

Agenda Item No:	10	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	15 December 2025	
Report Title:	Wisbech High Street Update	

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 To provide Cabinet with a monthly update regarding the ongoing construction work at 24 High Street, Wisbech and the pre-construction design and planning work for 11-12 High Street, Wisbech.

2 24 High Street Construction progress

- 2.1 The building is now complete.
- 2.2 Following a further Building Control inspection to assess updated works that the initial inspection highlighted, the building has received the necessary certification. During week beginning 15 December, the project team expects to meet with the contractor and for Practical Completion to finally take place, meaning that FDC will then take possession from the contractor and responsibility for the building.
- 2.3 FDC's property team is in the process of finding a tenant for the small ground floor shop area and the flats above that will let at a fair value.
- 2.4 The Council will hold an official completion ceremony in January with partners invited to mark this significant project and the high impact that this work has had on improving the historic High Street of Wisbech.

3 24 High Street; some history and the pathway to finally filling 40-year Gap in Wisbech High Street

- 3.1 No. 24 High Street was the site of a four storey 18th century building prior to its collapse approximately 40 years ago. Known locally as Cooks Butchers or The Gap there has not been a building on the High Street frontage since that time - until now.

Timeline of the building at 24 High Street

- 3.2 The shop was occupied by John Hives who was described as a hardware man in the 1850 trade directory. The 1861 census records John living there during that year along with his wife Sarah, two daughters and a servant.
- 3.3 By 1869 the shop was taken over by W Friend and then in 1870, by John Friend who, in the trade directory for that year were described as "Fancy Dealer and London, Birmingham and Sheffield Warehouse". The 1871 census records John Friend as a general merchant and living at No 24 with his wife Mary, his baby daughter, a servant, and a nurse. He is still registered there in 1883 as Birmingham and Sheffield warehouse and marine store dealer, Nene Quay. Interestingly, the plot of No 24 at that time would have also been

accessed from Nene Quay and the building which still survives at the rear of 24 today may have been his warehouse.

- 3.4 By 1896, the building became occupied by Thomas Tansley Jr, who was registered on the 1911 census living at the address with his wife Alice, 4 children and 2 servants. He was still there in 1916.
- 3.5 The 1932-3 Kellys Trade Directory lists the occupier as Charles Leonard Cook, butcher. The building remained **Cooks Butchers** until shortly before its collapse in the mid-1980s.
- 3.6 **Images of 24 High Street, Wisbech through the Ages**



High St, Late 19th Century, showing butchers on closest on the right

Credit: Wisbech and Fenland Museum (ref MS 248)



23-24 High St, c.1960s *Credit: Geoff Hastings*



24 High Street, 2017 *Credit: Taleyna Fletcher*



24 High Street, 2017 *Credit: Taleyna Fletcher*

Filling the Gap

- 3.7 Following several years of regular Cabinet updates regarding this challenging and costly project, the Council can feel proud that 'The Gap' in Wisbech High Street has finally been filled.
- 3.8 The work required to get to the point of completion cannot be underestimated and started back in 2013 when the Wisbech Society set up a discussion between Councils and English Heritage, with a hope to develop a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to improve the dilapidated buildings in Wisbech High Street.
- 3.9 Following a successful bid there was then a period of time when the future of 24 High Street was uncertain with projects such as a viewing platform being considered - and rejected - as a solution to fill The Gap.
- 3.10 Even at the point of appointing an initial contractor the project was frustrated again when the contractor pulled out at short notice as another project could not proceed in tandem with No. 24. This meant re-procuring a contractor with the time and energy that such a process takes.
- 3.11 Working on such a narrow site with terrible access, poor ground conditions due to the closeness of the river, no local site yard, and a busy High Street directly outside the site has been a considerable challenge.
- 3.12 Much has been learnt during the construction process, and this learning will be implemented during the 11-12 High Street project. This should mean that construction of 11-12 High Street proceeds more smoothly than the work at No. 24.
- 3.13 24 High Street experienced delays with piling works and then issues with ensuring that the new building fitted into the tight site itself.
- 3.14 Working on an historic High Street also brings problems with neighbouring properties in terms of making good party walls and working in a way such that vibrations are minimised to prevent damage to neighbouring properties. On the evidence of the No. 24 project, it is likely that there will be issues at neighbouring properties that will require remedying as part of the project at No.'s 11-12.
- 3.15 The completed building changes how the High Street both looks and feels and is a significant enhancement to the streetscape of the town.



24 High Street - 2025

11-12 High Street, Wisbech

3.16 There is no further update following November's Cabinet report regarding 11-12 High Street.

4 Recommendations

4.1 That Cabinet notes the report.

Wards Affected	Medworth ward	
Forward Plan Reference	KEY21APR22/01	
Portfolio Holders	Cllr Chris Seaton Cllr Chris Boden	Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility and Heritage Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance
Report Originator	Phil Hughes	Head of Service

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Background Papers	<div>Previous monthly Cabinet reports regarding Wisbech High Street</div> <div>July 2022 Cabinet and Council reports regarding 24 High Street, Wisbech</div> <div>June 2025 Cabinet papers regarding the Fenland Inspire! project and 11-12 High Street, Wisbech</div>