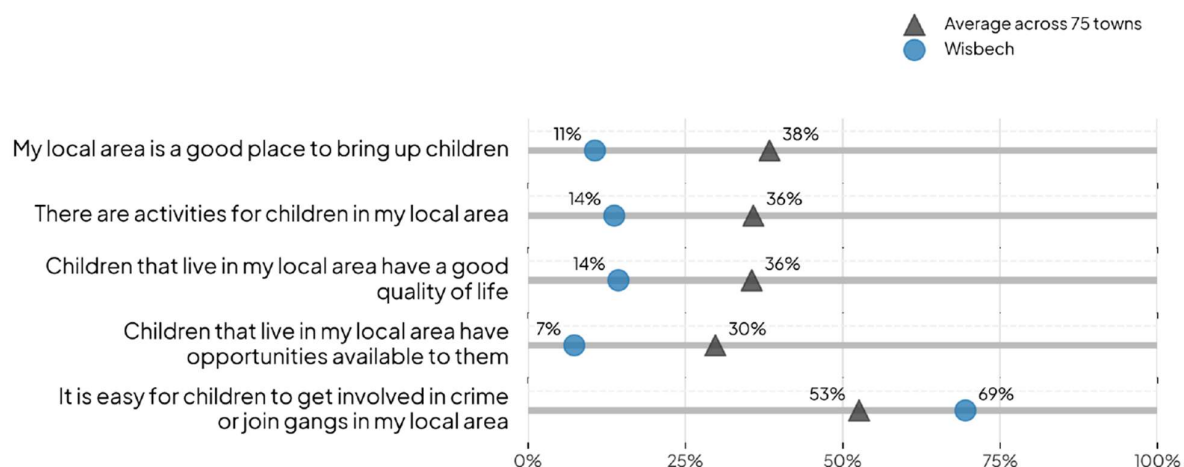
Figure 6 Socioeconomic Indicators



Source: ONS, Social Mobility Index, Arts Council England.

- 5.10 At the same time the Social Mobility Index ranks Fenland 319th out of 324 local authorities. In terms of the House Price Affordability, which is a measure of house prices relative to the residents' earnings, house prices are currently 7.4x higher than average resident earnings in Fenland.
- 5.11 This picture is exacerbated by a lack of visible or accessible skills training, sporting and creative opportunities available to residents. In 2021 Arts Council England identified Fenland as a Priority Place for intervention in the arts, placing it 11th out of 319 Local Authority Districts in England in terms of 'Need'. This was despite the area's relatively high presence of community groups and cultural partnerships, placing it 15th out of 319 districts for 'Opportunity'.
- 5.12 Furthermore, survey insights from Zencity highlight concerns from residents about the local area for children and young people. These are lower than average results across the survey questions.

Figure 7 Children and Young People (% agree)



Source: Zencity (2025), 'Wisbech Survey Results'

SUSCEPTIBILITY TO CRIME AND POOR SOCIAL TRUST

- 5.13 The economic and social factors described above leave Wisbech communities more vulnerable to crime and exploitation than in most of the country.
- 5.14 The Fenland district is the second smallest in terms of population in Cambridgeshire but hosts disproportionately large populations of individuals potentially vulnerable to victimisation by or participation in serious organised crime, notably: foreign migrant and temporary workers, the unemployed or underemployed, the economically deprived, and looked-after children.
- 5.15 A 2020 study of child criminal exploitation showed Wisbech had a particularly high concentration of under 18s affected by crime harm, including the Waterlees and Clarkson wards. Medworth ward is one of seven long-term high harm wards in the county that collectively generate 20% of all harm in Cambridgeshire². This is further reinforced by the Zencity data, highlighting that 'It is easy for children to get involved in crime or join gangs in my local area' more than the average across the 75 Plan for Neighbourhood towns (+17%)³.
- 5.16 Looking at detailed crime reports, Wisbech has a recorded crime rate of 124.2 reported crimes per 1,000 people, as shown in Table 2. This is higher than the recorded crime rate in Fenland (78.4) and England (76.7). When looking at the breakdown of reported crime, violence and sexual offences has the highest prevalence, with 44.7 reported crimes per 1,000 people which is higher than the average rates for Fenland (34.8) and England (32.3).

² Fenland Community Safety Partnership.

³ Zencity (2025) Plan for Neighbourhood Survey Results: Wisbech, July 2025. Survey carried between 9th of April to the 26th of May 2025.

Table 2 Crime Statistics in Wisbech, Fenland and England

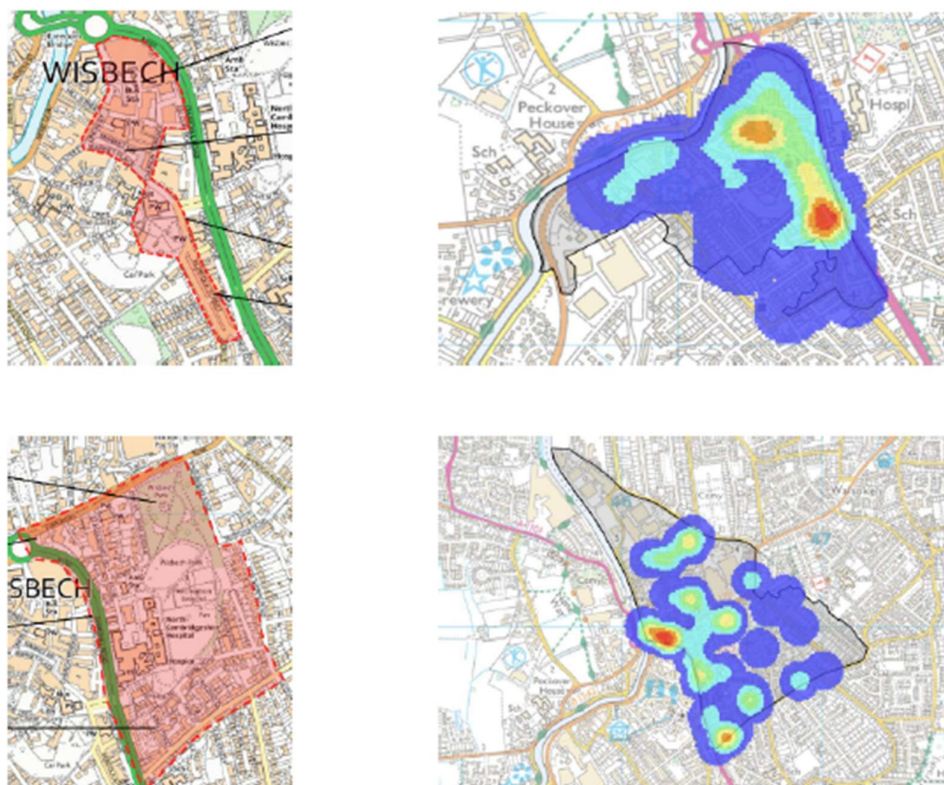
General Crime and Social Indicators			
Indicator	Wisbech	Fenland	England
Recorded crime rate per 1,000 population (2022)	124.2	78.4	76.7
Anti-social behaviour per 1,000 population (2024)	19.9	13.9	14.8
Social trust (%) (2023)	-15%	-8%	-3%
Recorded Crime by Type per 1,000 Population (2024)			
Crime Type	Wisbech	Fenland	England
Bicycle theft	0.9	0.7	0.9
Burglary	6.2	3.5	3.9
Criminal damage and arson	12.1	8.4	7.1
Drugs	3.9	2.1	2.8
Other crime	2.5	28	2.0
Other theft	14.4	7.3	6.9
Possession of weapons	1.8	1.2	0.9
Public order	6.3	4.6	6.6
Robbery	0.9	0.5	1.3
Shoplifting	12.6	6.1	7.9
Theft from the person	0.9	0.5	2.3
Vehicle crime	8.6	5.0	5.7
Violence and sexual offences	44.7	34.8	32.3

Note: Rates were calculated using 2022 mid-year population estimates due to data availability.

Source: MHCLG (2025) Wisbech – local data profile pack

- 5.17 Antisocial behaviour is an issue regularly cited in community and stakeholder engagement, including the recent engagement workshop with the High Streets Task Force. This is backed up by analytical work by Cambridgeshire Constabulary, which has identified a number of 'hot-spots' within Wisbech town centre. Their analysis shows that whilst Fenland District as a whole has a high proportion of properties categorised as 'Comfortable Communities', these parts of Wisbech town centre are predominantly categorised as 'Urban Adversity'.

Figure 8 Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Hotspots in Wisbech Town Centre

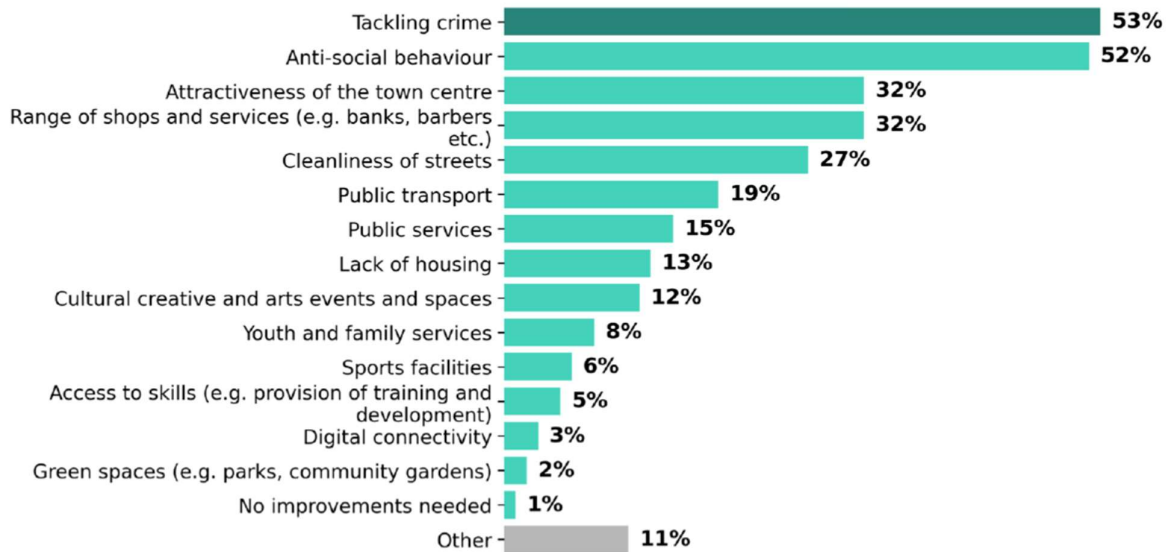


Source: Cambridgeshire Constabulary.

- 5.18 Net social trust is defined as the estimated proportion of people who say they generally trust others minus the proportion of people who say that you cannot be too careful when dealing with people. According to Onward (2023), Wisbech has a social trust score of -15%, which is significantly lower than the Fenland average of -8% and England average of -3%, showing that there is a lower level of social trust within Wisbech than national levels. More deprived Middle Layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs) are likely to have lower levels of social trust than less deprived MSOAs in Wisbech.
- 5.19 Tackling crime is the highest priority area residents would like to see improvements in, with 53% of residents indicating this when asked to identify areas for improvement in Wisbech as outlined through an online survey carried by Zencity (2025)⁴, see Figure 9. Tackling anti-social behaviour is the second most indicated answers, with 52% of responses highlighting the need. Overall, safety concerns are a key challenge for residents – with 55% of respondents indicating that safety is one of the main reasons they are not proud to live in Wisbech. Approximately 58% of responders consider the area to be run down.

⁴ Zencity (2025) Plan for Neighbourhood Survey Results: Wisbech, July 2025. Survey carried between 9th of April to the 26th of May 2025.

Figure 9 Areas Requiring Improvement



Source: Zencity (2025), 'Wisbech Survey Results'

A RELATIVELY ISOLATED ECONOMY

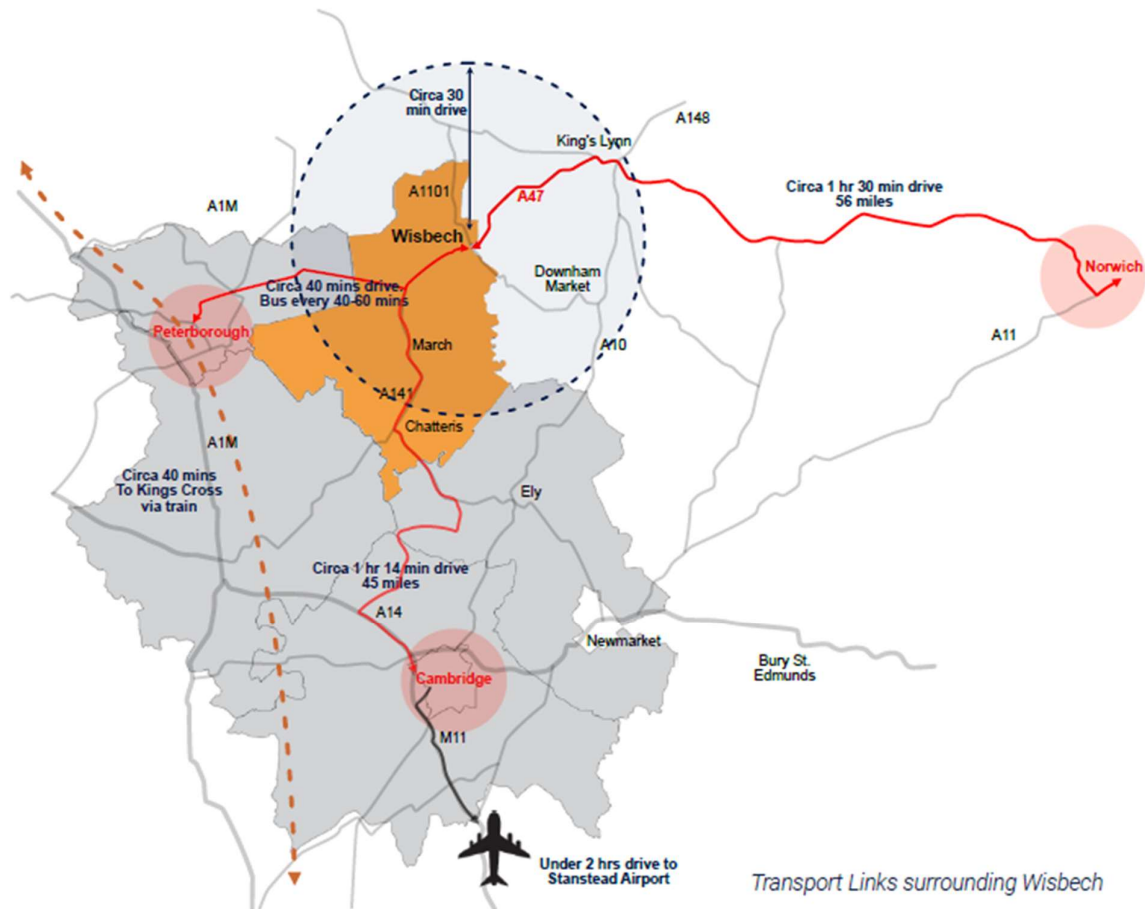
- 5.20 Wisbech suffers from poor transport connectivity. The fact that the A47 is single carriageway for much of its journey east and west from Wisbech makes it unsafe and slow. Cycle infrastructure to connect the town to other places is poor. All of the above means that it is difficult to work in any of the East of England's primary employment centres – Peterborough, Cambridge, and Norwich – while living in Wisbech. The economic impacts of this are clear.
- 5.21 Within Wisbech there are low levels of professional employment, meaning that many who want to move on in their career feel they need to leave the town. This takes people and resources away. It is also a missed opportunity to bring more money in to flow around the town, which would help the high street immensely.

Figure 10 Impacts of Poor Transport Connectivity



- 5.22 Whilst these major regional transport links undoubtedly need improving, this is considered beyond the reach of the Plan for Neighbourhoods funding and should be pursued through a wider programme of regional investment.

Figure 11 Transport Links in Wisbech



Priorities for Change

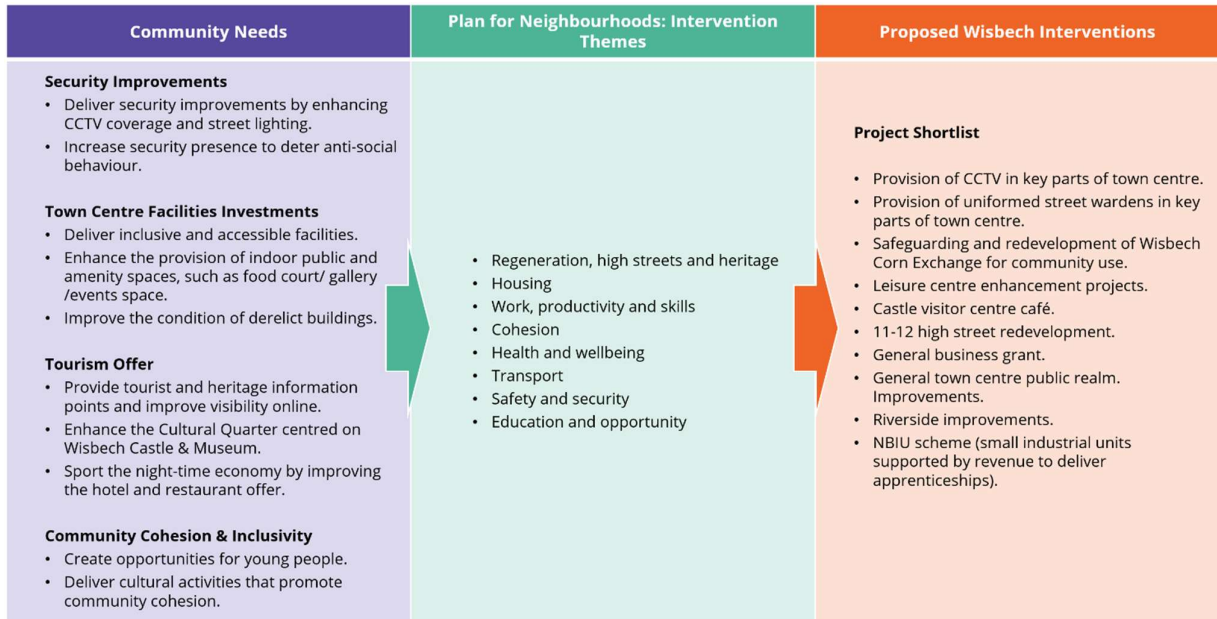
- 5.23 The Town Board's vision is underpinned by an extensive and ongoing programme of consultation, carried out over the last 8 years. Throughout this period, opinion has been sought directly from local people (for example, the comprehensive I Love Wisbech and Wisbech 2020 consultation programmes), as well as from expert advisers in regeneration and placemaking (for example, the High Streets Task Force, the Growing Fenland Wisbech Masterplan and an Independent Economic Commission).
- 5.24 Through this period, key issues raised by local people include:
- Improving the town centre to encourage greater usage, including improved cleanliness, addressing derelict or vacant sites, exploiting the town's heritage assets and encouraging a better mix of town centre retail/leisure/cultural uses.
 - Addressing antisocial behaviour and feelings of safety and security in the town centre through more visible policing, CCTV and other security measures.
 - Improving the range and availability of facilities and activities for young people, including sport, leisure and cultural opportunities.
 - Strengthening the cultural and heritage offer in the town centre and building a stronger identity and brand for the town around this.

- Forming place management partnerships to improve the attractiveness of key areas within the town, and tackle ASB, including Town Marshals and more targeted policing.

Alignment with Objectives

- 5.25 The links between identified areas of community need, the Plan for Neighbourhoods intervention themes and the proposed interventions are displayed below.

Figure 12 Actions and Alignment



Areas of Intervention

- 5.26 The Town Board has shortlisted the following projects, which all constitute pre-approved interventions under the 16th June 2025 Guidance issued by MHCLG.
- 5.27 This list includes three major capital projects, which will prioritised by the Town Board following an initial stage of due diligence.

Table 3 Shortlisted Interventions

PROPOSED INTERVENTION	TIME PERIOD	PRE-APPROVED INTERVENTION CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
PROVISION OF CCTV IN KEY PARTS OF TOWN CENTRE	4 Year Investment Plan and ongoing	Safety & Security – design & oversight of built and landscaped environment to design-out crime and encourage positive behaviour	Mixture of initial capital funding and ongoing revenue funding support
PROVISION OF UNIFORMED STREET WARDENS IN KEY PARTS OF TOWN CENTRE	4 Year Investment Plan and ongoing	Safety & Security – policing interventions to target crime prevention in specific locations	Revenue funding
GENERAL BUSINESS GRANT	4-year Investment Plan horizon	Work, productivity and skills: Developing and expanding local business support and networks for smaller businesses and social enterprises Regeneration, high streets & heritage: better accessibility for disabled people	General Business Grant available for application to the Town Board.
SAFEGUARDING AND REDEVELOPMENT OF WISBECH CORN EXCHANGE FOR COMMUNITY USE	4 Year Investment Plan	Cohesion: Investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civic society, youth and community groups.	Capital project, likely to extend beyond 4-year investment plan horizon
<<<<<<<<< <AND/OR> >>>>>>>>>			
LEISURE CENTRE ENHANCEMENT PROJECTS	4 Year Investment Plan	Health and well-being: funding for local sport and activity facilities, to foster community engagement and connection.	Enhancement of facilities to improve health and wellbeing access. To allow more community focused activities above and beyond the current health facilities.
<<<<<<<<< <AND/OR> >>>>>>>>>			
CASTLE VISITOR CENTRE CAFÉ	4 Year Investment Plan	Regeneration, High Street & Heritage: Enhanced support for arts, cultural, heritage activities, projects and facilities and historic institution that make-up the local cultural offer.	Improvements to the Wisbech Castle café and hub to celebrate local heritage.
<<<<<<<<< <AND/OR> >>>>>>>>>			

PROPOSED INTERVENTION	TIME PERIOD	PRE-APPROVED INTERVENTION CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
SAFEGUARDING AND DEVELOPMENT OF KEY SITES IN THE TOWN CENTRE	4-year Investment Plan horizon	Regeneration, high streets and heritage: funding for improvements to town centres, neighbourhoods and high street, including capital spend and running costs	Restoration and redevelopment of historic High Street properties. Potential for mixed-use space including retail and housing.
TOWN CENTRE PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS	Outside 4-year Investment Plan horizon	Regeneration, high streets & heritage: public realm improvements	Upgrades to public spaces to enhance the town's appearance and usability. Includes improved hoarding to uplift visual appeal and safety.
RIVERSIDE IMPROVEMENTS	Outside 4-year Investment Plan horizon	Regeneration, high streets & heritage: public realm improvements	Revitalisation of the riverside area to boost leisure and tourism. Focus on landscaping, seating, and pedestrian access.
NBIU SCHEME (SMALL INDUSTRIAL UNITS SUPPORTED BY REVENUE TO DELIVER APPRENTICESHIPS)	Outside 4-year Investment Plan horizon	Work, productivity and skills: developing and expanding existing business support and networks for smaller businesses	

Note: Most projects fit into multiple categories for pre-approved interventions, only the most relevant has been suggested for each project.

5.28 Table 4 displays how these proposals match against the Neighbourhood Fund objectives:

Table 4 Alignment with Funding Objectives

PROPOSED INTERVENTION	ALIGNMENT AGAINST FUNDING OBJECTIVES	NOTES
Provision of CCTV in key parts of town centre	Thriving Places / Stronger Communities	Build community cohesion through increasing safety
Provision of uniformed street wardens in key parts of town centre	Thriving Places / Stronger Communities	Build community cohesion through increasing safety
Safeguarding and redevelopment of Wisbech corn exchange for community use	Thriving Places/Stronger Communities	Redevelopment of Community space and key regeneration site
Leisure centre enhancement projects	Thriving Places/Stronger Communities	

PROPOSED INTERVENTION	ALIGNMENT AGAINST FUNDING OBJECTIVES	NOTES
Castle visitor centre café	Thriving Places	
Safeguarding and development of key sites in the Town Centre	Thriving Places	
General business grant	Taking Back Control/Thriving Places	Business grant to support training and relayed activities
General town centre public realm improvements	Thriving Places	
Riverside improvements	Thriving Places	
NBIU scheme (small industrial units supported by revenue to deliver apprenticeships)	Taking Back Control	Skill focused intervention

Regeneration Plan Outcomes

- 5.29 The proposed interventions are expected to give rise to a range of positive outcomes. These are outlined in Table 6.

Table 5 Spending Outcomes

PROPOSED INTERVENTION	LONG TERM OUTCOMES FOR WISBECH
Provision of CCTV in key parts of town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved perception of safety, supporting increased footfall and confidence in town centre use. Greater sense of security for residents, particularly vulnerable groups. Attracts businesses and visitors by creating a safer environment, supporting evening economy.
Provision of uniformed street wardens in key parts of town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced place management and crime deterrence, as well as providing reassurance for residents and building confidence in the local area. Improved business outcomes by reducing antisocial behaviour and encouraging longer dwell time in the town centre.
Safeguarding and redevelopment of Wisbech corn exchange for community use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restoration of historic asset will engender pride in place and improve perceptions of place as the Corn Exchange as a highly visible and prominent location on the River Nene. Potential to repurpose for community use by civic, youth, cultural and charitable organisations will foster inclusion and participation, creating opportunities for social enterprises and events-based economy, supporting jobs and skills.
Leisure centre enhancement projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements to facilities will encourage users to engage in physical activity, tackling health inequalities. Improved access to sport and wellbeing activities improves the range of activities for young people and families in the area, retaining activity and spend in the area.
Castle visitor centre café	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment in Wisbech Castle will improve the asset for use by visitors and the local community, increasing pride in place as one of the town's most prominent attractions. This should also increase local spend and act as a gathering place for the community.
Safeguarding and development of key sites in the Town Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivery of new commercial space in currently derelict site on the high street. Overcome negative perceptions associated with a derelict building in primary shopping area and introducing a new activity onto the high street, supporting employment and spend.
General business grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General business grant will support business start-ups and SME growth in the area by providing access to funding with broader parameters than commercial lenders.
General town centre public realm improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancements to the town centre environment will provide improvements to the streetscape, offering more usable, welcoming and attractive spaces for daily use and events. This should support dwell time and local retail and hospitality.
Riverside improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance the riverside area as an attractive and welcoming part of the town centre – improving the connection between the central shopping area and the amenity offered by the waterway.
NBIU scheme (small industrial units supported by revenue to deliver apprenticeships)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intervention will support bringing underused land and premises back into use for new and existing businesses. This will be enhanced by the provision of revenue spend to create apprenticeship roles – improving pathways into work through apprenticeships and skills training for young people.

Intended Use of Powers

- 5.30 Table 7 shows the Neighbourhoods Board's current view on the nature of the powers that they may wish to exercise - in conjunction with Fenland District Council (or its legacy body).

Table 6 Intended Use of Powers

POWER	INTENDED USE
REGENERATION & HIGH STREET	Likely to explore relevant powers in relation to improvement of the built environment in the town centre.
HOUSING	Possible minimal use of powers to promote reuse of derelict buildings
WORK, PRODUCTIVITY & SKILLS	Powers largely irrelevant for Town Board priorities
COHESION	Limited use, perhaps around Co-operative Placemaking
HEALTH AND WELLBEING	Limited use around design of public realm
TRANSPORT	Powers largely irrelevant for Town Board priorities
SAFETY AND SECURITY	Likely to explore in some detail given the community focus on crime reduction
EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY	Will consider role of Town Board in the delivery of the Young Futures Programme to reduce the risk of crime, and where there is work ongoing in the 75 communities Town Boards should consider what role they could play as part of that

6. Alignment with other Programmes and Investments

Planned Investments

6.1 There are a range of recently delivered schemes and planned investments proceeding in Wisbech that the Regeneration Plan will complement and enhance.

6.2 Recent investments include:

- Recently reopened Castle attraction in the heart of the town
- Recently renovated Museum (2022)
- Recently redeveloped Market Place (opened June 2022)

6.3 Investments underway include:

- 24 High Street
- Wisbech Park
- National Lottery Heritage Fund high street improvement project
- Nene Waterfront redevelopment

24 HIGH STREET

6.4 Fenland District Council has procured a construction company to develop the empty site at 24 High Street that has stood empty as a 'missing tooth' in the High Street for more than 40 years.

6.5 The new building will consist of a small ground floor shop unit, and 7 flats over three stories above. The building has been designed to complement the historic High Street. The original completion date was October 2024, with that now more likely to be March 2025, due to difficulties encountered during the build.

6.6 Funding for this project is predominantly from Fenland DC, National Lottery Heritage Fund, with CPCA contributing £250k from a housing fund as the flats will be rented as affordable units.

WISBECH PARK

6.7 The proposals for Wisbech park are for an outdoor electricity supply which will facilitate/generate additional use of Wisbech Park. The electricity supply will support the organisation of leisure, recreation, sports and other community activities (such as targeted youth work and health and wellbeing-related activity); the annual Armed Forces Day event and the annual WisBEACH Rock Festival (delivered by Wisbech Town Council). This will support community cohesion and integration and a "sense of place" for local people.

6.8 The provision of an electricity supply would prevent the need to use generators (which are costly to hire and run, use fossil fuel, are noisy and produce fumes and odour).

6.9 As the owner of Wisbech Park, Fenland District Council (FDC) would undertake the procurement exercise on behalf of Wisbech Town Council. Although the proposed electricity supply would be the responsibility of Wisbech Town Council, which would be its primary user, the council will make it available to local community groups and bodies to support activities and events delivered in the park.

6.10 The financial requirement for this investment c. £25,000. Funding will be relocated from the Wisbech Shop Watch Radio Scheme underspent following the cancellation of the scheme.

WISBECH HIGH STREET IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

- 6.11 National Lottery Heritage Fund supported Wisbech High Street improvement project, awarding a £1.9m grant to support the restoration of several buildings on the High Street, bring new uses back into empty properties and transform the derelict sites at number 11-12 and 24.
- 6.12 Eligible works under the grant conditions included repairs to roofs, chimneys, leadwork, downpipes, gutters, parapets, stonework, brickwork and repointing. The project also supported traditional repair of windows, doors and external joinery, including historic shopfronts, with all repairs undertaken using traditional materials replicating original patterns and details. The buildings were selected having been identified previously as High Priority.
- 6.13 Alongside the High Street building improvements, a series of heritage-related activities for local community learning and participation were organised. The project delivered activities agreed under the Activity Plan over 4 years. These included traditional construction skills training, archaeological investigation, photography, exhibitions and open days as well as close involvement with community groups and schools to promote heritage learning.

NENE WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT

- 6.14 A major residential development is due to commence ground works in Spring 2026 at Nene Parade. The first phase of the scheme, originally promoted by Fenland Future Ltd, a subsidiary of the council, will provide a care home up to 70 apartments with amenity space and communal space.
- 6.15 The development will provide safe, comfortable, and independent living for older residents while offering access to tailored care and support services, to meet a growing need for adaptable accommodation within Wisbech, ensuring that residents can maintain their independence in a secure and supportive environment. It will also support the creation of 25 local jobs.
- 6.16 A planning application has been submitted in June 2025 with a decision expected in autumn 2025. The proposals would make use of existing brownfield land, contributing to the regeneration and rejuvenation of the Nene waterfront.

Masterplans for Wisbech

WISBECH MASTERPLAN 2022

- 6.17 The Wisbech Masterplan sets out the long-term spatial vision for Wisbech that responds to local needs, builds upon the town's core strengths, and positions it for investment and as a visitor destination.
- 6.18 It sets out key ambitions for to drive change in the town through:
- Improved connectivity and pedestrian links
 - Enhancement of key streets and public realm
 - Extending the town centre to Nene waterfront
 - Celebration of historical assets of Wisbech
 - Making Wisbech an attractive visitor destination
 - Creation of new community and civic facilities
 - New leisure, entertainment and hospitality venues
 - A range of new quality housing for diverse needs
- 6.19 The masterplan covers an area of approximately 40 hectares, focusing on the core town centre, and seeks to address challenges such as low wages, housing issues, and a deteriorating retail and cultural offer. Key objectives include renewed town centre focus, improved connectivity, street greening & public realm, enhancement, reconnecting to the waterfront, celebrating heritage assets, new community services, innovation & educational facilities & new housing in the centre.

- 6.20 The document sets out a vision for the future of Wisbech which includes the provision of a safe and welcoming environment to attract all sectors and provide opportunities that can be delivered in a relatively short timescale in order to satisfy the demand, both current and anticipated. The Masterplan identifies a way in which the town centre will be attractive to business owners looking to expand or locate in the area and provide the opportunities for leisure operators to bring in additional investment to boost the town.

GROWING FENLAND: WISBECH MARKET TOWN

- 6.21 The Growing Fenland: Wisbech Market Town report is a response to CPCA's plans for Market Town Masterplans. These are being brought forward across the district. The report brings forward a set of strategy proposals for the whole district, which will help tackle challenges around health and education. The role that Wisbech plays in contributing to these is recognised, with Wisbech's educational deprivation being highlighted as a big challenge, as well as Health outcomes in Wisbech.
- 6.22 This Plan is based on master-planning work completed for the town of Wisbech and creates credibly linkages between the projects selected and ongoing, recently completed, and work planned to commence imminently within the town centre. The Plan links the recently reopened Castle attraction in the heart of the town and the recently renovated Museum (2022), with the recently redeveloped Market Place (opened June 2022), the ongoing National Lottery Heritage Fund supported Wisbech High Street improvement project (due to complete in March 2023, value £1.23m), through to Nene Waterfront where a major mixed-use development is due to commence ground works shortly.

Relevant Strategy and Policy

National Strategy and Policy

PLAN FOR CHANGE

- 6.23 Published at the end of 2024, the Government's Plan for Change sets out the overarching vision of "national renewal" that the Government aims to deliver on during this Parliament. It outlines key national missions to set the direction of change for the next decade, reflecting five overarching priorities:
1. Kickstart economic growth
 2. Build an NHS fit for the future
 3. Safer streets
 4. Break down the barriers to opportunity
 5. Make Britain a clean energy superpower
- 6.24 The Government commits to providing long-term policy certainty and economic stability that will ensure a resilient economy built on secure borders and national security. Hence, economic growth is the priority mission of the Government. To achieve that, the Plan for Change sets out key milestones to progress during this Government's tenure and deliver on the five strategic objectives:
- Raise living standards in every part of the United Kingdom and deliver the highest sustained growth in the G7.
 - Build 1.5 million homes in England and fast-track planning decisions on at least 150 major economic infrastructure projects.
 - End hospital backlogs to meet the NHS standard of 92% of patients in England waiting no longer than 18 weeks for treatment.
 - Employ 13,000 additional officers, police and community support officers and special constables in neighbourhood roles in England and Wales.

- Give children the best start in life and aim to achieve a record 75% of five-year olds in England ready to learn when they start school.
 - Secure home-grown energy, protecting billpayers, and putting the country on track to at least 95% clean power by 2030, while accelerating the UK to net zero agenda.
- 6.25 To ensure these objectives are met, the Government is increasing investment and reforming the economy to prioritise stability and prosperity across the UK. Higher public and private investment are expected to support infrastructure delivery, regional growth, trade, innovation and net zero to create new economic opportunities. The devolution of powers from Whitehall to local authorities and regions is seen as key to achieving that by giving more power to local decision makers.

INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

- 6.26 The Industrial Strategy Green Paper, published in November 2024, sets out the Government's 20-year plan to deliver economic growth for the UK, building on the country's unique strengths and untapped potential – which would enable further development and growth of world-leading sectors.
- 6.27 The Strategy focuses on tackling barriers to growth in the highest potential growth-driving sectors and places, creating the right conditions for increased investment, high-quality jobs and ensuring tangible impact in communities across the UK. Its goal is to capture a greater share of internationally mobile investment in strategic sectors and spur domestic businesses to boost their investment and scale up their growth, seen as an essential step in achieving, sustainable, inclusive and resilient growth.
- 6.28 The Industrial Strategy identified eight growth-driving sectors that offer the highest growth opportunities for the economics and businesses: Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Energy Industries, Creative Industries, Defence, Digital and Technologies, Financial Services, Life Sciences, and Professional and Business Services. Investment and development in these sectors will be prioritised and barriers to growth will be addressed.
- 6.29 A core objective of the Industrial Strategy is unleashing the full potential of cities and regions. Efforts will be concentrated on places with the greatest potential for our growth sectors: city regions, high-potential clusters, and strategic industrial sites. Devolution and establishing Mayoral Combined Authorities is seen as a key to ensuring a successful delivery. Existing partnership with devolved governments will also support the considerable sectoral strengths of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Regional and Subregional Strategy and Policy

CAMBRIDGE AND PETERBOROUGH STRATEGIC SPATIAL FRAMEWORK (NON-STATUTORY)

- 6.30 The Strategic Spatial Framework Phase One defines the immediate priorities for sustainable growth and includes actions they will take to support the sustainable delivery of over 100,000 quality new homes and more than 90,000 additional jobs.
- 6.31 The Combined Authority supports the implementation of the local plans to help meet the Frameworks ambitions. Fenlands Local Plan as an example, seeks to contribute 11,000 homes and 7,200 jobs during the plan period to 2031, with Wisbech being a major contributor (3,350). Through sustainable growth the plan seeks to address current health inequalities, community deprivation, lack of affordable housing, low skills, and educational attainment.

CPCA INDEPENDENT ECONOMIC REVIEW

- 6.32 The Review sets out 14 recommendations to drawn out the actions which, if taken, can secure a prosperous future for the area. The recommendations cover wider economic ambitions and placemaking ambitions consistent with the Wisbech ambition.

- 6.33 Fenland has been selected by Arts Council England as a Priority Place. Joint work between Fenland Council, Arts Council and a local strategic creative group is anticipated to raise the profile of creative and cultural assets in Wisbech in 2023 and 2024 as part of a joint Shared Prosperity Fund and Arts Council grant.

Local Strategy and Policy

FENLAND DRAFT LOCAL PLAN 2021-2040, 2022

- 6.34 Fenland District Council is in the process of updating its Local Plan (2014). A draft version of the new Local Plan was published in 2022. The Draft Plan sets out the emerging policies and proposals for growth and regeneration, and the proposed sites to deliver the growth. It sets out the vision for the district to 2040:

“By 2040 all settlements, big and small, will be attractive and prosperous places to live, set within our unique and protected Fens landscape. They will benefit from economic growth and inward investment. Between 2021 and 2040, Fenland will grow by approximately 10,500 new homes and 18,000 new jobs, meeting the needs of all communities. Growth will be focussed on our four market towns, but villages will not be left behind, with appropriate levels of development being permitted to ensure they remain thriving local communities. The district will attract new business, jobs and investment, whilst also supporting existing businesses and encouraging them to expand, helping to boost productivity. Rural communities and the rural economy will be supported. Growth in homes and jobs will be closely linked, with new infrastructure such as schools, roads, health facilities and open space provision planned and provided at the same time as the new buildings. The natural and historic environments, and their assets, will be conserved and enhanced, and high-quality agricultural land will be protected, with new development taking into account the surroundings of the area in which it would be situated. Through growth, current issues such as health inequalities, community deprivation, infrastructure deficit and low skills, will be tackled and addressed. Growth will attract investment, businesses and new residents to the district.”

- 6.35 Part B of the draft Local Plan outlines the spatial strategy for the district to:
- Deliver 10,525 new homes by 2040.
 - Create 18,000 jobs, through the allocation of 215 hectares of employment land between 2021 and 2040.
 - Promote sustainable development, regeneration, and improved quality of life.
 - Support economic growth and attract investment.
 - Ensure compliance with national policies, including Biodiversity Net Gain.
- 6.36 As the district's largest population centre in Fenlands, Wisbech is key to achieving these goals and delivering on the vision. Policy LP3 notes that employment growth strategy will be principally focused on the market towns, including Wisbech and includes three Established Employment Areas which are critical to the local economy.
- 6.37 Policies LP35: Regeneration of Wisbech enables the implementation of development which contributes to the regeneration of Wisbech by:
- Allocating strategic sites for regeneration, particularly the Nene Waterfront area, which is identified as a key location for mixed-use development including housing, employment, and leisure.
 - Encouraging investment in infrastructure, public spaces, and transport links to improve connectivity and attractiveness.

- Supporting residential and commercial development that aligns with the town’s heritage and urban character.
- Promoting environmental enhancements, such as flood resilience and biodiversity improvements, especially in areas prone to flooding.
- Aligning with the Wisbech Masterplan, which outlines long-term ambitions for economic growth, town centre revitalisation, and improved quality of life.

FENLAND ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGIC REFRESH 2025-2028, 2024

- 6.38 The Economic Growth Strategic Refresh 2025–2028 builds upon Fenland District Council’s long-term Economic Development Strategy (2012–2031) and follows the first refresh (2022–2025). It aims to ensure that the Council continues to support and enable economic growth across the district, adapting to changing national and global contexts such as Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and a new UK government.
- 6.39 The strategy is structured around five core themes from the original Economic Development Strategy:
- Enterprise: Supporting start-ups and entrepreneurship, including access to grants and business advice.
 - Workforce Development: Improving skills, raising aspirations, and aligning education with employer needs.
 - Business Retention & Growth: Helping existing businesses expand and remain competitive.
 - Inward Investment: Attracting new businesses to Fenland, especially in key sectors like food production, engineering, and renewables.
- 6.40 The Refresh also responds to external challenges and opportunities. It acknowledges the impact of Brexit on trade, the shift toward service-based exports, and the need for sustainable economic strategies. Therefore, it reflects five key action areas for the council:
1. Growing businesses: Through engagement with existing local businesses the Council will target the support that is available to help enable each business to grow and assist them to overcome any barriers to growth or to develop opportunities. This will include ensuring that businesses are aware of and supported in applying for any grant funding support for which they are eligible.
 2. More business start-ups: Help ensure that the support is in place to help enable local people to start a business and to stay in business including where possible the availability of grant funding.
 3. Attract new businesses: Help attract new businesses into the district from supermarkets and fast-food brands to businesses seeking a first UK base. The Council will proactively engage with targeted new business opportunities to ascertain each businesses plans and location requirements.
 4. Available workforce: Help ensure both the supply of and skills of the available workforce are appropriate for the Fenland marketplace, as well as offering young people improved aspirations, increased wage levels and alternative career paths. Represent businesses skills requirements into the development of skills support funding and development of relevant courses.
 5. Available serviced land and premises: Acquiring technical and specialist support to bring forward employment sites and premises to include infrastructure, highway, and market/commercial assessments. To bring together these and other similar requirements into an “Commercial Investment Land and Property Database” for Fenland.

LOCAL ECONOMIC RECOVERY STRATEGY (LERS), 2021

6.41 The LERS aims to be a leading contributor both to the UK's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and to its future global success. The recovery phases and objectives are set out as follows:

1. Response (2021) – helping people and businesses manage the impact of the pandemic
2. Recovery and Rebound (2021-2023) – reopening of the economy
3. Renewal and Future Growth (2023 onwards):
 - Help people at risk of unemployment by accelerating retraining and upskilling
 - Build back faster by accelerating start-ups, scale ups and set ups
 - Build back better and greener by accelerating high tech jobs and cluster growth, focussing on green, digital, and net zero technologies.

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7. Match Funding and Leveraged Investment

- 7.1 The Plan for Neighbourhoods will help the Neighbourhoods Board in bidding for further match funding from several providers. External funders often offer funding out with the condition of match funding being available to enhance the investments in to the town. Plan for Neighbourhoods funding will act as this match allowing the board to leverage even more investment into the town, over and above the £20,000,000 already committed.
- 7.2 Examples of funders and other partners that we would look to engage with to assist in delivering projects in line with our key themes are:
- National Lottery Heritage Fund
 - National Lottery grants
 - Historic England
 - Arts Council England
 - Sport England
 - Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority
 - Cambridgeshire County Council
 - Homes England
 - Infrastructure partners
 - Anglian Water / UKPN / Gas / Fibre optic service suppliers
 - Larger local and regional businesses and employers such as Nestle and Purina
 - Cambridgeshire Constabulary
 - Police & Crime Commissioner
 - National Highways

8. Community and Stakeholder Engagement

The Town Board

- 8.1 Engagement with the local community begins with the membership of the Town Board itself. The Board is made up of several key partners across Wisbech, Fenland and the Wider Cambridgeshire area. With a focus on local knowledge and experience at the heart of the Board, the Board is made up of a private sector Chair, local political leaders, local community leaders and local business leaders. The Board is distinct from the local authority, and any district council officers attending meetings are not afforded voting rights.
- 8.2 The Town Board's vision is underpinned by an extensive and ongoing programme of consultation and engagement, carried out over the last 8 years, and is reinforced by a strong commitment to further consultation as part of the Plan for Neighbourhoods.
- 8.3 Throughout this period, opinion has been sought directly from local people (for example, the comprehensive I Love Wisbech and Wisbech 2020 consultation programmes), as well as from expert advisers in regeneration and placemaking (for example, the High Streets Task Force, the Growing Fenland Wisbech Masterplan and an Independent Economic Commission).

Public Engagement

- 8.4 The following consultation programmes have focussed on identifying broad challenges and opportunities for the town:

I LOVE WISBECH

- A comprehensive consultation exercise undertaken in 2019 by Hunts Forum for Cambridgeshire County Council Business Intelligence Service, with the aim of conducting a community conversation with those who live, work and invest in the town of Wisbech.
- Consultation included in-person surveys in the town centre, online surveys and a series of community workshops. Consultation themes were broad, asking respondents what they love about Wisbech, how they would make it better, and what they thought could be done. This was a partnership project, including many community organisations, such as Care Network Cambridgeshire, Blackfield Creatives CIC, the Ferry Project and the Rosminin Centre.
- Many responses focussed on tackling antisocial behaviour and improving the attractiveness of the Town Centre.

WISBECH 2020

- An online survey carried out in Autumn 2016, this consultation asked residents broad questions about how they feel about Wisbech, and the proposed vision for 2020. Heritage, countryside and open spaces were seen as the town's main assets, whilst transport links, run-down buildings and policing were regularly identified as key challenges. The responses to the broad consultation questions show a very strong alignment with the Long-Term Plan for Towns menu of Themes and Interventions.
- 8.5 More specific consultation programmes have focussed on specific themes, areas or projects, including Wisbech Park Community Hub, the creativity and culture strategy, accessibility, development in East Wisbech

WISBECH PARK COMMUNITY HUB

- Carried out in Summer 2021, this consultation survey asked residents about what facilities they felt would most improve Wisbech Park. The most commonly suggested facilities included security measures such as CCTV and lighting, more inclusive facilities (e.g. changing places, baby changing), equipment to improve the active opportunities for young people, community garden/allotments, and tourist/heritage information.

BROAD HORIZONS – A CREATIVITY AND CULTURE STRATEGY FOR FENLAND

- An online consultation from Spring 2021, Broad Horizons focussed on the themes of Connections, Communication, Empowerment and Inspiration to respond to the changing population and improve community cohesion. Whilst there was some scepticism about deliverability at the time of the consultation, there was also clear support for a renewed focus on cultural activities in the town.

WISBECH ACCESS STRATEGY

- Carried out in Winter 2017, this consultation sought feedback on the draft Access Strategy. There was general acceptance and agreement of the need for transport improvements, although there was a clear lack of support for any road infrastructure that might restrict a potential future rail link to the town.

EAST WISBECH DEVELOPMENT

- An extended consultation exercise completing in Spring 2018, including surveys and visioning workshops. This included both broad questions about how Wisbech could be improved, as well as specific points about a proposed new residential development. Preferred improvements to the town included green infrastructure and open space for biodiversity, formal and informal recreation, traffic management to promote people priority, facilities for young people, and better street lighting to improve safety.

Expert Input

- 8.6 In addition to the open public engagement exercises summarised above, Wisbech has also undertaken a number of consultations with place-based regeneration specialists, each of which has drawn in stakeholders from the community to frame the proposals:

HIGH STREETS TASK FORCE

- A specialist consultation exercise in Spring 2023, run by the High Streets Task Force, and including a series of visits, stakeholder workshops and reports. The exercise identified high architectural merit, high quality market square and good parking provision as key strengths, hindered by image problems that prevent the town from attracting potential visitors. A branding and communications strategy, and a town marshal system to combat anti-social behaviour were key recommendations.

GROWING FENLAND – WISBECH TOWN MASTERPLAN

- A strategic consultation-based masterplan by regeneration specialists Metro Dynamics, developed between 2018 and 2020, exploring the future of Wisbech. The masterplan identified the wealth of heritage assets, strong outdoor market and full calendar of cultural events and community organisations. It recommended interventions to address the lack of evening/nighttime economy, poor health and education outcomes, and the poor transport links to regional employment centres. Specific recommendations included improving the attractiveness of gateway sites, repair of derelict buildings, creating indoor public space such as a covered market, consolidating a strong cultural quarter around the Wisbech Castle, improving policing in the town centre, and improved physical wayfinding and online visibility of the town's attractions.

8.7 Alongside the completed consultation exercises above, ongoing active engagement includes:

- Fenland Community Safety Partnership
- Cinnamon Network

Other Insights

8.8 The Regeneration Plan emphasis and focus has also been informed by input from MHCLG. Insights from Zensity were collected for Wisbech from the 9th of April to the 26th of May 2025. 127 respondents from Wisbech were digitally recruited through social media, mobile apps and survey panels. These insights have been included in the case for change and key messages are outlined below:

- **Satisfaction with local area:** Most respondents in Wisbech are not satisfied with their local area as a place to live (52%), think it has greatly declined in the last 12 months (45%) and expect the area to get worse to live in 2 years from now (64%).
- **Pride in local area:** Most respondents in Wisbech are not proud to live in their local area (58%), the top reasons are "the area is run down" (58%) and "safety concerns" (55%). Of those who are proud to live in the area, it is "because of the green and natural spaces here" (73%) and "because of the culture heritage and history of the local area" (46%).
- **Perceptions of local area features:** In Wisbech, residents rated all features less positively than residents across the 75 Plan for Neighbourhood towns. The biggest gaps were for 'Ease of getting around by public transportation' (-30%) and 'Availability of green and other attractive public spaces' (-29%).
- **Improving local area:** In Wisbech, the top areas residents would like to see improvements in are Tackling crime (53%) and anti-social behaviour (52%). In Wisbech, residents identified street drinking or drunken behaviour (54%) and drugs or evidence of drugs (50%) as the most pressing problems in their area.
- **Perceptions of children and young people:** In Wisbech, residents agreed with the statement 'It is easy for children to get involved in crime or join gangs in my local area' more than the average across the 75 Plan for Neighbourhood towns (+17%), but agreed with the statement 'My local area is a good place to bring up children' less (-28%).
- **Perceptions of local community:** In Wisbech, most respondents trust a few people in their local area (37%) for this question. Most respondents in Wisbech think that their area has been very left behind in comparison to the rest of the country (63%) in comparison to the rest of the country.

Ongoing Plans for Consultation

8.9 The Board is committed to undertaking ongoing consultation throughout the plan period.

- Town Wardens are tasked with recording interactions and reporting to the board on a quarterly basis. These will be a vital "ear to the ground" for the Board, regarding day-to-day happenings in the town.
- There will be individual project consultations as they come forward
- Annual general consultation is planned to be undertaken. There will be a consistent set of questions to track sentiment. This consultation will be held in person and online – staffed by council officers supporting the Town Board/ Town Wardens and Town Board members.

TOWN BOARD WEBSITE

- 8.10 The Town Board is underway with developing an online presence for the Town Board which is distinct and separate from Fenland District Council. This will display:
- The long-term strategy for regenerating your local area.
 - The neighbourhood's vision for the future.
 - A clear plan for how the Town Board will deliver change over the next decade.
 - A detailed investment and delivery plan for the first investment period.
 - All relevant Town Board documentation (minutes, agendas, upcoming meetings and membership)
- 8.11 To maximise value for the community, it is also being developed to create a comprehensive tourism and community platform to serve residents, visitors and local businesses. This will include additional features such as:
- Business and attraction directories – each business and attraction should have its own individual page, including logo, name contact details, business information and map.
 - Latest news and upcoming events - Blog-style latest news area for general community and tourism updates., categories and archive functionality, news items shareable on social media.
 - Visitor information pages and social media integration – “getting here” and “directions” page with transport options.
 - Accommodation listings – each listing should have a detail page for places to stay, searchable by name and location utilising map functionality, including images, contact details, links to book, and Google Maps integration.
 - A dedicated Town Board section with polling capabilities, surveys and updates – The dedicated page about the Town Board and its work will include news updates specific to the Town Board (distinct from the main news feed), ability to run polls/surveys on Town Board initiatives, Board member page, similar to business directory utilising individual pages with name, photo and information about the member.
- 8.12 This will be supported by a managed social media presence to increase community engagement, promoting local events, businesses, and attractions, and growing awareness of the Visit Wisbech website and wider tourism offer.

9. Governance

- 9.1 The Wisbech Town Board is made up of key partners across Wisbech, Fenland and the Wider Cambridgeshire area.
- 9.2 Fenland District Council (FDC) shall act as the accountable body and FDC's governance and financial procedures will apply when developing and delivering Town Board recommended projects and initiatives.
- 9.3 Advice, Board management and administrative support to the Board will be provided by professional Fenland District Council officers. FDC officers may also attend Board meetings, although they do not have voting rights.
- 9.4 Responsibilities of the Board:
- 1) To work together to shape and manage the investment of the Plan for Neighbourhoods funding for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government through the development of a 10-year Vision document and the development of a 4-year Investment Plan.
 - 2) To explore new ways of working to maximise the impact of resource deployment within core organisations to address the priorities for the community identified in the Vision document.
 - 3) To seek to add social value to the Wisbech Plan for Neighbourhoods project by considering wider socioeconomic, environmental and health impacts through the Vision document and the 4-year Investment Plan.
 - 4) To work together to deliver a collaborative approach towards strategic interventions which improve the long-term opportunities for the community.
 - 5) To explore and progress opportunities to deliver against the Vision for Wisbech town.
 - 6) To provide support and advice to the accountable body (Fenland District Council) in developing and managing the Vision plans in accordance with Government requirements
 - 7) To explore and maximise synergy of the Vision with other projects that are already underway or planned within the town.
 - 8) To maintain strategic oversight of the Vision document.
 - 9) To approve the 4-year Investment Plan and monitor delivery performance against that Plan.
 - 10) To ensure that the project team has sufficient resource, knowledge and capacity available to deliver the objectives of the Delivery Plan.
 - 11) To ensure the necessary liaison arrangements are in place to maximise capacity and resources across a range of potential partners within the town and regionally and nationally, and to work collaboratively to deliver the shared objectives of the Vision.
 - 12) To ensure the views of the community are represented and considered through the development of the 10-year Vision and 4-year delivery plan and communicated effectively to the local community through the development of a communications plan.
- 9.5 The Wisbech Town Board has adopted a code of conduct setting out the expected behaviours required of Board Members, acknowledging that they each have a responsibility to represent the ambition of the Vision for Wisbech and are also agreeing to work constructively with Fenland District Council's delivery officers and partner organisations to develop and deliver the Vision and associated three-year delivery plan as stipulated by the MHCLG.
- 9.6 Full details of the Town Board's members, roles, responsibilities and code of conduct are published on the Town Board website: <https://www.fenland.gov.uk/> Wisbech Town Board, including conflict of interests, registration of gifts, complaints and removal of board members.

- 9.7 Board Member Standards When acting in a Board Member capacity, members must be committed to behaving in a manner that is consistent with the Nolan principles (The Seven Principles of Public Life) to achieve best outcomes for residents and to maintain public confidence in the actions of the Board.

Nolan Principles

- **Selflessness:** Members of the Board should act solely in terms of the public interest.
- **Integrity:** Members of the Board must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
- **Objectivity:** Members of the Board must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- **Accountability:** Members of the Board are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- **Openness:** Members of the Board should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
- **Honesty:** Members of the Board should be truthful.
- **Leadership:** Members of the Board should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

- 9.8 The Town Board maintains robust control, including the need to understand the interdependencies of the different work streams of the project and areas of potential risk.

- 9.9 Decision making will follow the approach laid out in the Green Book and in guidance on producing Better Business Cases. Investment decisions will consider strategic, economic, financial, commercial and management related issues, with an emphasis on value for money and an alignment with the aims of the Town Vision. The process for approving investment decisions is outlined below:

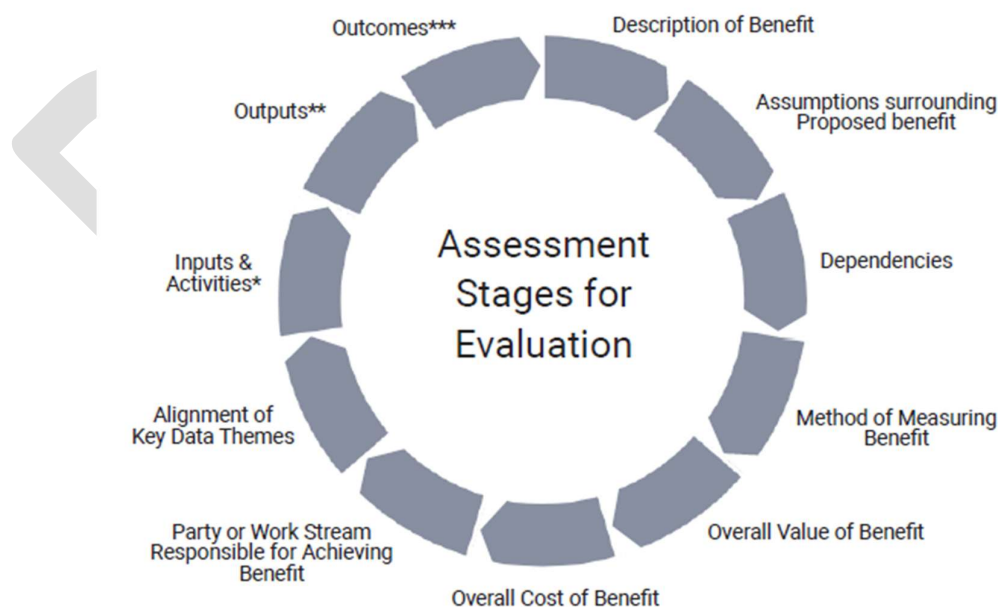
Figure 13 Process for Selecting Interventions



10. Assurance

- 10.1 Fenland District Council, as the accountable body, is experienced at running capital projects across a partnership. This is the approach that is successfully taking place for the March Future High Street Fund project. A project board of senior officers including, when necessary, the Council's Section 151 officer and legal representative, works with officers from multiple agencies (such as the County Council's Highways Major Infrastructure Team). Fenland District Council has put in place effective governance structures for the delivery of the Future High Street Fund (FHSF) project for the town of March. A similar approach would be developed for the Wisbech projects ensuring that the Town Board remain the primary decision-making forum.
- 10.2 A Monitoring & Evaluation framework will be developed that will ensure that the MHCLG requirements for Level 1 and Level 2 evaluation are met and that there is a strategy for ensuring that lessons learned are well embedded in future policy and practice.
- 10.3 The different levels of evaluation that can take place (adapted from NESTA Standards of evidence) are set out below:
- **Level 1:** You can describe what you do and why it matters: logically, coherently and convincingly.
 - **Level 2:** You capture data that shows positive change, but you cannot confirm you caused this.
 - **Level 3:** You can demonstrate causality using a control or comparison group.
- 10.4 Counterfactual impact evaluation methods are not considered feasible given the scale and nature of the intervention and the extended time period likely for impacts to materialise.

Figure 14 Evaluation Process



- 10.5 Delivery of M&E will be led by the Programme Manager, supported by the Project Team. They will develop monitoring systems and a framework for contractors to report on progress against milestones. Monitoring data will be collated in a data tool to enable consistent tracking against milestones and targets. The localised impacts will also be evident in official statistical data, particularly from ONS, which

will be used to provide further context and demonstrate the wider impacts this development has on the town.

- 10.6 Fenland DC has the governance structures in place to monitor and evaluate this project. The council has experience in supporting and coordinating developments such as this one.

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Unlocking Your Place Potential – Report and Feedback



Wisbech town centre

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About the visit and this report

The High Streets Task Force visited Wisbech town centre on 14th March 2023 to undertake an *Unlocking Your Place Potential* diagnostic visit. Chris Gregory was the High Streets Task Force Expert undertaking the visit.

The attendees representing Wisbech can be found in Appendix 1.

The purpose of the visit was to diagnose the main barrier to your transformation. In other words, what problem, if not resolved now, will make it difficult for the town to change. To do this the Expert wanted to understand more about the challenges facing the town, your plans for transformation, meet key stakeholders, ask questions and tour the town.

As a result of the diagnostic process, the Expert has identified the need for stronger branding and promotion for the town, as well as the implementation of place management, as the joint main barriers to transformation in Wisbech.

The rest of this report identifies the strengths of the town, the main barriers to transformation the Expert found, as well as clear recommendations which partners can action now to accelerate the transformation process. The report ends with a list of High Streets Task Force Products that the Expert has prescribed.

On behalf of the High Streets Task Force, may I take this opportunity to thank attendees who gave up their time to attend the meeting, and who contributed to a frank and positive discussion. Thank you to Jo Blackmore for organising the session and to those that led, and contributed to, an informative and well-planned town tour.

From reading the feedback from the visit, and this report, I can see you have a lot going for you in Wisbech – and many strengths both in the town and in your people. The High Streets Task Force is here to help you build on those strengths, and I hope you find it useful.



Matt Colledge

High Streets Task Force Project Director

Wisbech – Strengths

- ✓ Good sized town centre containing many buildings of high architectural merit
- ✓ Large market square, which includes considerable space for activation
- ✓ Range of ornate metal archways throughout the town centre
- ✓ Good and free car parking provision
- ✓ Significant potential for further improvements

Wisbech is a town with a number of strengths and, in many regards, is very well positioned to move forwards in both the short and medium term. The town centre core features a number of historic buildings and independent businesses, although the town is not considered to be fulfilling its potential in attracting visitor numbers and has been stymied in recent years by image problems. In summary, whilst the town has a number of key strengths, it is considered to require extra focus to increase overall vitality.

4Rs Framework and our method

The aim of the Unlocking Your Place Potential workshop is for our High Streets Task Force Experts to identify the key barriers to the improvement of your high street and recommend an appropriate strategic response. To enable our experts to do this in an evidence-based way, the High Streets Task Force uses the '4Rs Framework'.

Research has identified 237 factors that impact on the success of the high street. However, it is too overwhelming to think of all these at once, so we have developed the '4 Rs' framework to provide some structure to the incredibly complex practice of place transformation. Without a framework, it is easy to be drawn into so much detail that you cannot see the big picture.

When you simplify the process of renewal, the reasons why so many regeneration plans do not result in the changes people expect fall into 4 categories:

- The problems facing the centre were not accurately identified
- The plans were good but not enough changed
- The place changed but people's perceptions didn't
- There were fundamental issues with governance or the spatial layout of the place

We looked at these problems and identified 4 strategies to address them, *repositioning*, *reinventing*, *rebranding*, and *restructuring*. So, the framework distinguishes between the processes of analysis and decision making (repositioning), effecting change (reinventing), communication (rebranding) and governance/spatial planning (restructuring). More detail on each of the '4R's' is set out below.



Figure 1: The 4R's Framework

Applying the 4R's to Wisbech

Although the town exhibits many strengths, we also identified a number of challenges and have grouped these using the 4R's framework, as outlined below.

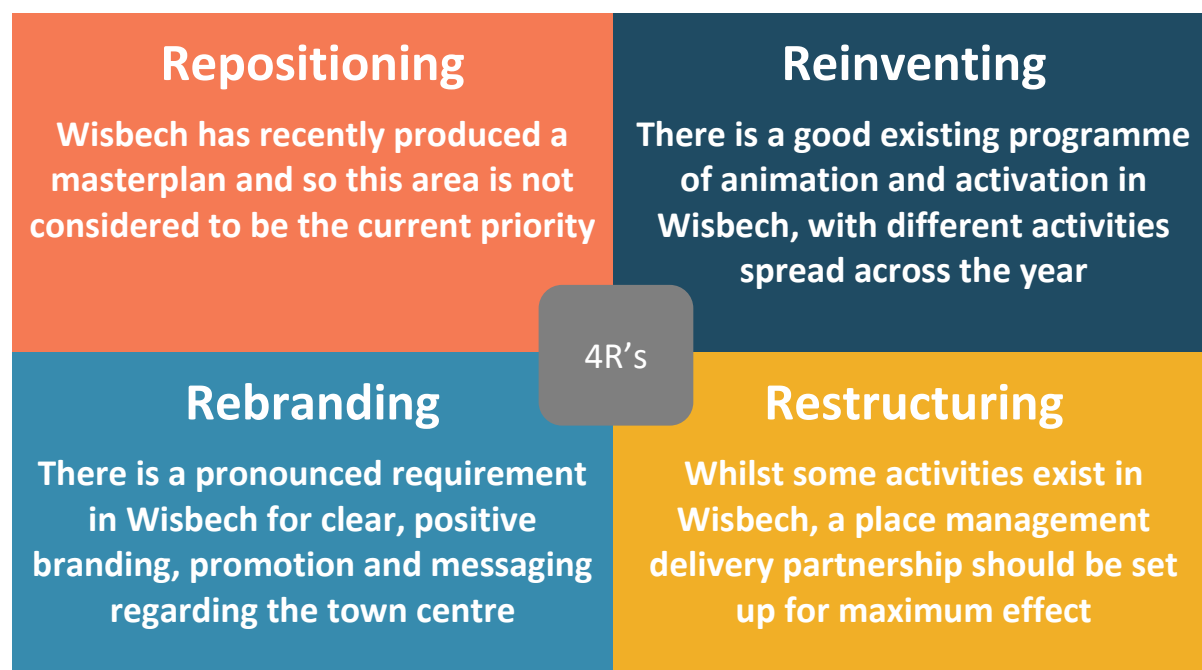


Figure 2: Wisbech analysed using the 4R's Framework

We used all the information we had to identify which of the descriptions above fitted the evidence we had collected. We collected this evidence from looking at a range of sources as well as from the Unlocking Your Place Potential visit, including our meeting, discussions, exercises and the tour of the town. We also reviewed the information we found out about Wisbech from our desk research.

We then grouped each piece of evidence under the 4R's headings of Repositioning, Reinventing, Rebranding, and Restructuring. You can see our working on the Fishbone Analysis included in this report.

By classifying every clue, we could see how these are grouped and where Wisbech is facing major barriers. This then allows us to recommend suitable strategies to overcome these (see Figure 3). These strategies are *ways of working*, rather than 'magic bullets' relating to any particular intervention in your town. As mentioned at the start of the Unlocking Your Place Potential visit, you are the experts in your town.

You can see what we consider to be the major barriers to your transformation in the next section.

Fishbone Analysis

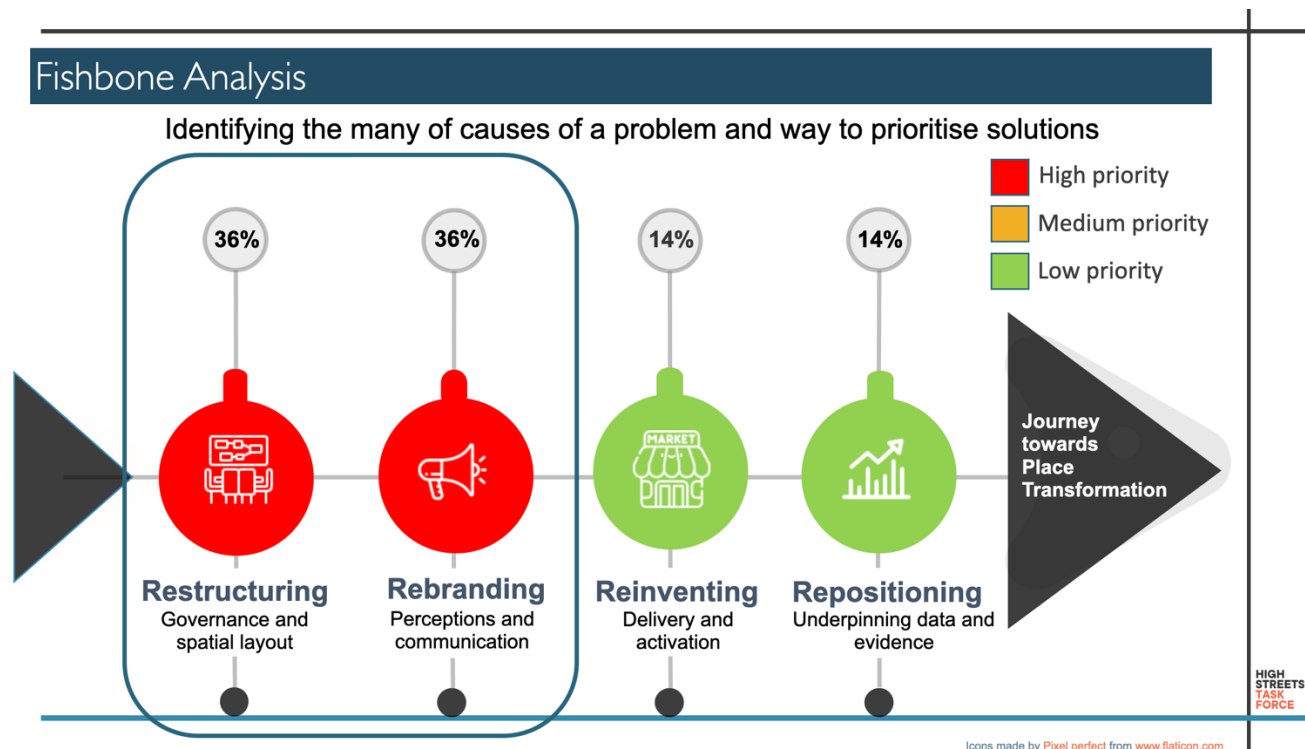


Figure 3: Wisbech Fishbone Analysis

Diagnosis of main barriers to transformation

As a result of the diagnostic process, the Experts have identified the need for stronger branding and promotion for the town, as well as the implementation of place management as the main barriers to transformation in Wisbech.

Rebranding (36% of need)

Rebranding is considered to be the joint main barrier, as evidenced by the following:

- Lack of a strong town centre identity
- Lack of social media channels to promote the town centre
- Lack of co-ordinated messaging to promote the town centre
- Relatively poor perceptions of the town centre
- Lack of communication with the wider community
- Feeling from the UYPP that perceptions of the town centre need to be addressed

Restructuring (36% of need)

Restructuring is also considered to be the joint main barrier, as evidenced by the following:

- No place-management partnership currently in place
- The UYPP session expressed support for more effective public-private sector links
- The UYPP session identified a need to work more closely with the Police on antisocial behaviour issues
- There was a feeling from the UYPP session that the town centre would benefit from place management
- Relatively little evidence of participation from residents or community groups
- The UYPP session agreed that the type of interventions which would be likely to result from place management would create a high impact

We therefore consider that the town should focus significantly on rebranding and restructuring activities as a result of this report and would therefore propose that a range of partners be brought together to establish an effective place management partnership for Wisbech town centre. This group should be established to set achievable targets, and adequate financial and staffing resources appointed.

Importantly, whilst this group should be supported by the Council, it should be directed and populated mostly by town centre businesses and wider stakeholders and should complement and be additional to any existing activities currently in place.

We also consider that a degree of attention should be paid to other considerations as follows although, whilst these factors are considered to be important and need to be considered in the future, they are not considered to be the most urgent current requirements for the town centre:

Reinventing (14% of need)

Reinventing is considered to be a barrier to a minor degree, as evidenced by the following:

- The town could benefit from more cultural attractions and experiences
- There was a feeling from UYPP session that existing events could be developed further

Repositioning (14% of need)

Repositioning is considered to be a barrier to a minor degree, as evidenced by the following:

- High Street is in high need (several IMDs in most deprived)
- No footfall data or clear use of data to influence decision making

It was very clear from our visit that there is an enthusiasm and support for the town from a range of parties. We recommend the measures as outlined within this report to facilitate a place partnership approach to improvements, with the public sector, businesses, the third sector and the community.

Recommendations

We are recommending a joint strategy of *rebranding* and *restructuring* to refresh your approach to place leadership. We understand it is not always easy to change cultures, structures and behaviours to work in a more collaborative way, so we are giving you immediate recommendations that if you adopt, will lead to some quick improvements.

1. Share the final version of this report with everybody that attended the Unlocking Your Place Potential meeting – as well as a wider range of key partners to include town centre businesses, wider stakeholders and the local community.
2. Arrange an event with a wide range of partners to review challenges facing the town centre and feedback from the UYPP visit and consider how these may inform future rebranding activities for Wisbech town centre.
3. Work to develop a branding and communications strategy which identifies the unique qualities of Wisbech and use these as a basis for a range of enhanced messaging to attract more town centre visitors.
4. Form a new and representative place management partnership for the town centre that can oversee key projects and coordinate plans and activity. This group should be focused on promoting a positive image for the town and be genuinely cross-sector, rather than being solely public sector-led, business-led or community-led. Find a structure to work together in, which may involve building on an existing structure or on existing activities.
5. Your new structure should identify who will own or action the areas for improvement identified in this report and, as indicated, our assessment is that a place management partnership should be established to oversee, co-ordinate and deliver a range of improvements.

Given the overwhelming support for the need to act upon the current antisocial behaviour problems in the town, we would also recommend that the partners in the town work together to introduce a town centre marshal system, or similar, to complement the improvements recommended above.

A further recommendation is that the views and feedback of a range of local businesses and local residents should be regularly sought in order to help shape and validate the range of town centre improvement plans. We would suggest that surveys are carried out on at least an annual basis to obtain responses from a minimum of 25 town centre businesses and 100 local residents. The results and resulting actions from such surveys should then be published and disseminated via a range of media. In this way, the intention would be to build a culture of inclusivity from the local community.

We hope these recommendations are useful. As we explained in the Unlocking Your Place Potential visit, you are the experts in Wisbech, not us. Nevertheless, we have experience of working with many towns around the country that face similar challenges – so when we undertake a diagnostic visit, we are well trained in looking for strengths and weaknesses in the town’s offer, as well as the structures and processes that manage and change the town.

High Streets Task Force Product Prescription

Based on our recommendations, we would like to offer you the following products. This has been decided after considering your key barriers to transformation and what we have concluded as the best way to help you achieve your transformation goals.

High Streets Task Force Products Prescribed:

Product prescribed	Rationale
Further mentoring support	I have recommended that Wisbech would benefit from mentoring support in order to maintain momentum on the previous stages of High Streets Task Force support and to assist laying the further foundations in advance of and following the workshop prescribed below.
Workshop	I have recommended that Wisbech would benefit from a Place Making Programme with a view to agreeing the most appropriate branding and place management approach. There will be an opportunity to further discuss this product with you, to ensure that it is something that you agree you would benefit from. If, during these discussions, the need for the programme is agreed, arrangements will begin to put this in place, and further guidance supplied.
Online learning/resources	You should already be aware that a range of online resources are available from the High Streets Taskforce website and we would encourage you to review any resources which you consider may be useful for Wisbech. Further details are available here

Next steps:

Please liaise with your Operations contact to make arrangements for the delivery of the next stage of your support. The Operations team are available to assist with any queries relating to the delivery of the above support, so please do not hesitate to get in touch if any aspect is unclear. More information about all of these products can be found on the HSTF website [here](#).

Appendix 1 – List of town attendees

Walking tour of the town centre

Cllr Sam Hoy	Wisbech Town, District and County Councillor
Cllr Steve Tierney	Wisbech Town, District and County Councillor
Phil Hughes	Head of Leisure & Open Spaces – FDC
Simon Machen	Interim Corporate Director – FDC
Matt Wright	High Streets Projects Officer
Shahid Rafique	Pub & restaurant owner
Sidney Imafidon	Representing Norfolk Street
Chris Gregory	HSTF

UYPP workshop

Cllr Sam Hoy	Wisbech Town, District and County Councillor
Cllr Steve Tierney	Wisbech Town, District and County Councillor
Paul Medd	Chief Executive of FDC
Jo Blackmore	Head of Corporate Support – FDC
Phil Hughes	Head of Leisure & Open Spaces – FDC
Matt Wright	High Streets Projects Officer
Austen Adams	Chair of North Cambridgeshire Place Development Board
Tim Watkins	Head of Service for Planning & Sustainability for CCC
Nigel Swan	Dark Realms (Market Street)
Phil Reiley	Sunlounger (Travel Agent in Market Place)
Shahid Rafique	Pub & restaurant owner
Inga Spukiene	Manager of above
Dean Satt	Lash & Beauty Lounge & Evie's Sandwich Bar (Hill Street)
Sidney Imafidon	Representing Norfolk Street
Terry Jordan	Clerk to Wisbech Town Council
James Ingham	Full-Fibre Broadband Internet Upp
Rob Buswell	Business Team at Upp
Chris Gregory	HSTF



Produced by the Cambridgeshire Research Group



Summary Report of Public Engagement Findings

V0.2
March 2019

‘Cambridgeshire Research Group’ is the brand name for Cambridgeshire County Council’s Research function based within the Business Intelligence Service. As well as supporting the County Council we take on a range of work commissioned by other public sector bodies both within Cambridgeshire and beyond.

All the output of the team and that of our partners is published on our dedicated website www.cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk

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Introduction

‘I ♥ Wisbech’ is a partnership project involving the following organisations:

- Blackfield Creatives CIC
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Care Network Cambridgeshire
- Clarion Housing Group
- CPSL Mind
- Diocese of Ely
- Fenland District Council
- Ferry Project
- Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations
- Living Sport
- Rosmini Centre
- Wisbech Community Development Association
- Wisbech Town Council

Together we have joined forces to talk to people that live and work in Wisbech about what they love about the town, what they’d like to change and what they’d like to do about it.

Our collective aim is to find and build relationships with new community leaders, fund new resident-led projects and create a community mandate to enable those that live and work in Wisbech to achieve long lasting impacts in the town.

The project has the following objectives:

- To undertake a community conversation with those who live, work and invest in the town of Wisbech
- To encourage resident involvement in local services and projects which will improve well-being outcomes
- To collate these responses into a single point narrative which will help direct or influence future plans, activities and projects
- To encourage small scale social action in Wisbech
- To strengthen the resilience of the Wisbech community
- To help build collaborative working across sectors in Wisbech

There were a total of 967 respondents. These came from:

- Face to face conversations with partners at community events and in community spaces
- Online responses via social media
- Hard copy responses via community groups, schools and colleges

Analysis Methodology

The strategy for analysis of the survey was as follows:

- **Duplicate Entries.** Measures were in place to avoid analysing duplicated entries. The online survey software collects the timestamp of entries so patterns of deliberate duplicate entries can be spotted and countered.
- **Partial Entries.** The system records all partial entries as well as those that went through to completion (respondent hit submit). These are reviewed separately and in a few cases, where a substantial response has been made (as opposed to someone just clicking through) then these are added to the final set for analysis.
- Within the analysis a search for any unusual patterns within the responses was carried out, such as duplicate or 'cut and paste' views being expressed on proposals.
- This survey consisted of three free text questions, which were analysed using qualitative methods, namely through thematic analysis. Key themes are identified using specialist software and then responses tagged with these themes (multiple tags can be given to the same response). At this stage totals of tagged themes are created and sample quotes chosen for the final report that typify particular tagged themes.

Quality Assurance

Data Integrity

- A visual check of the raw data show no unusual patterns. There were no large blocks of identical answers submitted at a similar time.
- Date / time stamp of submissions showed no unusual patterns.
- Text analysis showed no submissions of duplicate text.

Negative/Nothing. 13% of respondents discussed this theme – often saying ‘nothing’ or ‘not a lot’. Some of these respondents felt there had been a decline in Wisbech’s quality. Some of these respondents felt there was little to do in Wisbech. A few of these respondents discussed issues around crime and personal safety.

“Sadly I cannot think of anything that I like, let alone love about Wisbech today. There is no reason to ever go into the town anymore, there is nothing there.”

Conversely, some respondents responded that they loved everything about the town.

“I was not born in Wisbech, but I think it's awesome.”

Communities – Friendliness. 13% of respondents discussed this theme. These respondents felt that Wisbech had a friendly community and a village-feel. A few of these respondents indicated they loved Wisbech because their friends and family lived there. A few respondents discussed the volunteer charity groups in the area, which they felt to be very active.

“Small friendly town where you almost always meet somebody you know when you walk around. Lots of societies and voluntary work if you want to get involved. Ferry Project, Food Bank, CAB, Trinity coffee bar, Baptist Church Monday drop-in and other organisations trying to help those who aren't coping. Wisbech Churches Together. Multi-national get-togethers from time to time. Angles Theatre and Luxe Cinema.”

“How the locals raleigh round for each other when the chips are down.”

Amenities – Open space. 13% of respondents discussed this theme. These respondents indicated they loved Wisbech because of the parks, gardens and rural landscape.

“I like its history and that it’s a market town. I grew up here and it’s changed considerably. I love that you can be in a rural landscape within 10 mins of leaving the town”

Communities – Cohesion. 12% of respondents discussed this theme. These respondents felt that Wisbech’s diverse community was a positive.

“Many people from different countries”

Town centre – shops. 11% of respondents discussed this theme. These respondents felt that the selection and accessibility of shops was the reason they loved Wisbech. A few of these respondents said they liked the independent shops and cafes.

“I like the way the shops are laid out because they are all different and there are loads”

Minor themes

Town centre – Misc. The respondents who discussed this theme left general positive comments about the town centre. These also included comments about its accessibility, how it felt like a small town, and how it felt calm.

“It’s quiet, very little major crime, nice community, people are helpful and friendly.”

Town centre – Events. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that the events held in Wisbech were the reason they loved it. These included Wisbech in Bloom, the Christmas Fayre, the Rose Fair, and other festivals. Most of these respondents discussed the community events that are held.

“The market, proximity of facilities, variety of community activities to support, eg. Christmas market and events in the park, Georgian riverbank, heritage, free parking, flowers, friendly people”

“The history such as the amazing museum, the castle, the market place, the brink. We love that the town put on a lot of events such as Christmas, Halloween, beach day. People are generally friendly. We love the theatre and independent cinema and independent shops.”

Town centre – Food and restaurants. The respondents who discussed this theme indicated that the selection of cafes and eateries was the reason they loved Wisbech.

“I like that Wisbech has good places to eat, good schools and a good cinema”

Amenities – Services. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that the availability of charities, activities, schools, and health care were the reasons they loved Wisbech.

“There are a lot of places you can go when you need help”

Town centre – Market. The respondents who discussed this theme indicated the market place was the reason they loved Wisbech.

“The park is beautiful, and the market place. The architecture is amazing.”

Amenities – Accessibility. The respondents who discussed this theme indicated that the accessibility of shopping, things to do, services, and nearby places of interest were the reason they loved Wisbech.

“The old buildings and character of the town. The old views looking along the river and out towards the farmland. The lovely pocket parks within the town. The great assets of Wisbech need to be protected, North Cambs hospital/bus station and what shops we have within walking distance of town centre”

Town centre – Parking. The respondents who discussed this theme indicated they loved Wisbech because of the free and available parking.

“It’s quiet and peaceful with free parking which is unusual nowadays.”

Communications/Promotion – What’s on. The respondents who discussed this theme discussed events, leisure facilities and activities that occurred in Wisbech and felt these were the reason they loved Wisbech.

“I personally never feel the need to travel outside the town for shopping or entertainment with the Angles theatre and two cinemas.”

Prosperity – Housing. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that the availability, standard, and cost of housing in Wisbech was the reason they loved it.

“Cheap housing and lots of it.”

Prosperity – Education. Respondents who discussed this theme indicated that the educational facilities were the reason they loved Wisbech.

“Moved here from Herts. Newton first then been in town centre 18 months - very happy, great supportive school for son. Thomas Clarkson. Dance fit classes. Wisbech forum - although sometimes negative. Lots going on if you know where to look. Foreign neighbours – happy”

Rural location. The respondents who discussed this theme loved Wisbech because of its rural feel, location and surroundings.

“The sweeping ‘Brinks’, Clarkson Memorial, Town Bridge, the ‘harbour’ and the countryside.”

Town centre – Feeling safe. There was debate with respondents who discussed this theme in relation to their feelings of safety. Some of these respondents felt that Wisbech made them feel unsafe due to drug use, public drunkenness and lack of visible policing. Some of these respondents indicated that they felt safe in Wisbech.

“Sadly I don’t. Since I moved here 5 years ago it has deteriorated beyond belief. However, the church gardens have been stunning and renovation of the Castle etc has been worthwhile. People don’t go into town as they feel unsafe. The parks are full of drunks and drug users. Really, what is there to love?”

“It has a very laid back community with a slow pace of life that offers a relaxing environment. The night skies are brilliant and you can see a sea of stars sprawled above you at night time. There are always people on patrol and it is a very safe and friendly environment with lively markets on the weekends”

Town centre – Clean environment. There was debate with respondents who discussed this theme in relation to their feelings towards the state of the environment. Some of these respondents felt that Wisbech had issues with litter and waste being unmanaged. Some of these respondents felt that Wisbech was clean and felt positive about the local environment.

"It's a small town. It's clean. It's friendly."

Amenities – Misc. Most of the respondents who discussed this theme left general positive comments about Wisbech's amenities. A few respondents felt that there was nothing to do in Wisbech.

"The town is a historic gem with a very diverse population and is comfortably behind the times when it comes to development and progress. This is what gives the town its character and laid-back feeling. Long may it remain this way."

Prosperity – Jobs. Respondents who discussed this theme indicated that the availability of work was the reason they loved Wisbech.

"The history about Wisbech and the museum. It's multicultural and there are multiple opportunities for people in need of work."

Transport. The respondents who discussed this theme indicated that the availability of transport links, such as free parking and bus services, were the reason they loved Wisbech.

"It has a shopping centre and has easily accessible public transport (bus, taxi etc)"

Communities – Young people. Most of the respondents who discussed this theme felt that there wasn't enough for young people to do in Wisbech. A few respondents highlighted the availability of clubs and activities for children was the reason they loved Wisbech.

"Nothing for young people to do in Wisbech"

Town centre – Anti-social Behaviour. Respondents who discussed this theme highlighted issues they had seen around anti-social behaviour, including drug use, public drunkenness, and fighting.

"Find this very hard to answer because apart from the flower displays during the summer at various locations and looking at the North Brink in the sunshine, there is nothing else at all that grabs me! My sister in law visited us from Australia for the second time this year and i actually refused to show her into Wisbech town the first time, and this year I reluctantly agreed and walking around the rear of the town church we were face to face with a seriously nasty physically violent fight betwee two women and four men! Lovely !"

Prosperity – Homelessness. The respondents who discussed this theme highlighted issues around homelessness in Wisbech. A few of the respondents discussed the work local charities had done to help.

"Good history in the town. Good opportunities for free food for the homeless - Bygones, Rift Café, Britannia, Rosmini and others"

Prosperity – Poverty. The respondents who discussed this theme indicated issues around poverty in Wisbech. Some respondents felt it was adding to the anti-social behaviour issues. A few respondents felt Wisbech was in need of renovation.

“The immense sense of depression and poverty”

Question 2: How would you make it better?

928 respondents answered this question. The themes that arose from those comments are summarised below.

Figure 2: Word Cloud of question 2 responses



Main themes

Town centre – Shops. 27% of respondents discussed this theme. Most of these respondents felt there needed to be more shops with improved variety. A few of these respondents felt that these shops should be more independently run with less retail or charity shops. Some respondents felt that the market place should have more investment to allow it expand. Some respondents felt that the derelict buildings should be reopened as shops.

“Tackle dead town centre - more shopping like there used to be - out of town shopping”

“So dilapidated and run down, nothing to welcome people. Improve the High Street as it's looking old. Less immigration, less foreign shops, less labels over the windows and more tradition”.

Town centre – Environment/Clean up. 22% of respondents discussed this theme. Most of these respondents discussed issues with litter and felt that this needed addressing. Some of these respondents discussed the condition of the town centre, feeling it needed repair and regeneration work, including on the roads and pavements.

“Cleaner streets, pavements/roads need repairing. Better street lighting, particularly roads around Wisbech Park. Wisbech needs the railway station so commuters would buy in the town. Also, invite retailers such as Marks & Spencer, NEXT etc. to come to the Retail Park.”

Town centre – Feeling safe. 22% of respondents discussed this theme. These respondents discussed feeling unsafe and the reasons for feeling this way, including improved policing. Most of these respondents discussed public drunkenness, drug use and drug availability.

Some respondents discussed gang culture, violence and vandalism. Some respondents also discussed ways to make people feel safer. These suggestions included more visible policing, improved lighting, more CCTV, more activities for younger people, and more community events.

“Remove/enforce anti-social behaviour on undesirable people, restrict/impose better conditions on rogue and irresponsible land lords thus restoring a better population/residents/community. More community events to help bring people together”

Get authorities to *“open their eyes and recognise the huge problem the town has with anti-social behaviour and do something about it, not try to pretend it doesn’t go on & people avoid the town centre because they are too scared to go!”*

“Policing in general seems inadequate.”

Amenities – Facilities. 18% of respondents discussed this theme. These respondents discussed various facilities they would like to see developed. These included places for activities and clubs, places for youth activities, historical places, green spaces, an indoor market, evening activities such as live music and eateries, and more events.

“To improve Wisbech, I would add leisure centres so children could become more active and interact with the community”

Town centre – Anti-social behaviour. 17% of respondents discussed this theme. Most of the respondents who discussed this theme discussed it in relation to ‘Feeling safe’. Respondents felt there were issues around anti-social behaviour such as public drunkenness, drug use, vandalism, and violence.

“There is a fear of street drinking and anti-social behaviour, especially around the market place. There is also a lack of parking enforcement”

Transport. 13% of respondents discussed this theme. Most of these respondents felt that Wisbech could use a train station and the transport links that would bring, particularly to Peterborough and Kings Lynn. Some respondents felt that transport options needed improving in Wisbech, including increasing the number of buses and routes as well as improving road links to improve traffic.

“Better public transport. More bus stops & routes linking local villages to the town. I live on the outskirts and have no form of public transport to get into town which means me and my partner have no choice but to run 2 cars. Hopefully the train station to go ahead.”

Minor themes

Communities – Cohesion. The respondents who discussed this theme left comments indicating that there was a lack of community cohesion. Some of these respondents felt that more should be done to encourage different communities to work together and share

experiences. Some of these respondents left comments indicating they had issues with immigration.

“Not enough integration of communities.”

Negative. The respondents who discussed this theme left negative comments about what could be done to improve Wisbech. Most of these respondents felt that everything needed improving, some felt that nothing could be done to improve things mainly due to funding.

“to be honest I really don’t know there does not seem to be the funds to improve things”

Communities – Young people. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that improvements were needed for younger people, particularly around employment/educational opportunities and activities.

“Improved youth service for young people that increased aspirations. More funding into early intervention for families. More jobs.”

Amenities – Open space. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that open spaces needed improving. Some of these respondents felt that existing play areas needed to be better maintained. Some of these respondents felt that green spaces should be made more accessible. A few of these respondents discussed running more events in open spaces.

“Wisbech Park is beautiful. However sadly every time I have taken my children to the playground there has been vomit and rubbish in the floor. Is it possible to make the area larger as lots of children use it. Lots of the play equipment is never used i.e. the metal bar climbing frame. Could a roundabout be fitted that could be used by disabled children too. Also two small stand on spinners. At the other end where it is the harbour line could another zip wire be fitted for the teenagers. Can it be monitored more?”

Amenities – Clean up. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that the appearance of many of the buildings and shops in Wisbech needed improving. Respondents felt these were coming into disrepair, were too industrial or not in fitting with the Georgian feel of Wisbech.

“Difficult: whilst building new houses, schools and open spaces, it is important to focus on what is already here and in need of repair/improvement. Many Georgian properties, including shops, are owned by private landlords; some are in serious need of repair especially as many are rented out. They should take responsibility for the upkeep to enhance the local area, not add to its dilapidation!”

Town centre – Parking. The respondents who discussed this theme felt there needed to be improvements to parking and more of it. Some of these respondents felt there needed to be more enforcement of illegal parking.

“Police presence. Traffic Wardens. A sensible parking arrangement on the market place. Council sponsored market stalls for a Saturday ONLY markets.”

Road repairs/infrastructure. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that the road and pavement infrastructure needed improving. Most of these respondents discussed the need for better maintenance on the roads and pavements. Some of these respondents felt that safety improvements were needed on the roads and pavements. A few respondents felt there needed to be infrastructure improvements to the roads to reduce traffic in Wisbech.

“Sort out all the pot holes. Do something about parking near schools. Ramnoth road is a nightmare at sometimes and I dread a child getting hurt by all the cars reversing and fighting for spaces. Encourage businesses into the town by reducing rents.”

Town centre – Market. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that the market place needed investing in to attract more stalls. Some of these respondents felt that the market needed specific improvements such as pedestrianisation or developing an indoor market.

“If we cannot afford to completely rebuild the town centre, why don’t we build a really decent sized town indoor market where there are permanent stall holders, cafe and room for travelling market stalls. There has been a total revolution up north somewhere which has breathed life back into high streets through creating a big indoor market place buzzing with people both shopping and ‘meeting up’ for coffee.”

Town centre – Food & restaurants. The respondents who discussed this theme felt there needed to be more eateries, cafes and pubs.

“The town would benefit from some more shops/restaurants/social hubs as there are many empty units in and around the town centre. I believe the town would benefit by attracting more visitors.”

Communities – Events. The respondents who discussed this theme felt there needed to be more events. Some of these respondents felt that events would be used to bring different members of the community together.

“More access to heritage sites or events on how to find out about Wisbech hidden archaeology and history. More variety of shops. Rather than big retailers offering smaller business opportunity. More seasonal activities and evening lecture series. Historic craft fares go down very well.”

Prosperity – Jobs. The respondents who discussed this theme felt there needed to be more jobs available in Wisbech. Some of these respondents felt these needed to focus on youth employment. A few of these respondents discussed reducing business rates in order to attract more business to bring in more jobs. A few of these respondents felt that a rail link would help increase employment opportunities.

“Would like to see regular farmers market set up. Would like to see the young people with additional needs given employment opportunities, there is a fantastic special school who try hard to be more visible within the community. Would be great to see more collaboration

between businesses and local schools. Would love to improve our transport links out and into the town to assist access to employment, leisure and services for the outlying villages that Wisbech serves as a hub for. More cycle paths! Would love to have a theatre that could attract acts like Lynn's Corn Exchange."

Prosperity – Education. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that there needed to be more investment in educational facilities across the board. This included improving current facilities and adding more.

"Improved youth service for young people that increased aspirations. More funding into early intervention for families. More jobs."

Prosperity – Housing. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that Wisbech needed more affordable housing. Some of these respondents felt that there needed to be more housing for the homeless as this was felt to be a serious issue in Wisbech. A few respondents felt that more should be done to control irresponsible land lords.

"More social housing and places for the homeless to live - maybe "homes first" as some towns do. More opportunities for the vulnerable and those with mental health problems to be helped. Need more doctors' surgeries and more accessible public toilets. A proper supermarket in the Horsefair."

Communications/Promotion – What's on. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that more events/activities should be available and these should be advertised so residents knew what was happening in Wisbech.

"Advertising for events like the Christmas market."

Council and Policing issues. Some respondents mentioned the commitment of *all Councils* and the Police, to work together to improve the town and involved communities more in decision-making.

"As an individual what can I do about it? It's down to the 3 layers of politicians/councils, i.e. WTC, FDC, CCC, all of which don't or won't pull together for Wisbech"

"It needs more consultation with young people, business and the movers and shakers in the town."

"The council needs to do more public engagement and fewer plans"

Amenities – Services. Some of the respondents who discussed this theme felt there needed to be more health care facilities in Wisbech. Some respondents felt there needed to be more security features, such as lighting, CCTV, or police presence. Some respondents discussed the need for more places that run health, leisure and educational activities. A few respondents felt there needed to be somewhere central to find out what events/activities were available within Wisbech.

“Some restaurants, big name stores, more police, more doctors and dentist surgeries, 24:1 minor injuries unit, railway line to Cambridge/London and to Kings Lynn, better road repairs, another bridge over the river, vibrant market place, independent bakers.”

Amenities – Accessibility. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that accessing the amenities and facilities in Wisbech needed to be made easier, particularly for those with young children and disabilities. These respondents felt this could be done through better transport links, better parking facilities, and more centralised locations.

“Making it better for the disabled to get a round more parking Facilities would be nice, also a meeting place for the people of Wisbech poorer side of the town so they can use it for things like arts and crafts, dance, keep fit and make them cheap as possible or free. Also help people how have no heating get some like if they have oil make it gas or electric storage heating.”

Town centre – Toilets. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that there needed to be more accessible public toilets.

“Many people will name shops like Primark etc, which the town centre does not have, to a certain degree this may help as long as people can afford to park etc. Town centre seems to lack food shops since Co-op has gone from Horsefair. Then there's the lack of toilets, payable ones or any that are open.”

Prosperity – Poverty. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that poverty was an issue within Wisbech and that more should be done to tackle this. These respondents felt that more facilities for the homeless, improved education and job prospects would help with this.

“Better and more varied shops. More employment and better employment. More disposable income for people.”

Town centre – Heritage. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that more should be done to highlight Wisbech's heritage, including restoring old buildings, opening more historical locations for visitors, and running more historical events.

“Spend money on restoring said buildings as I feel once restored the town would attract more people from outside the area thus bringing additional prosperity to the town.”

Communication/Promotion – Press. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that more publically available information should be available. Some of these respondents felt that Wisbech needed more positive press, including from a tourism board. Some respondents felt the council needed to provide more public information and be generally more engaged. A few respondents discussed the loss of local newspapers.

“When you google Wisbech the first sites that come up are negative reviews about the area. Wisbech needs a tourism marketing plan update and some positive pro Wisbech journalists.”

This place is a hidden treasure with so much history. We need to put Wisbech on the map for the right reasons.”

Communication/Promotion – Celebration. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that more needed to be done to show off Wisbech’s history and positive aspects.

“If the image of the town could be changed to reflect all the amazing people, places and History that town has.”

Communications/Promotion – Tourism. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that more should be done to promote tourism and attract visitors.

“More hotels to cater for tourists and more tourist promotion as well.”

Communities – friendliness. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that there could be more respect and friendliness between people in Wisbech.

“More Housing and a rail station. A bit more respect and love amongst people.”

unsuitable shops is simply not the answer, for example the new Cromwell Road trading park has attracted a selection of retailers of which none have the capability to draw customers on a regular basis."

Council issues. 16% respondents discussed this theme. Many respondents said it was the authorities' responsibility to deal with the wider issues.

"It is not what would I like to do about it. It's more about what the Combined Authority, the County Council, Fenland District Council and Wisbech Town Council can and will do about it"

Communities – Events. 15% of respondents discussed this theme. Some of these respondents discussed events they already volunteer to help run. Some respondents discussed events they would like to volunteer to help run. Suggestions included entertainment events, community outreach events, and community cleaning.

"Help organise events, push for more funding to help get support and promote events."

Town centre – Feeling safe. 13% of respondents discussed this theme. These respondents felt there needed to be more enforcement in Wisbech, particularly around anti-social behaviour, littering, public drunkenness and drug use. Some of these respondents felt that an improved police presence would aid this.

"The police need to be pushed to provide more readily visible patrols especially in the town. There is a disturbing increase in anti-social behaviour including graffiti, damage and abusive behaviour. Public drinking needs to be curtailed urgently."

Negative/Nothing. 11% of respondents discussed this theme. Some of these respondents indicated they did not feel they could help for various reasons, such as free time, their financial situation, or health.

"I don't the time unfortunately"

Town centre – Environment/clean up. 10% of respondents discussed this theme. These respondents felt that Wisbech needed to be cleaned of litter. Some of these respondents indicated they would help with some form of community cleaning project.

"Happy to get involved. I would like to see an anti - litter campaign on the streets with local people involved."

Town centre – Anti-social behaviour 10% of respondents discussed this theme. These respondents indicated there were issues around anti-social behaviour in Wisbech. Some of these respondents felt that more police presence and enforcement would help.

"Stop anti-social behaviour."

Communities – cohesion. 10% of respondents discussed this theme. These respondents felt that events and community engagement should work on helping the community feel more connected.

“Be part of the process of pulling people together.”

Minor themes

Communities – Young people. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that events and community engagement should focus on things that would benefit younger people, such as clubs and activity areas.

“Activities for kids or hire a hall or run a weekly club”

“Set up a website or social media site to inform young people on what's happening in Wisbech”

Amenities – Services. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that services, such as food banks, policing, healthcare, the council, and homeless facilities could be helped or improved.

“Wisbech food bank”

Amenities – Open space. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that improvements could be made to Wisbech by increasing the amount of green spaces, such as parks, and increasing planting around Wisbech.

“More parks, places to go, more towns”

Prosperity – Homelessness. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that more could be done to aid the homeless in Wisbech.

“Help the homeless or people that are struggling”

Communication/Promotion – What’s on. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that more could be done to promote what events/activities were occurring in Wisbech. A few of these respondents indicated they were already, or would like to be, involved in these events/activities and their promotion.

“More positive PR - More events and things to do.”

Road repairs/infrastructure. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that the roads and pavements around Wisbech needed more maintenance and safety improvements, such as crossing points. A few of these respondents felt that Wisbech needed to be more accessible by road, particularly around the A47.

“Until Wisbech is more accessible by road with more free car parking with more shops in the Town centre you will not encourage people to visit or shop in the Town. If the infrastructure is not in place there will be no improvements.”

Town centre – Parking. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that issues around illegal parking needed to be addressed.

“Have more police patrols, or people with the power to move people on and ticket bad parking on a daily basis.”

Town centre – Shops. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that Wisbech could be improved with a larger selection of shops and that incentives should be put in place to encourage this.

“Cheaper rents for shop keepers so we get shops that stay in town rather than being empty.”

Transport. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that improved transport links, such as increased bus routes and a train station, would help Wisbech. A few of these respondents indicated they had supported the development of a train station.

“Bring back the railway! Improve public transport. Duelling the A47. Publicise more plans for development etc”

Town centre – Market. Some of the respondents who discussed this theme felt that the market place could be improved by adding more stalls. A few respondents felt that the stalls should be reduced or newer stall holders located elsewhere.

“Create a market place in a centre to allow entrepreneurs to show what they can offer before getting a stall in the actual market place.”

Prosperity – Jobs. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that a more diverse range of jobs would improve Wisbech.

“Take advantage, more community. Better jobs than cleaning. Better paid, worthwhile – progression. Volunteered for museum - interested in heritage”

Communication/Promotion – Celebration. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that more could be done to promote the positive aspects of Wisbech, such as its history and community.

“Advert in paper asking for info about everything individuals are participating in to get a true picture of how incredible Wisbech is - very passionate discussion”

Town centre – Heritage. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that events and facilities focused on Wisbech’s heritage would help improve it. A few of these respondents indicated they have volunteered for the museum.

“Develop links between the museum, library and Castle - possible joint Heritage Lottery Bid – volunteers, funding, cultural quarter”

Town centre – Food & Restaurants. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that more places to eat, particularly restaurants, would help Wisbech.

“Get some other places to eat other than fast food”

Prosperity – Education. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that improvements should be made to educational facilities, particularly making links with the community and businesses.

“Education needs to support the next generation to invest and remain in the local areas if not Fenland will die. It will literally be a place for cheap housing and an elderly population. But no one will spend and therefore buy into their community the money always goes elsewhere because people complain there’s nothing here?”

Communication/Promotion – Tourism. The respondents who discussed this theme felt that more could be done to promote tourism in Wisbech.

“I already volunteer at one of the tourist attractions in the town. I talk Wisbech up at every opportunity I would like to see more tourist promotion.”

Other responses

420 respondents were asked a slightly different question for question 3, “What would you do about it if you had £50?”. Responses were mostly similar but differences were seen in the major themes.

Prosperity – Homelessness. 30% of respondents discussed this theme. These respondents indicated they would give the money to the homeless or use the money to buy food, living essentials for them.

“Buy food for homeless”

Prosperity – poverty. 26% of respondents discussed this theme. Most of these respondents indicated they would give the money to someone who would financially need it or donate it to a charity/food bank. Some of these respondents indicated they would use it to buy essentials for themselves.

“I would donate the money to the people that really need it”

Town centre – Environment/clean up. 12% of respondents discussed this theme. These respondents indicated they would use the money to provide more bins or pay for cleaners to remove litter from the streets.

“I would spend it on employing more people to collect litter/trash”

Amenities – facilities. 11% of respondents discussed this theme. Most of these respondents indicated they would donate the money to local charities and places of interest. A few of these respondents indicated they would put the money towards opening something for the community, such as a youth club or community centre.

“I would open a free youth club with things like arcade games, computers, TV and entertainment for young people”

Negative/Nothing. 11% of respondents discussed this theme. Most of these respondents indicated they would spend the money on themselves on non-essential purchases such as entertainment. Some of these respondents felt that £50 would not make any difference or that they were not sure what they would spend it on.

“You can't do anything with 50 quid”



Wisbech:

Market Town Masterplan



Wisbech Town Council



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Introduction

This piece of work is a response to the Combined Authority's plans for Market Town Masterplans. These are being brought forward across the district.

This report is unlike the other three market town reports (Chatteris, March, Whittlesey). This is because Wisbech has done a lot of its strategic thinking already. Throughout the Wisbech 2020 Vision work, there has been extensive consultation of residents to understand the mood of the town. The Wisbech 2020 Vision work is currently being refreshed to create an action plan for the year 2019/20. The Wisbech Garden Town proposals have also been developed, and we are securing buy-in for these.

This document, then, does not represent another strategy, or a totally new set of ideas. Nor will it constitute a new workstream on top of the significant activity already going on in Wisbech.

However, we are excited about the new opportunities that the advent of the Combined Authority brings. We invite the Combined Authority to get involved in the work we are leading on to transform the town of Wisbech: focused on improving economic, social, and environmental outcomes for the benefit of all our residents. We have worked with the Wisbech 2020 Vision team to understand which of the long list of actions are the key proposals where Combined Authority support would be most helpful.

A strategy that works across Fenland

As well as this report, we are also bringing forward a set of strategy proposals for the whole district. These will move the dial on many of the big challenges experienced right across the district.

It is at this level that we hope to tackle challenges around health and education, where the opportunities from acting at a district level are much greater.

A mandate to be bold

We are acting with courage to transform the town of Wisbech. This reflects our history. Thomas Clarkson was a leading abolitionist, who courageously challenged the dominant views of his day to bring about the end of the slave trade. The Peckovers were philanthropists who stood for improvements in education and pacifist causes. Octavia Hill was a pioneer in creating new models of social housing and founded the National Trust. We have never been cautious of embracing change, or speaking out against the consensus.

Now, more than ever, we need to draw on this tradition of doing things differently. There are many brilliant things about our town – but we have some serious challenges we need to work on, including education and health. And we need to think creatively about how we manage factors which are not directly under our control, such as land values, flood risk, and climate change. We want Wisbech to be a **resilient town of the future**, ready to adapt to whatever challenges come our way.

This call for resilience is in particular reflected in our longer-term ambitions for future housing growth. Our plans embrace the need to be resilient to the impacts of climate change, particularly flooding. This reflects the recommendation in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review



(CPIER) that Wisbech becomes a “UK testbed for new flood-resistant approaches to development”¹. And by being fully integrated within the Wisbech community, we can also strengthen community resilience.

Now is the time for those standing in the model of our radical past to embrace the opportunity.

¹ <https://www.cpier.org.uk/media/1672/cpier-report-151118-lowres.pdf> p92

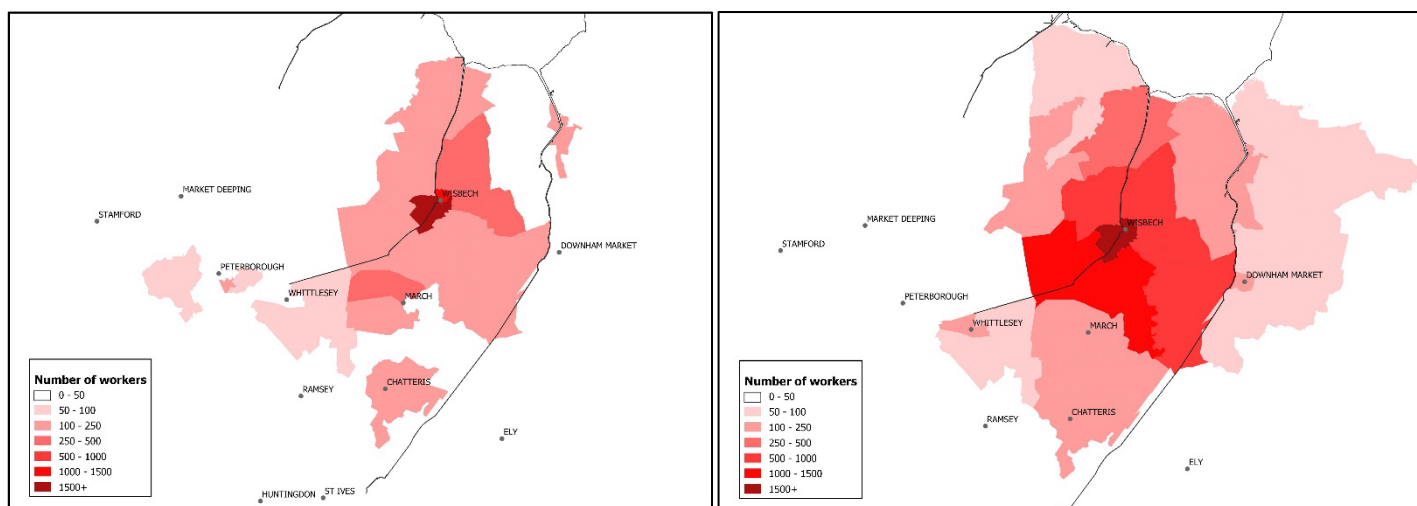
Wisbech – what residents and the data is saying

A strong local centre

Wisbech, unlike other towns in Fenland, acts as a magnet – it draws in more people than it sends out for work. We can see this by looking at commuting patterns for the town:

Commuters out....

...and commuters in



Source: Analysis of Census 2011

This is the result of a few things. Firstly, Wisbech² is by some margin the largest of the Fenland market towns. While it is still some way off city size, in the absence of another city nearby, this makes Wisbech an important local centre.

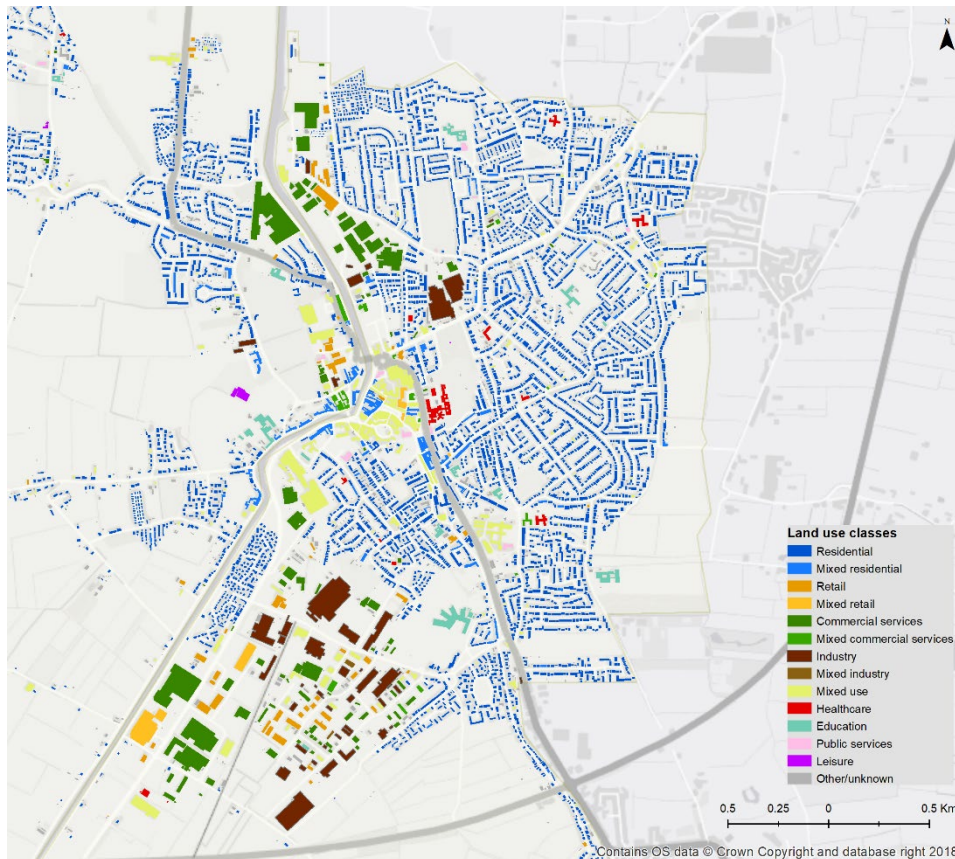
Secondly, Wisbech has high employment – with many larger firms. Total employment is 13,750 in Wisbech, and 15.2% of all business have ten or more staff – very high compared to Fenland (10.1%) and the England average (10.5%).

This can be seen in the large industrial clusters around the town. But Wisbech also offers significant retail and leisure services, as well as healthcare services at the North Cambridgeshire Hospital. The local importance of Wisbech can be seen from the variety of different land use types in the town.

“We’re a bit in-betweeny in terms of size.” – Wisbech resident

Land use in Wisbech

² Our geographical definition is based upon ward boundaries. For more details, please see Appendix



Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of Ordnance Survey Points of Interest data

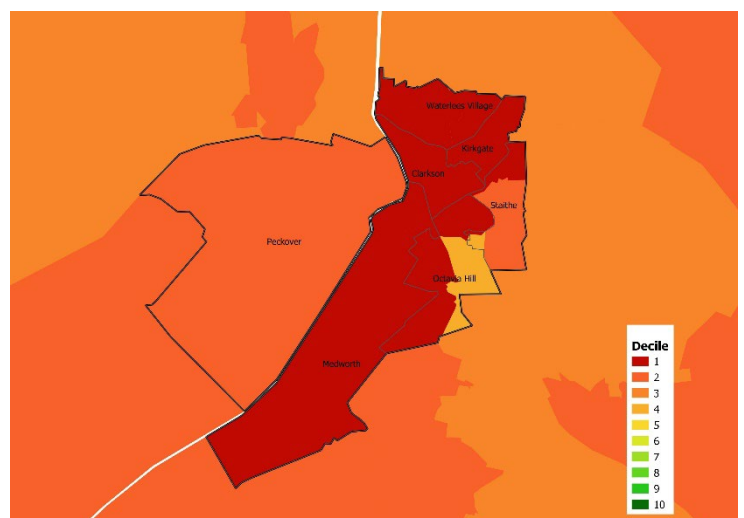
One cause for concern, though, is the lack of substantial amounts of people commuting west to Peterborough. While this may have grown since the data was recorded in 2011, Peterborough is our nearest city, which contains higher-paid employment. There is virtually no commuting south to Cambridge. Much of this comes down to issues with transport – inadequate road links which are prone to closure, and poor public transport provision.

An educational offer that needs support

While recent improvements have been seen at several schools in Wisbech, educational deprivation remains a big challenge. There are a few elements to this. Firstly, when children arrive at primary school in Wisbech, they are generally performing less well than their peers elsewhere. Phonics skills among young children are among the worst in the country.

Secondly, rates of children staying on for sixth form have historically been low – though this has not been the case at the grammar school.

Educational Deprivation in Wisbech (2015)



Thirdly, there are many different cultures in Wisbech, which brings diversity to our town, but can also put extra pressure on resources – with the need to teach children who don’t have English as a first language, and who may come from a culture where schooling starts later.

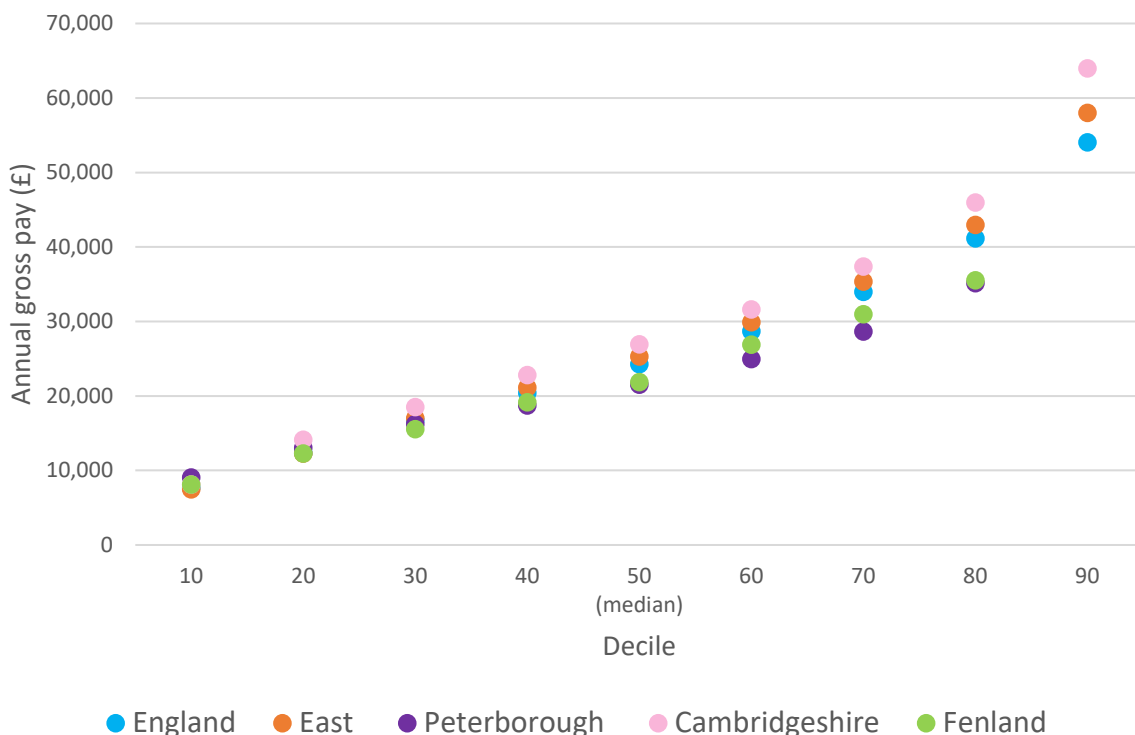
Source: Analysis of Home Office data (2015)

Low unemployment – but also low wages

Unemployment is low in Wisbech – with only 2.2% of the working age population claiming Job Seekers’ Allowance (JSA). The large industrial cluster which has grown up around the town testifies to the fact that people work hard in Wisbech, and employers recognise this.

At the same time, much of this work is in lower skilled occupations. At the time of the last census (2011) **43% of Wisbech residents were in occupations that were either “Elementary Occupations” or “Process, plant, and machine operatives”**, compared to 29% in Fenland and 18% in England³. This lower skilled work is linked to generally low wages – which lag behind Cambridgeshire across Fenland as whole.

Wages at different deciles for different areas



Source: ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. Data not available for Fenland and Peterborough at the 90th decile.

³ Analysis of ONS Annual Population Survey data

A mixed picture on the high street

Wisbech High Street has seen conversions from shops to restaurants, cafés, pubs and bars over the last fifteen years – with the amount of floorspace for shops decreasing by 2,500m² between 2002 and 2017, while the amount of floorspace for eating and drinking increased by 2,350m² over the same period⁴.

“There’s no real night time economy” – Wisbech business owner

In many ways, this is in line with national trends, where retailers have struggled with the increase in online shopping. **But the increase in cafés, restaurants and pubs has not yet translated into a busy evening economy for the town, which generally feels quiet post 7pm.** This is probably in part due to the leisure and dining facilities which exist out to the west of the town (including the Light Cinema) which may draw people away from the town centre at this time. Wisbech also suffers somewhat from not having a “flagship store” to bring footfall to the town centre.

However, the town is weathering the declining retail trend well with a busy market and few vacant units. A recent report on the market commented that “the traditional market days are Thursday and Saturday which still appear to be strong trading days as does not unsurprisingly Friday”⁵.

At the same time, the town is blessed by a wealth of brilliant architecture and cultural attractions, including Peckover House, Wisbech Castle, and the Wisbech & Fenland Museum, meaning there is plenty for visitors and residents to see and do. There is a full calendar of events, and numerous community organisations.

Some challenges with health

Health outcomes are generally worse in Wisbech than England averages (though not on every measure). Most notably, hospital stays for alcohol related harm are 46% above the England average, cancer incidence is 10.6% above the England average, and rates of emergency admissions for heart disease, heart attack, and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) are all over 50% above England averages. As a consequence, premature mortality rates for those under 75 are 30.9% higher than in England, and for those under 65 are 43.8% higher – indicating a significant challenge here.

In terms of lifestyle factors, the available data is less detailed, but there is a notable gap with England in the rates of healthy eating adults – 22.7%, compared to 28.7% in England, and 32.4% in Cambridgeshire⁶.

A town that is taking the initiative

Wisbech is very unusual for a market town in being very proactive about its future. Through the Wisbech 2020 Vision, the town has actively engaged with the Government, which has resulted in visits

⁴ Source: Cambridgeshire County Council. Based upon change of use applications for planning categories A1, A3 and A4. Figures rounded.

⁵ NABMA: Market Health Check Report

⁶ All figures taken from Public Health England data, available through the Local Health tool



from ministers and senior civil servants, signalling support. While cities tend to have more resources for this type of activity, Wisbech has used its assets to make a strong case for investment. A recent visit from Their Royal Highnesses The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall has raised the profile of the town still further.

The town also benefits from a strong community spirit. In recent surveys undertaken for the 'I Love Wisbech' work, the friendliness of the town was frequently referenced, as well as voluntary sector organisations such as the Ferry Project and local churches. Wisbech Town Council have also tried to be as proactive as possible in enhancing community integration through their wide range of community events.



Our key asks of the Combined Authority

We invite the Combined Authority to be a part of transforming our town. The Combined Authority has recognised, through its response to the CPIER, the importance of the Fens as a separate economic area to both the Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough economies. Wisbech is the largest town in the Cambridgeshire Fens – so realising the potential of this economy has to mean a prosperous and inclusive future for Wisbech.

Our key asks are:

- 1. Provide immediate connectivity to key employment centres**
- 2. A Town Centre Improvement Initiative**
- 3. Support cohesion and community shared space**
- 4. Open up countryside access, and develop the Wisbech Country Park**
- 5. Develop a workplace health award scheme**
- 6. Focus on Tourism**
- 7. Repair Derelict Buildings**
- 8. Commercialisation of Wisbech Port**

We now unpack each of these in turn.

1. Provide immediate connectivity to key employment centres

Wisbech suffers from poor transport connectivity. According to Wikipedia, it is among the twenty largest towns in England not to have a train station⁷. The fact that the A47 is single carriageway for much of its journey east and west from Wisbech makes it unsafe and slow. Cycle infrastructure to connect the town to other places is virtually non-existent. All of the above means that it is difficult to work in any of the East of England's primary employment centres – Peterborough, Cambridge, and Norwich – while living in Wisbech.

The economic impacts of this are clear. Within Wisbech there are low levels of professional employment, meaning that many who want to move on in their career feel they need to leave the town. This takes people and resources away. It is also a missed opportunity to bring more money in to flow around the town, which would help the high street immensely.

We know what the real “game-changers” are to make changes to this in the long run, which are covered in the strategy paper. The A47 needs to be fully dualled to open up employment opportunity. In the longer term a rail link to the town will mean young professionals, who are increasingly unlikely to drive, will base themselves in the town. A 45-minute link to Cambridge would increase employment and allow for people working in Cambridge to access more affordable housing. Further ahead, Wisbech may be able to become part of the Cambridge Autonomous Metro (CAM) network, which is initially being developed in the south of the county.

But, even if all goes as best as it possibly can on these projects, construction of heavy infrastructure inevitably takes a long time in both the planning and delivery. It is highly unlikely that either project will be complete before 2030. This is too long to wait – we need solutions now. Business cases for ambitious schemes will also stack up more readily if we can nurture patterns of commuting out of the town. Fenland Association for Community Transport (FACT) is working to help address this – but much more needs to be done, which goes beyond the limits of what a volunteer organisation can provide.

Some ideas which should be developed, tested, and if viable rolled out include:

- **A shuttle bus service to key transport hubs.** Both March and Watlington stations are within 25 minutes' drive from Wisbech. These enjoy quick connections to Cambridge (and Peterborough, in the case of March). A shuttle service which was designed to coincide with train departures would make public transport commuting a feasible option.
- **Testbed for the Cambridge Autonomous Metro (CAM).** The technology for the Cambridge Autonomous Metro will need to be trialled. According to the Strategic Outline Business Case, the CAM will use “high-quality, zero-emission ‘trackless metro’ vehicles, powered by electric batteries recharged overnight and at route termini throughout the day, without the need for overhead wires”. This technology could be trialled to connect Wisbech on the course of one of the old railway line connections. This would help as a proof of concept both for the CAM, and also for future connectivity to Wisbech.

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_largest_towns_in_England_without_a_railway_station



These suggestions are fixes for the short term – but impetus must be kept up for Wisbech Rail and the dualling of the A47.

2. A Town Centre Improvement Initiative

Throughout the Growing Fenland project, among the normal rivalries between towns, one refrain has been clear from other towns that they believe Wisbech has been the focus an undue amount of resource and attention. That there has been real focus on Wisbech is clearly true. This is to a degree justified by the socio-economic and demographic statistics in the town which are particularly challenging.

In our view, a focus on Wisbech is justified over and above the proposals suggested by the town team, but the focus should be on giving the town the support it needs to capitalise on its assets and deal with its issues so that it has a momentum of its own going forward. We think it is possible and necessary to get Wisbech even more firmly on the right path. This is because the context has changed or is set to do so.

The strategy paper includes a range of transport proposals. Alongside the revenue proposals also considered for improvements to education and health, these capital proposals, if implemented, would change the potential of Wisbech Town Centre, making it both possible and necessary to improve the town's offer.

This is a project that other key stakeholders have a concern with. NPP, owners of the Horsefair Shopping Centre, have reported a marked decline in footfall and wish to work with the Town and District Council and others to develop proposals to improve footfall in the town centre. At the moment, footfall is not tracked in the Town Centre – but as this initiative is taken forward it will be important to do so.

Based on all of these factors, we propose a Wisbech Town Centre initiative.

Its aim should be to make Wisbech a venue of choice for retail, leisure and culture for the widest possible cross-section of local people as well as to a growing number and range of visitors.

The way this will be achieved is through a combination of measures designed to:

- increase footfall in the town centre, thereby embedding and sustaining the existing retail offer as well as creating new opportunities. Footfall counters to be introduced to monitor changes in footfall i.e. when events are held or if a new store is opened. It will be important to do so as anecdotal evidence suggests the market place and surrounding streets are doing better than the Horsefair shopping centre – the only place footfall is currently counted.
- improve the attractiveness of key gateways to the town centre including by potentially remodelling the Horsefair carpark
- improve the range of hotel accommodation on offer
- investigate the possibility of covering the market, or other creative approaches to maximising its potential, while exploring whether there is a case for more retail space in the town centre (or whether existing large retail space in the centre can be made more attractive for large retailers).
- develop a distinctive food and beverage offer which reflects the rich agricultural offer of the Fenland area

- develop the area around the Wisbech Castle and Museum as a cultural quarter, with space for artists to display and sell their products.
- create community owned and managed space as a home for community groups
- Fund and work with Wisbech Town Council to introduce their plans for Wisbech Market Place which includes pedestrianisation as well as visual features
- Introduce policies to encourage nightlife such as restaurants into the Town Centre

We believe that there is a valuable opportunity to take forward these proposals in a joint partnership between the Town and District Councils the owner of the Horsefair shopping centre, NPP, and potentially others including Elgood & Sons Brewery.

This approach would need to be accompanied by other policy changes, including a commitment to more effective policing of the Town Centre and a commitment on the part of the District Council to focus development on the Town Centre, curtailing further developments on the outskirts of town for activity that could reasonably find a location in the town centre.

King's Lynn was improved by a focus on a large retail offer, whilst this is difficult to do in the existing High Street, sites very close to the existing centre should be identified as possibilities to improve the shopping precinct.

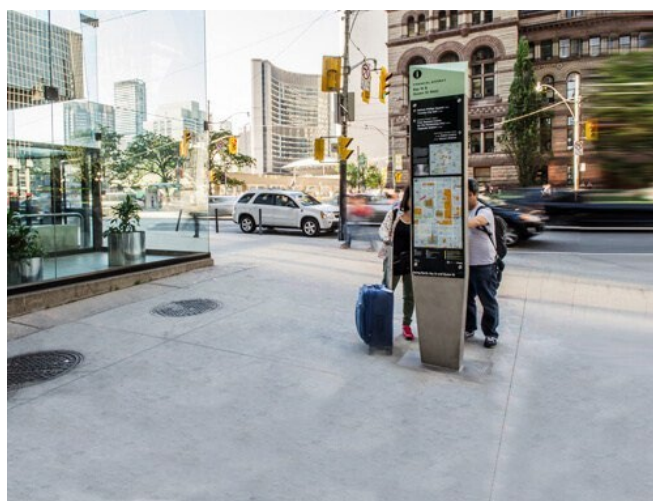
As well as improving the digital offering for the town, there is an important role for doing things around the town which will help to generally improve the “feel” of Wisbech.

But there are some smaller things we can do as well.

Attractive Totem Signage to improve legibility

Wayfinding totems are smartly presented, with well-designed maps, clean text, and attractive colour palette. These will help to improve the town centre aesthetic. They also send a clear message that the town expects visitors to come and look around – which grows a sense that the town is “on the map” and reminds locals about reasons to take pride in their town. Including historical sections on the signs about key features of the town can also help connect people to the town’s heritage.

The importance of navigability, or “legibility” of places is becoming increasingly appreciated. People will spend longer, discover more, and have a more positive experience if a place has an effective wayfinding strategy.





Support a “digitally-enabled” town centre which can thrive in the era of online shopping

Online sales as a percentage of total retail sales has grown from 3.4% to 18% between 2007 and 2018⁸. This has been blamed for the challenges we have seen on the high street in Wisbech. Retail space has fallen by 2,500m² between 2002 and 2017⁹, though much of this has been absorbed by another trend – towards café culture, pub, and restaurant space.

However, many town centres are thriving, which shows the link between growth in online shopping and high street decline is by no means cast in iron. Shops which are innovating to bring together their digital and physical offerings can continue to maintain a high street presence, where customers can continue to appreciate using the store, even if they then wait until returning home to order. **The integration of the physical and digital offering is a key trend** of the moment.

To adapt to this trend, we need to enact the following:

- **On-street Wi-Fi across the town centre.** This currently exists in Cambridge, and has recently been launched in Ely. As well as giving people a reason to be on the high street, it also increases digital inclusion, by supporting those who would be unable to afford a data-heavy phone contract. In Ely, it has also been shown to really boost the takings of local market stallholders – as it enables them to use contactless for payments, instead of having to take cash. More work needs to be undertaken to identify current Wi-Fi ‘white spots’ and provide coverage in these areas.
- Working with Wisbech Town Council, the potential for **enhancing the existing Town Council website** to be explored, using search engine optimisation to make it easier for potential visitors to see the main attractions in the town.

⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/retailindustry/timeseries/j4mc/drsi>

⁹ Cambridgeshire County Council data on changes of use

3. Support cohesion and community shared space

A cohesion programme, drawing on the example of Peterborough

Peterborough has been chosen by the Government as one of the UK's five "integration areas". This means it has had funding to respond to some of the challenges associated with high levels of international immigration, and develop responses accordingly. The interim strategy for the programme, "Belonging Together" has been developed, which sets out four key areas of work:

1. **Economic Opportunity** – which focuses on removing barriers to the labour market through interventions such as childcare support and careers fairs
2. **Bringing Communities Together** – which focuses on improving community relations, through support for community projects, and using planning approaches to improve cohesion and control the number of Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs)
3. **Young People** – which focuses on how to develop a shared sense of citizenship among the young, and understand their perspectives on integration
4. **English Language** – with tailored English for Speakers of Other Languages training (ESOL), particularly focused on allowing those with skills to put them to use where English Language is a barrier, and developing a partnership of providers

Within the Belonging Together strategy, partners state that: "we welcome the opportunity to share our learning"¹⁰. We believe Wisbech could offer a great opportunity to apply many of the lessons learnt in Peterborough to our context – where we share many of the same challenges, as well as the same ambitions to ensure our town is inclusive, welcoming, and cohesive. We are already making progress, with mandatory licencing that came into effect in October 2018 is beginning to address the issue of the overabundance of HMOs.

We also believe that **some initiatives can be trialled most successfully within a town setting**, where the scale of the challenge is lessened. We would welcome the opportunity to be involved in conversations with government about the future of Peterborough's Integration Area – and by working with Peterborough we can evidence the benefits of the Integration Area being felt beyond the city itself.

A public indoor space to bring the community together

In order to deepen a sense of community in the town, we need to create spaces where people can come to dwell together. The historic market square is one such key space, which could undergo improvements while preserving the heritage. There is also work ongoing to bring in heritage funds to this area.

Another approach which some towns are taking across the UK is to create a new indoor shared space. Altringham, Cheshire (see example) has used a food court with independent traders to bring people into the town centre, helping to bring it back to life. In Great Yarmouth, a vacant M&S store has been transformed into an art gallery for showcasing work by local talent. An initiative which helps local entrepreneurs – be they artists, craftspeople, or chefs – to display and sell their work in an attractive

¹⁰ <https://pcc-live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.peterborough.gov.uk/council/strategies-polices-and-plans/BelongingTogether-AConversationAboutOurCommunitiesAndFuture-May2019v2.pdf?inline=true> p16

setting would make our town centre more vibrant. We also know that in and around Wisbech there are many affluent families – testified to by the popularity of the fee-paying grammar school and presence of numerous asset management firms. We need to give these people something unique which cannot be found online to bring them into the town centre and spend their disposable income.

This event space could also be used for town events – such as the annual Wisbech beer festival. **Elgood's brewery is one of the town's foremost assets** – a beautiful Georgian brewery on the North Brink with a long history of beer making. At a time when interesting beers are in vogue, we will use our association with beer making to attract people to spend time in the town and advertise our offer.

Case Study: Reviving the town centre in Altrincham



Altrincham, in Cheshire, has managed to buck national trends by *reducing* its shop vacancy rate – from 25% in 2014 to 10% in 2018. This dramatic reversal of fortunes was sparked by a proactive market development strategy, which has looked to bring in independent “street food” suppliers, breweries, and other retailers. The market has become the new “anchor” for the town, in a way that department stores have traditionally acted in other towns.¹¹

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/sep/16/uk-market-towns-embrace-foodie-wave-to-revive-ailing-centres>

A continuation of public events

As one of the Partners of Wisbech 2020 the Town Council was tasked with delivering community events to help cohesion. These events such as the Rock Festival and the WisBEACH Day are attended by thousands. Other organisations in the town are also putting on a number of great free events. We should aim to encourage these events to take place as frequently as possible and aim to reduce bureaucracy as much as possible to allow people to put on more events.

4. Open up countryside access, and develop the Wisbech Country Park

While Wisbech is well placed in a rural area, opportunities for access to the countryside are limited. This is due in part to the historic nature of the land – much of which was brought above water with the express purpose of farming it, and therefore doesn't have many rights of way across it (the Nene Way being the only footpath of any length that comes near the town).

Physical activity is one of the most effective ways to tackle the health problems our town faces. As a former Chief Medical Officer for the NHS has commented: "The potential benefits of physical activity to health are huge. If a medication existed which had a similar effect, it would be regarded as a 'wonder drug' or 'miracle cure'." ¹² The Active Fenland programme is working to promote physical activity in various different forms across the District, but we need to join this up with making the countryside more accessible to people.

We will work with the Department for Farming, Environment, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and Cambridgeshire County Council to explore where we might be able to create extra rights of way to make it easier for residents to access the countryside. This process requires new creation orders, which it is within the power of the County Council to generate. We will use our relationships with local landowners where we have them to smooth this process.

We will explore the inhibiting factors around walking and cycling in the town with the aim of helping people to walk or cycle in a town where rates are currently low compared to Cambridgeshire averages. We could be a trial area for the use of new lightweight recycled plastic bike lanes. These have been developed in the Netherlands, where the geographical terrain is identical to our landscape. They have the added benefit of being much lighter than asphalt, and more durable, so don't need repairing anything like as often.



Within the town itself, a country park is central to the Garden Town vision. Work can begin on this now, even while we wait for support to come in around transport and housing. This will bring a

¹² <http://nbhottopics.blogspot.com/2014/01/helping-gps-promote-exercise-motivate.html>



pleasant, green, shared space to the heart of Wisbech, increasing the presence of blue and green infrastructure. This will have numerous benefits:

- **The health and wellbeing of residents will be improved.** Extensive research has shown the benefits which greenery in the local environment provides for tackling stress and lifting mood. The World Health Organisation comments that: “Having access to green spaces can reduce health inequalities, improve well-being, and aid in treatment of mental illness. Some analysis suggests that physical activity in a natural environment can help remedy mild depression and reduce physiological stress indicators.”¹³
- **Social interaction will increase.** The Country Park will be a place to meet people and dwell together.
- **Attractive visitor facility.** As the town looks to become more attractive for visitors, having a Country Park will be a big part of the draw.
- **Flood attenuation.** The Country Park will serve as a basin for holding floodwater in the event that the River Nene floods. This will make construction of housing and infrastructure more viable.

¹³ <https://www.who.int/sustainable-development/cities/health-risks/urban-green-space/en/>



5. Develop a workplace health award scheme

Our big action on health is the **North Cambridgeshire Health Opportunity Area**. This is covered in the strategy paper and will hold across all four market towns.

However, one big opportunity here in Wisbech is to respond to challenges around workplace health. Many of Wisbech's biggest employers are factories where much of the labour is manual and heavy going, with long shifts. This increases health risks – therefore it is especially important here to guarantee good working conditions.

One of the most significant impacts on a person's health, both mental and physical, is their workplace. Employers need to recognise the responsibility they have for supporting the health of their workforce, and by doing so they can enjoy the benefits of more productive workers. Therefore, we propose to launch an occupational health award scheme, which employers can choose to sign up to if they want to make a priority of this issue. This has been developed successfully in Cornwall (see case study) and ties into our aim of developing the degree of networking between businesses in Wisbech. In order to support this, we will work with the health opportunity area, local Clinical Commissioning Group, and Cambridgeshire County Council to develop a clear set of health standards for the workplace.

Case Study: Occupational Health in Cornwall

Ten years ago, Cornwall Council appointed a Workplace Health Co-ordinator with the sole remit of engaging businesses on this issue. After discussions with businesses about what could help, an award scheme was launched, where businesses would be recognised as bronze, silver, or gold for their contribution to worker health and well-being. A framework and toolkit are published, which is regularly updated to reflect new public health initiatives (such as the recent National Sugar Smart Campaign). Businesses who want to participate then assess themselves against criteria relating to ten key areas, including mental well-being, back pain, smoking, alcohol and substance misuse, and healthier eating, with the Co-ordinator visiting to confirm this assessment.

Companies have really seen the benefits – a director commented: “We recognise that employees perform at their best when they are happy and healthy, and that optimal employee performance is necessary for the company to be a leader in its field.” Another smaller company managed to reduce sickness rates by 10%, saving £20,000, which was put into further worker health initiatives. These examples demonstrate that an interest in worker health can have transformational productivity benefits for business, and transformative lifestyle impacts for workers.



6. Focus on Tourism

Wisbech has a very rich heritage with a number of significant buildings which many people come to see. Our history includes Clarkson and Wilberforce fighting against slavery, The Jesuit movement which has roots to Wisbech Castle, The Peckovers who were one of the founders of Barclays Bank and Octavia Hill who founded the National Trust. It also has an extensive network of underground tunnels that have had many uses such as smuggling. This is seen most clearly on Heritage Open Day, where people always come away pleasantly surprised about the amount of heritage the town has to offer.

A focus on tourism will help the town by bringing prosperity. We can do this by:-

- Developing a Cultural quarter in Museum Square and link to the proposed FDC Cultural Strategy
- Look to reopen the tunnels under the town as a tourist attraction
- Reinvigorating the Wisbech Tourism group, using it as a forum to bring together the different visitor attractions in Wisbech to co-ordinate on
- FDC Economic Development team try to focus on attracting hotel and leisure services
- FDC Economic Development Team and Wisbech Town Council to work together to push Wisbech Tourism nationally and increase dwell time in the town by promoting 'The Wisbech Experience'

7. Repair Derelict Buildings

Wisbech has a number of derelict buildings which have been caused by neglect and/or arson. It is highly unlikely that these will ever be bought back into use due to viability issues – in particular, the Phoenix Hotel. Work has been done to draw up a list of these buildings and develop approaches to each. With the Phoenix Hotel, a strategy which may succeed is to use a CPO and build flats at the back. Other buildings would simply look better with a fresh lick of paint or cleared gutters. A small fund that was tied to owners making improvements to their properties would incentivise the town being well kept, helping to attract visitors.

8. Commercialisation of Wisbech Port

Wisbech is unique in Fenland in the fact it is a port town – a fact which has played a key role in the town's history. The port supplies timber to a local business and has the potential to be more of a commercial opportunity. The land surrounding the Port has also been earmarked for development for a number of years and to begin this could bring up that whole area which is currently not very visually appealing. Providing attractive 1- and 2-bedroom apartments would give the area a big lift. This could be the ideal place for the Combined Authority to trial its plans for the £100k home.



Regarding the commercialisation of the port, it is currently hard for larger vessels to turn in the port due to the tight circle. We also need to think about how the port relates to a possible future Nene barrage – which may require creative solutions to maximise the benefits to the town as whole from both initiatives. The capital works to enhance this are in the region of £1 million. The actions falling out of this are for CPCA to help:

- Accelerate development round the port
- Fund, or help seek funds, to enable works to increase commercialisation

What happens now?

We have set out a plan for Wisbech which, along with the Fenland-wide strategy document, can transform the town, showing which interventions can make a real difference.

We now look forward to working constructively with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), and its Mayor, James Palmer, to implementing these ideas. This will require both direct support from the Combined Authority, and the resources needed to take these ideas to key government funds such as the Stronger Towns Fund, as and when they come forward.

This work will be overseen by Fenland District Council, working in conjunction with the town team that was put together for this work.

Plan for Neighbourhood Survey Results

Wisbech July 2025




Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Introduction

Plan for Neighbourhoods (PFN)

As part of a £1.5 billion investment programme to foster stronger, better-connected and healthier communities across the UK, Zencity has partnered with the **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)** to help capture **community sentiment** on the **PFN** and the future of local towns.

Zencity digitally engaged with residents and businesses across the **selected 75 towns**, gathering voluminous, inclusive and valuable feedback on where people want to see investment in their local areas, as well as their views on a range of other important topics.

The insights collected have been compiled into both a **nationwide aggregate report** and **75 individual town-level reports**, designed to help empower central government and local authorities to make informed decisions that reflect the priorities of their communities.

What you'll find here is the **town-level report**, which highlights key findings from the survey.

Zencity Sampling

Methodology

The data presented in this report was collected from the **9th of April to the 26th of May, 2025**. **127** respondents from **Wisbech** were digitally recruited (e.g., over social media, mobile apps, and survey panels).

Zencity built a representative sample by matching respondent data to UK Census race, ethnicity, age, and gender distributions for the town. Rake-weighting was then also applied as a statistical safeguard to balance out any remaining discrepancies in distribution, such that no demographic group was overrepresented or underrepresented in the final score.

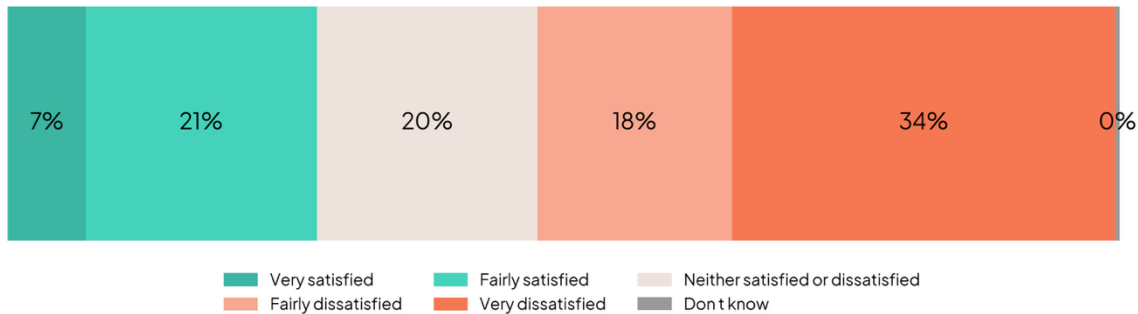
Respondents under the age of 18 and those who did not give a valid postcode were excluded from the sample.

The questions that were included in this survey can be found [here](#).

Satisfaction with Local Area

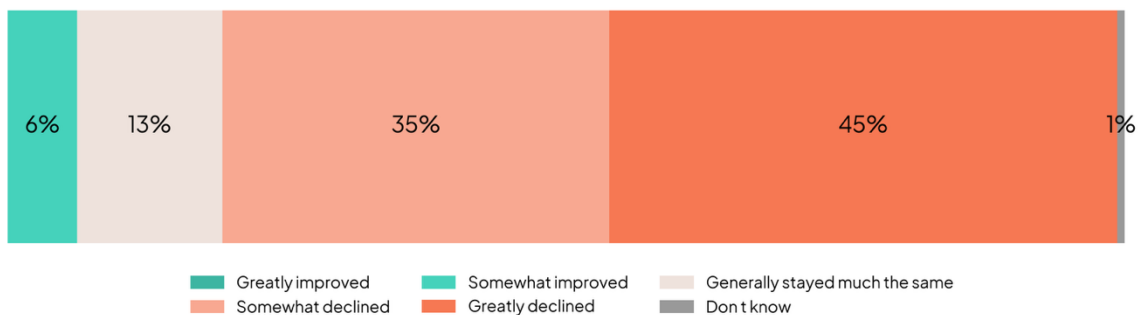
Q2: Your local area is the area within 15-20 minutes walk from your home. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?

Most respondents in Wisbech are not satisfied with their local area as a place to live (52%).



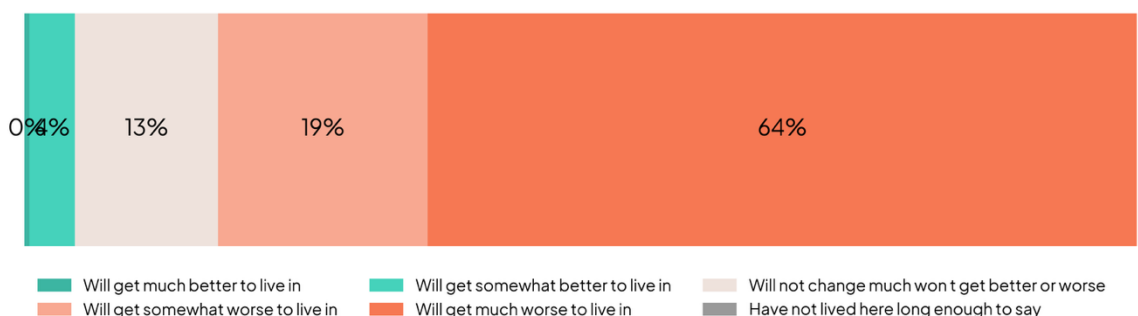
Q3: Would you say that in the past 12 months, your local area has improved or declined?

Most respondents in Wisbech feel their local area has greatly declined (45%) in the past 12 months.



Q4: Generally speaking, do you expect your local area to get better or worse to live in 2 years from now?

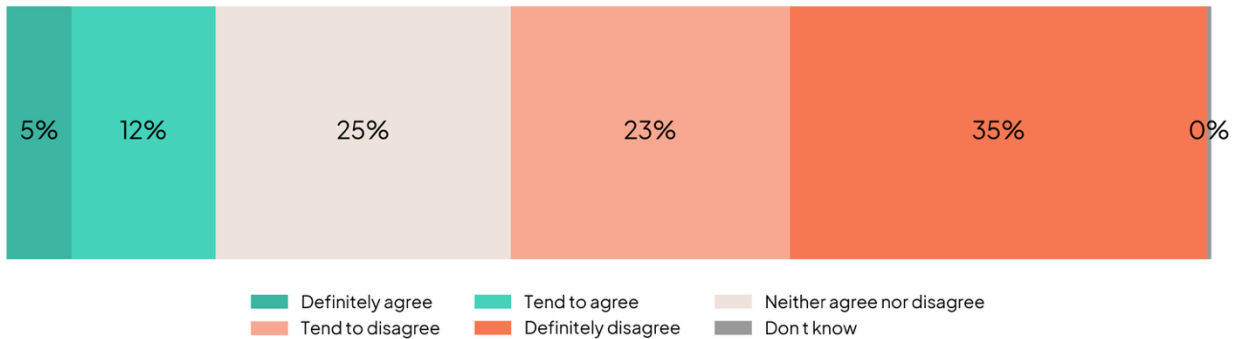
Most respondents in Wisbech expect their local area to will get much worse to live in (64%) in the next 2 years.



Pride in Local Area

Q5: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I am proud to live in my local area.

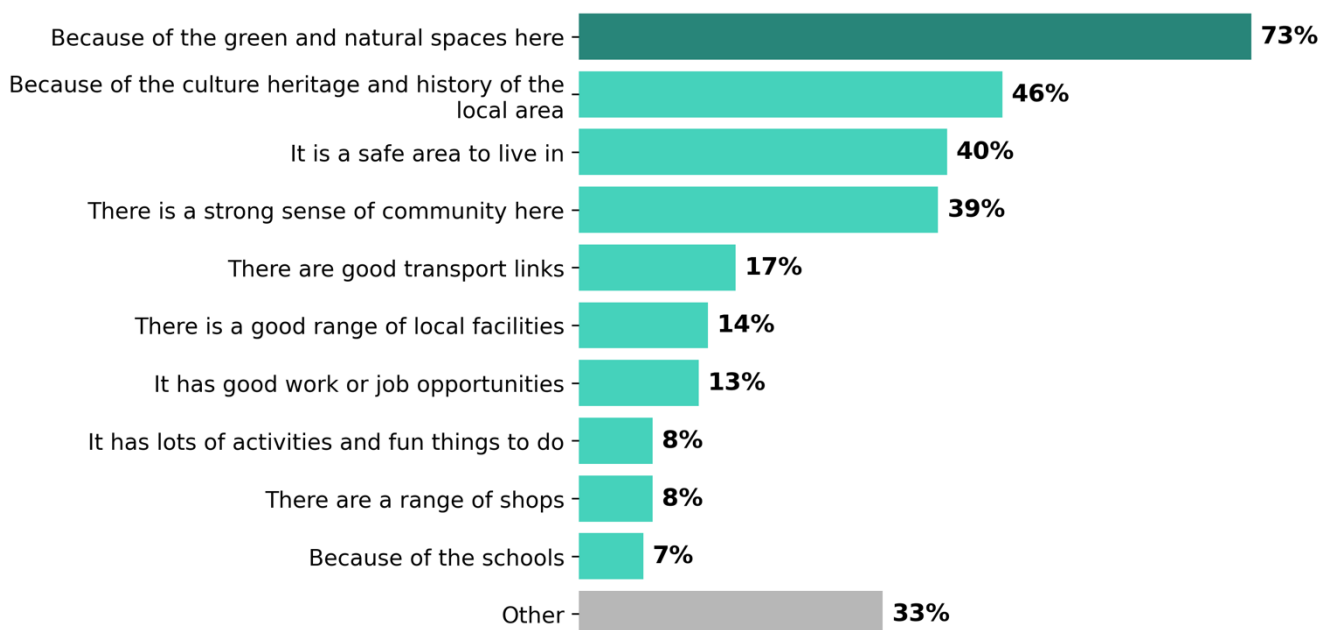
Most respondents in Wisbech are not proud to live in their local area (58%).



Q6: What are the main reasons you agree with the statement that 'I am proud to live in my local area'?

Number of respondents who are proud = 30

Among respondents who are proud to live in their local area, the top reasons they are proud are "because of the green and natural spaces here" (73%) and "because of the culture heritage and history of the local area" (46%).

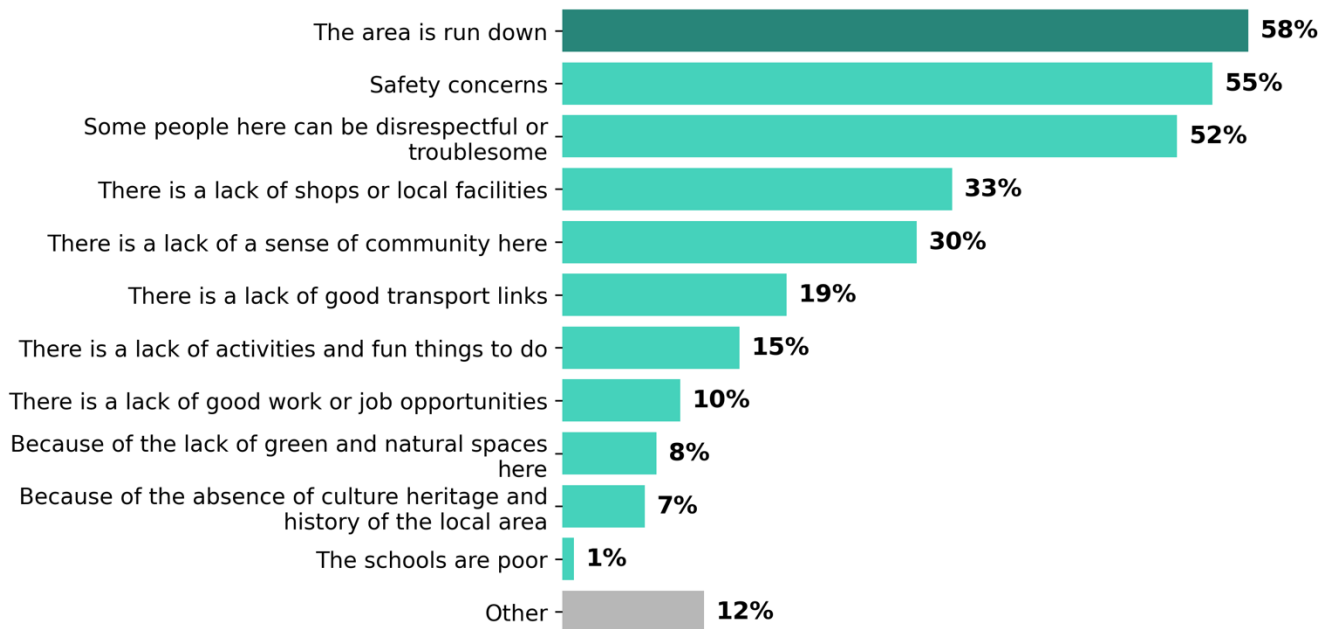


Pride and Satisfaction in Local Area

Q7: What are the main reasons you disagree with the statement that 'I am proud to live in my local area'?

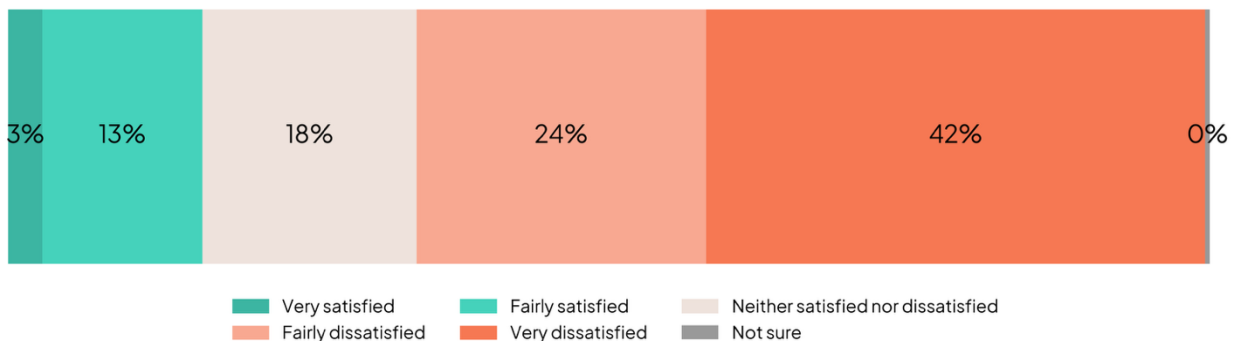
Number of respondents who are not proud = 64

Among respondents who are not proud to live in their local area, the top reasons are "the area is run down" (58%) and "safety concerns" (55%).



Q8: Generally, how satisfied are you with the local services and amenities in the town centre closest to your local area?

Most respondents in Wisbech are very dissatisfied (42%) with the services and amenities in their closest town centre.



Perceptions of Local Area Features

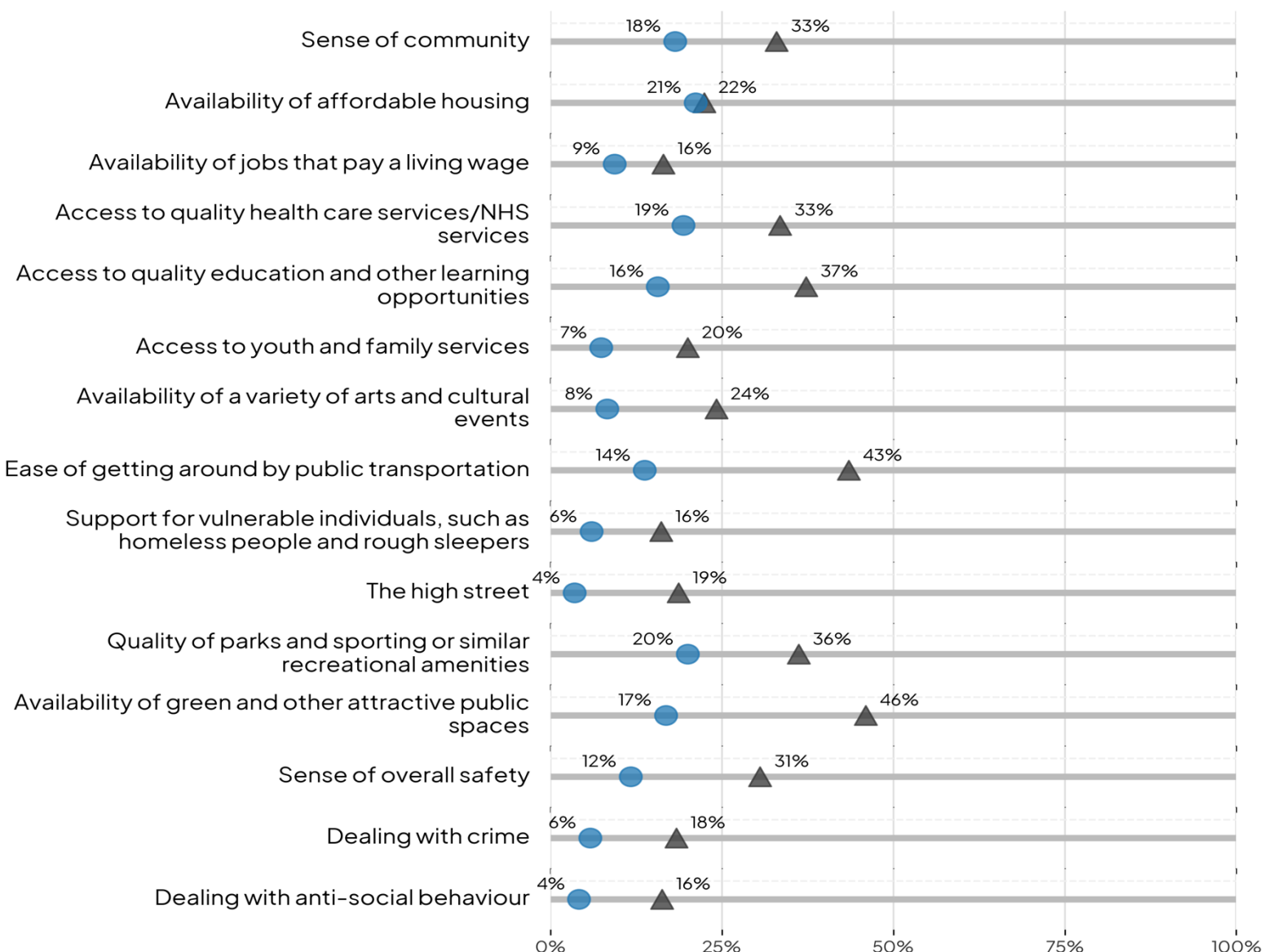
Q9: The following questions cover different parts of life in your local area. For each, respondents rated whether they felt they were good or excellent.

This chart shows how the proportion of respondents rating features in Wisbech as good or excellent compares to the average across the 75 Plan for Neighbourhood towns.

In Wisbech, residents rated all features less positively than residents across the 75 Plan for Neighbourhood towns. The biggest gaps were for 'Ease of getting around by public transportation' (-30%) and 'Availability of green and other attractive public spaces' (-29%).

% Rate "Good" or "Excellent"
(Q9: Town features and infrastructure)

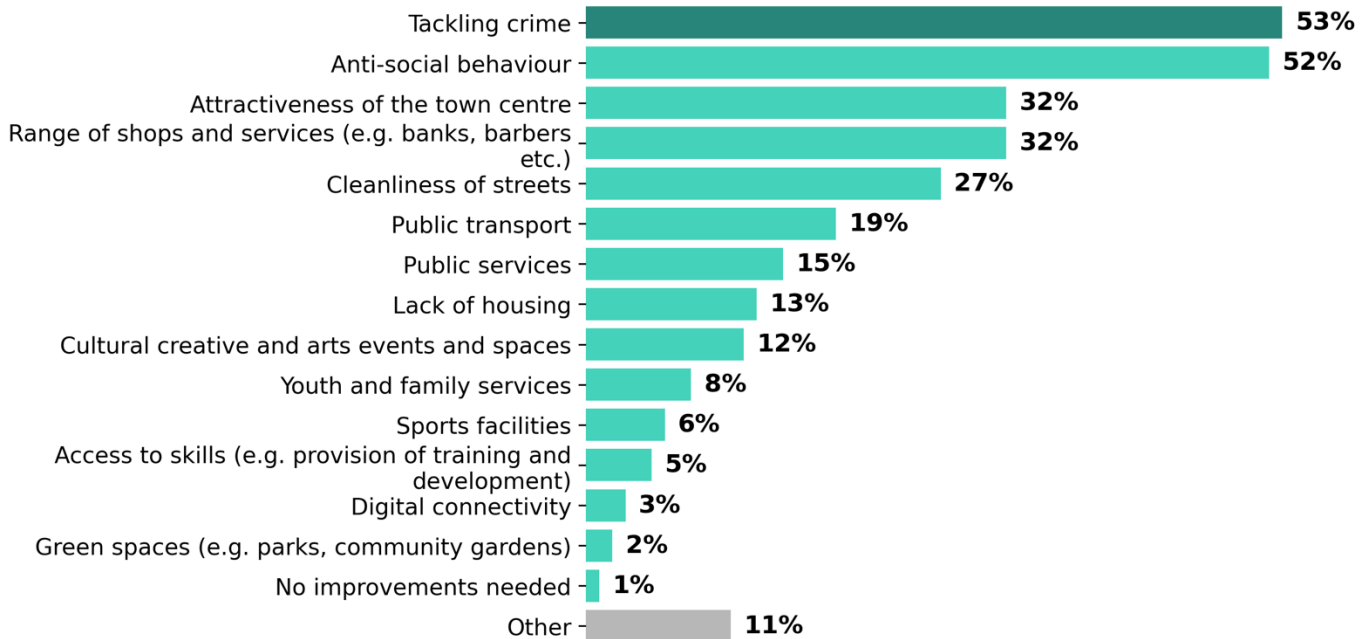
▲ Average across 75 towns
● Wisbech



Improving Local Area

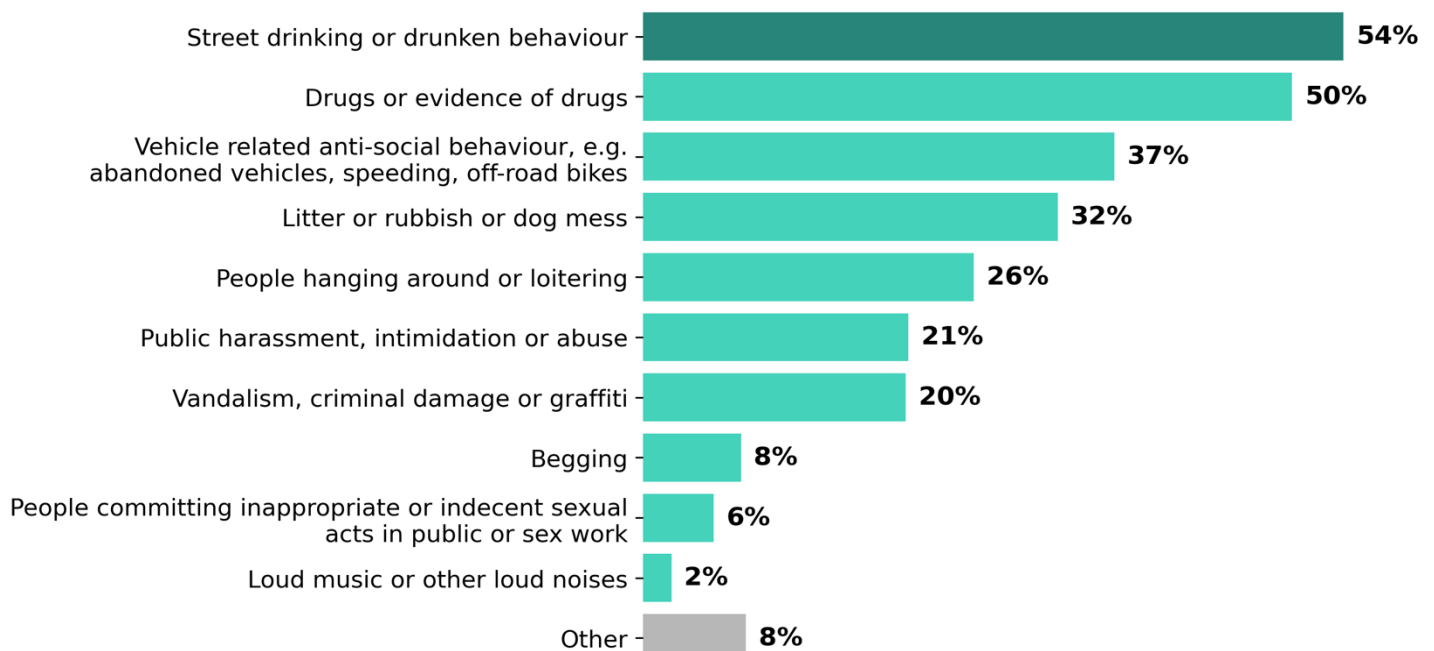
Q10: Which of the following needs the most improvement in your local area?

In Wisbech, the top areas residents would like to see improvements in are Tackling crime (53%) and anti-social behaviour (52%).



Q11: Which of the following are the biggest problems in your local area?

In Wisbech, residents identified street drinking or drunken behaviour (54%) and drugs or evidence of drugs (50%) as the most pressing problems in their area.



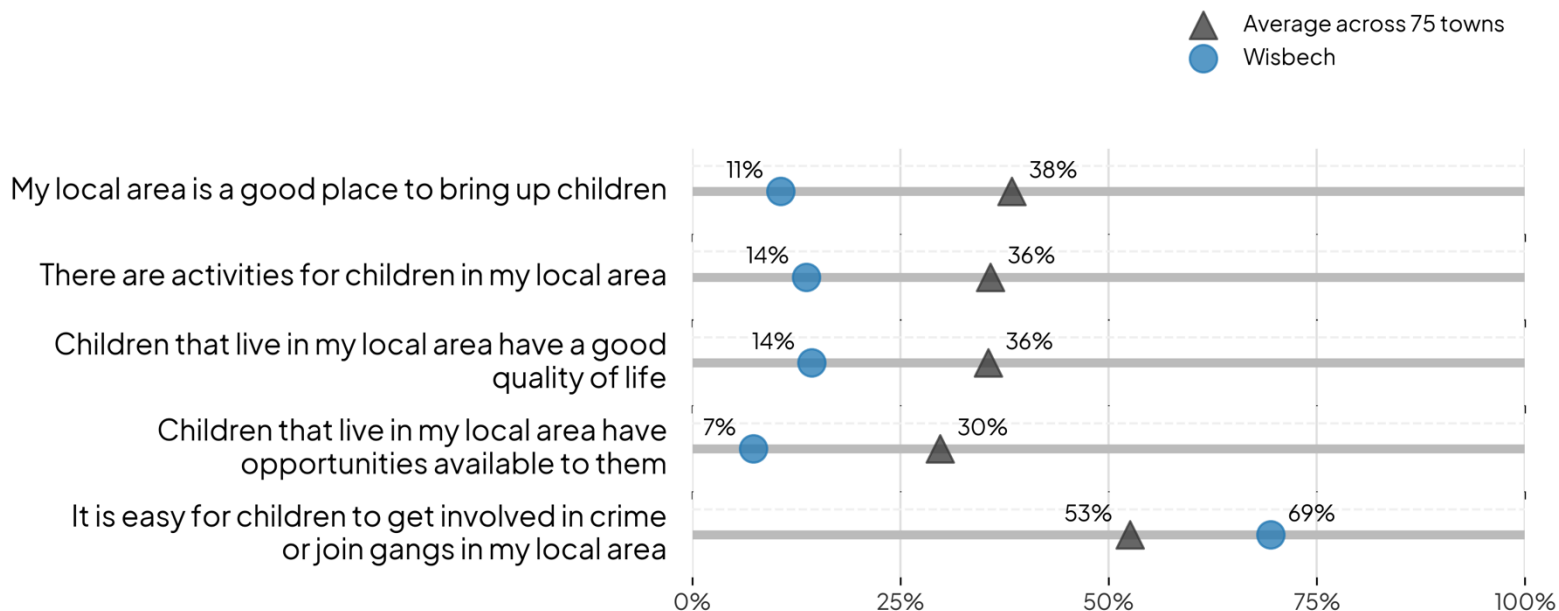
Perceptions of Children & Young People in the Local Area

Q12: Thinking about your local area, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

This chart shows how the proportion of respondents agreeing with each statement in Wisbech compares to the average across the 75 Plan for Neighbourhood towns.

In Wisbech, residents agreed with the statement 'It is easy for children to get involved in crime or join gangs in my local area' more than the average across the 75 Plan for Neighbourhood towns (+17%), but agreed with the statement 'My local area is a good place to bring up children' less (-28%).

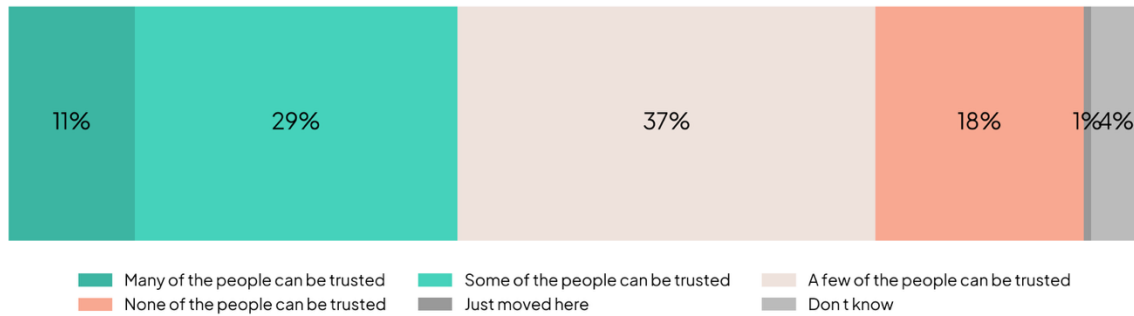
% Agree (Tend to / Definitely)
(Q12: Children & young people)



Perceptions of Local Community

Q13: Thinking about the people who live in your local area, to what extent do you believe they can be trusted?

In Wisbech, most respondents trust a few people in their local area (37%) for this question.



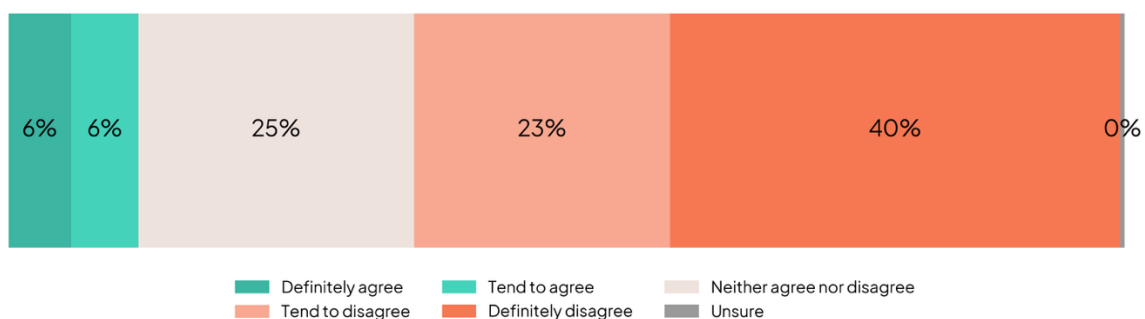
Q14: Do you feel your local area is 'left behind' in comparison to the rest of the country?

Most respondents in Wisbech think that their area has been very left behind in comparison to the rest of the country (63%) in comparison to the rest of the country.



Q15: To what extent do you agree or disagree that you personally can influence decisions affecting your local area or influence what happens in your community?

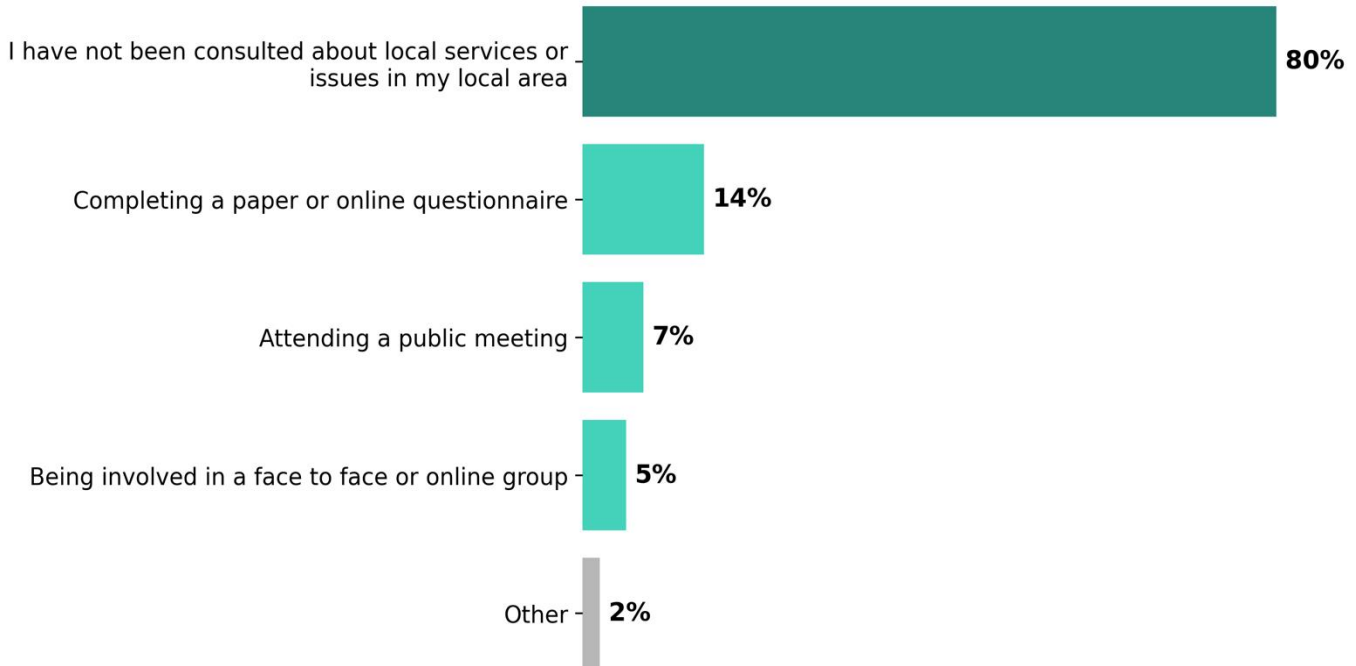
Most respondents in Wisbech disagree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area (63%).



Empowering Residents

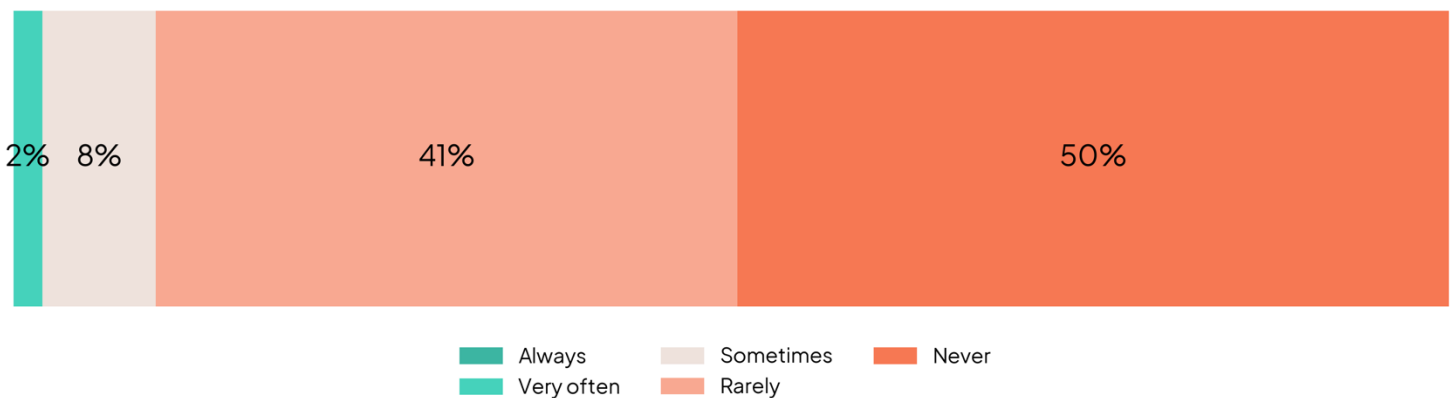
Q16: In the last 12 months, have you been consulted about local services or issues in your local area through any of these methods?

Most respondents in Wisbech report that they have not been consulted about local services or issues in their local area (80%).



Q17: Do you feel your voice is listened to when decisions are made about your local area?

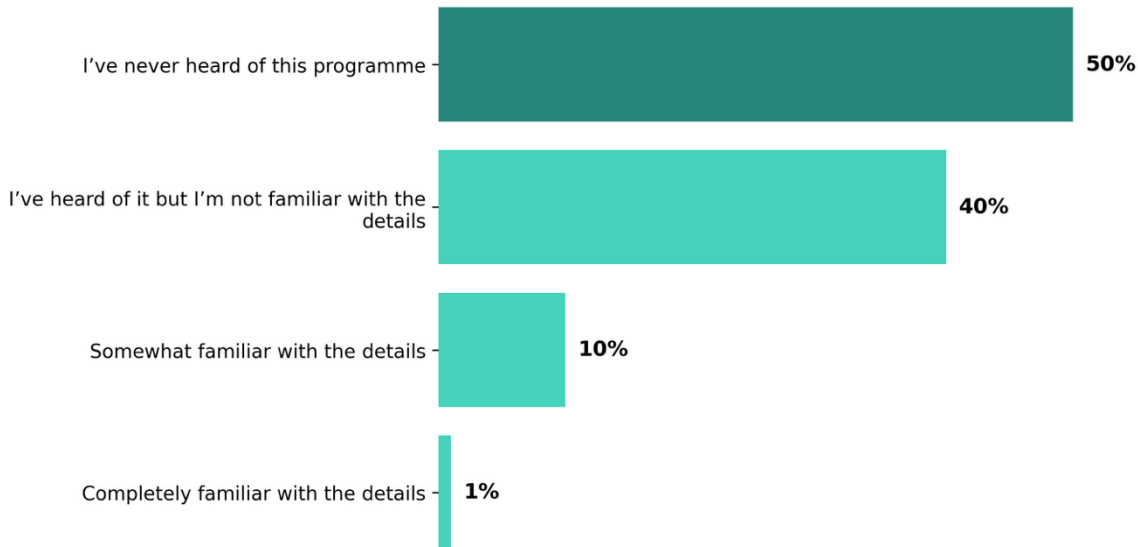
In Wisbech, most people report that their voice is never listened to when decisions are made about their local area (50%).



Familiarity with Plan for Neighbourhoods

Q18: Your local town has been selected to receive £20 million of funding as part of the Government's Plan for Neighbourhoods programme. Prior to this survey, how familiar are you with this programme?

Most respondents in Wisbech reported that they have never heard of the Plan for Neighbourhoods (50%).



Q19: What would your number one priority be for use of the £20 million of funding through the Plan for Neighbourhoods programme in your area?

The word cloud below shows the top priorities suggested by residents for how the £20 million funding should be used in Wisbech.



Matt Wright

From: BARNES, Natalie <natalie.barnes@parliament.uk>
Sent: 08 October 2025 10:39
To: Matt Wright
Cc: Iain Kirkbright; Simon Machen; BARCLAY, Stephen
Subject: October 7th Town Board Documents

Dear Matt

Steve has looked through the regeneration plan and is happy to endorse it.

Kind regards
Natalie



Natalie Barnes
EA to Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP
MP for North East Cambridgeshire
✉ MJS House, Wisbech Road, Westry, March, PE15 0BA
📧 natalie.barnes@parliament.uk
☎ 01354 707005

From: Matt Wright [REDACTED] >
Sent: 06 October 2025 14:05
To: BARNES, Natalie <natalie.barnes@parliament.uk>
Cc: Iain Kirkbright [REDACTED]; Simon Machen [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: October 7th Town Board Documents

Thanks for the update Natalie.

Could I please ask that in their absence they send their written endorsement of the regeneration plan (appended last week).

It is a gov requirement that the MP is sighted and has had the opportunity to be involved in the shaping of this document. This meeting is the last one ahead of our planned submission so it would be good to get the signoff from Steve please.

Kind Regards,
Matt

Matt Wright
High Streets Programme Manager

[REDACTED]
www.fenland.gov.uk

<image002.jpg>