



**West  
Northamptonshire  
Council**

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**Place, Economy and Environment**  
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16<sup>th</sup> March 2022

## **Expression of Interest: Great British Railways Headquarters**

### ***Context***

Northampton is the County Town of Northamptonshire and is the area's main employment, retail and cultural centre.

The town lies on the banks of the River Nene, 67 miles North-West of London and 54 miles South-East of Birmingham. As such, the town is strategically located to benefit and contribute towards the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, a major national Government economic growth corridor. The town is served by the M1 motorway and the Northampton Loop of the West Coast Main Line, offering strong regional and national transport connections.

These attributes mean Northampton is recognised as one of the top towns pursuing high growth strategies in sectors such as automotive, logistics and advanced manufacturing. This in turn contributed to the establishment of the nationally designated Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone in 2011; 120 hectares of business led development along the River Nene.

Northampton is the largest town in the UK, with a population of over 225,700. Over the last 20 years, its population has grown faster than the national rate, at 0.8% per year (ONS mid-year population estimates 2017). Northampton is a net importer of workers, with a workplace population of 153,000, and a jobs density of 1.07 which is significantly above both the regional and national comparisons. The town itself commands a sizeable travel to work area which is roughly in line with the catchment area for Northampton Town Centre.

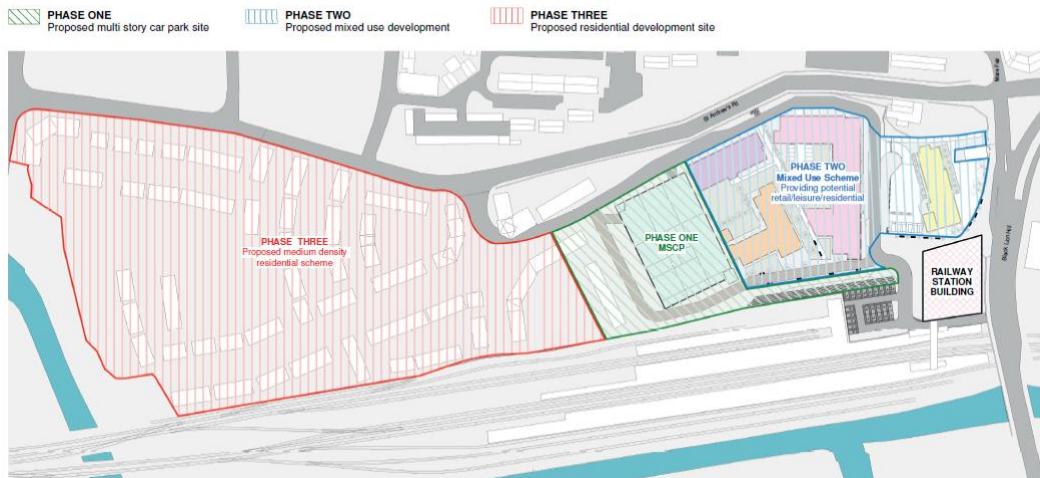
Northampton has a number of historical features that support the rich heritage of the town, include Northampton Castle and Mound, Grade I listed St Peters Church, Black Lion pub and Grade II listed Caste Hill United Reformed Church.

The site measures approximately 0.25 hectares and is located within an important gateway position, adjacent to the recently refurbished Northampton Railway Station, a well occupied area providing direct links to Rugby, London and Birmingham. The site is currently occupied as surface car park for station users.



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*Figure 1: Site Plan*

Since the new Northampton train station was opened in January 2015 there has been the commitment to enhance the parking arrangements at the station site with a new Multi Storey Car Park (MSCP) due to the known undersupply of parking there. The development of the MSCP would free up land for the development of the wider site to provide a better gateway into the town while bringing forward brownfield development sites. In addition to the 1,150 space MSCP, the new development site is earmarked for additional uses to come forward including: -

- 270 residential apartments;
- a 111-bed hotel;
- c.400sqm office floorspace;
- c.300sqm retail unit;

This MSCP project will directly enhance the main rail asset within West Northants, giving the potential for more people to use the rail system and improve overall sustainability of how people travel and commute. One of the key attributes of the scheme is to vastly improve the customer experience when using the station facility.

Northamptonshire has a significant rural economy base, however increasingly its income is generated from employment outside of the traditional rural sector, either by working in growing sectors of the economy, or commuting to major urban areas. It is these people and sectors that the car park would appeal most greatly to, enabling a stronger infrastructure, economic growth and a recognisable social environment.

The Council has been working with Network Rail and their development partner, Blocwork, to bring forward a proposal for the site following delivery of the new MSCP, that seeks to benefit the users of the station.

The station site development lies adjacent to the Four Waterside development site. Four Waterside seeks to bring forward a mixed use development scheme that focuses upon



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permeability and pedestrian flows between key transport hubs and the town centre through the provision of high quality linkages, spaces and paths. In turn this will support a safer, better connected and integrated town that puts people, business and sustainability at the heart.

We recognise that with our existing railway network, conversations, partnership working, member endorsement and wider development optioneering we have already embarked upon, positively demonstrates that Northampton is well suited to host the British Railways national headquarters recognising that we are demonstrating the importance of cross collaboration with public and private sector bodies to promote the railway assets that form part of our town.

### ***Levelling up***

Albeit funding was not secured in the round 1 submissions of the Levelling Up fund, Northampton have been successful in securing £33.5m funding from the Towns Fund, Community Renewal Fund and the Future High Streets Fund – demonstrating that there is a clear case of public sector intervention to address market failure, that seeks to create a platform for future regional prosperity. Furthermore, we are now actively seeking to apply for funding through the Round 2 stage when launched later this year.

Heads of Terms for the Towns Fund received in March 2021 for 10 projects totalling £25m, 8 projects are underway with the funding drawn down and delivery commencing with the remaining 2 over the next few months and all projects on schedule to be completed by the Government deadline of March 2025.

The total programme leverages over £150m of private sector investment over its lifetime. The team and the arrangements are in place to deliver the programme of works, with the governance and decision-making processes agreed. West Northamptonshire Council's projects team has a strong and demonstrable track record in delivering major, transformational projects. The Council has put in place the arrangements for successful delivery of the interventions, including: a robust governance structure, risk and change management plan, and a system for monitoring and evaluating post-delivery benefits.

As part of the government's commitment to level-up the UK, the new GBR HQ will be based outside of London and bring a number of high-skilled jobs to the winning location. Northamptonshire with its well-connected central location, railway heritage and commitment to the levelling up agenda, is an ideal location to host the GBR HQ.

When reflecting upon the 12 priorities of the Levelling Up Fund, the transformational benefits of the proposed headquarters, coupled with the wider regeneration around the site, can deliver the following key objectives:

- Transport infrastructure – deliver infrastructure that focus on the way people and places are interconnected, creating employment opportunities that support a hybrid working model through ease of travelling



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- Digital connectivity – incorporation of digital and smart technology within new development to create a better place that improves the health, wellbeing, mobility, equality, communities and prosperity.
- Pride in place – harness the rich heritage and diverse community of Northampton, creating a place that is inclusive and engaging. This would involve continuous community and stakeholder engagement, creating a simplified and adaptable town that locals are proud of.
- Local leadership – the opportunity to empower local leaders and communities by creating a place that thrives and prospers.

Redevelopments within town centres are pivotal to the changing faces of an area with investors and developers alike. As town centres and cities across the UK look to attract a new wave of business, investment and people in the coming years, train stations will continue to be at the heart of urban modernisation projects. Projects that not only improve transport links but enhance local amenities on offer such as car parking facilities, further support the placemaking agenda to drive people into the town and reinforce options to commute.

### ***Connected and Easy to get to***

The site is situated along the London North-Western Railway, that has direct connections to the north and south of the UK. Employees and visitors alike would have direct access to the HQ upon exiting the railway station given its prominent location and therefore creates fewer reliance on other forms of transport modes.

With people and place at the heart of our proposal, we are committed to creating safer, better connected and attractive spaces that appeal to all members of society and thus support the Public Sector Equality Duties. Furthermore, it is important to note the benefits of neighbouring developments and phasing will have in creating new communities through residential development and thus create opportunities to live and work in the town.

Good national, inter-regional and intra-regional rail connections are vital for economic growth, and the location of this site, coupled with the member endorsement for development, will furthermore increase the use of Northampton Railway Station and stimulate economic growth into the local area.

The Council commitment to infrastructure and economic growth is highlighted within their investment plans. The Northampton Town Investment Plan ('TIP'), has set out an ambitious 10 year vision to deliver to strengthen, create, build and improve the accessibility, quality and rich heritage of the town centre. An important consideration for the TIP is the extent to which the proposals build on recent and ongoing investments in the town and complement activity by the Council and its partners. We reflect below on collaboration opportunities occurring within the area that support the growth and connectivity of the area.



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- City Fibre is in the process of rolling out a £40 million investment in superfast broadband in Northampton which will benefit the town and all proposed investment sites, as well as enabling the deployment of 5G across the town.
- County Council Transport Investments - Northamptonshire County Council is investing heavily in transport infrastructure, including commitments for the A43 Northampton to Kettering – Phase 3, Northampton East - West Walking and Cycling Corridor, and the Greyfriars Bus Punctuality and Traffic Scheme.
- The draft Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) supports an ambition for Northampton to become a leading centre for active travel, which fully embraces walking and cycling, underpinning plans for any further expansion of the town. The LCWIP sets out the cycling and walking improvements required and identifies short, medium and longer term measures as part of a network approach. The key outputs of LCWIP are: a network plan for walking and cycling which identifies preferred routes and core walking zones for further development; a prioritised programme of infrastructure improvements for future investment; and a report which sets out the underlying analysis carried out and provides a narrative which supports the identified improvements and network. The TIP proposals for Northampton Town Centre will support the proposed improvements in the LCWIP to promote active travel, connectivity and reduce carbon emissions.

### ***Opportunities for Great British Railway***

Northamptonshire lies within the South East Midlands; a high growth economy that occupies a key strategic position at the nexus of Oxford, Cambridge, London and Birmingham. Situated within the growth area, Northampton plays a key role in supporting a prosperous economic growth for the local economy. We are already working closely with Network Rail and their development partner, Blocwork, who have continued to work closely and support the Council in scoping their preferred options in and around the Railway Station.

The subject site occupies an ideal location for office occupiers, being in close proximity to both the Railway Station and the town centre, and the site would offer a premier office building in the context of the town centre when constructed. It offers the opportunity to re-establish offices in a prime location, with close proximity to support local services, including the retail, environment and economic sectors.

We have continued to engage with National Rail and government bodies regarding the proposed office development within the town centre, who continue to remain supportive of the proposition.

The location lends itself to further enhance the offering to the existing Enterprise Zone (EZ) and establish an area for prime business and investment. This enables a core opportunity for



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GBR to network with local, regional and national businesses, developing upon their supplier network and leverage their opportunity to create a greater social return of investment.

### ***Railway heritage & links to the network***

West Northamptonshire's location near the geographic centre of England has long made it an important focus for the nation's transport system. In the west of the county, between the villages of Norton and Whilton, four historic transport corridors run in close proximity:

- The A5, originally a Roman road linking London and Chester, known to the Saxons as Watling Street and later a major turnpike between London and Holyhead.
- The Grand Union Canal opened on 21 June 1796 as part of the Grand Junction linking Braunston in Northamptonshire with the River Thames at Brentford.
- The West Coast Main line railway, opened in 1838 by the London & Birmingham Railway as part of the first line linking London with the Midlands and the north.
- The M1, the first substantial piece of motorway opened in England on 2 November 1959.

West Northamptonshire's first railway came as early as 1800, when a link for canal traffic was constructed at Blisworth Hill pending completion of a tunnel on the Grand Union Canal; while Northampton's first railway was a connection from the town to the canal opened in 1805. While the original main line of the London & Birmingham Railway bypassed Northampton by staying on high ground to the west of the town, Northampton gained a direct railway connection with the opening of the Blisworth – Peterborough line in 1845, with the present railway serving the town – the 'Northampton Loop' forming the slow lines of the West Coast Main Line – following in 1881.

West Northamptonshire was traversed from north to south by the last new main line constructed from London during the reign of Queen Victoria – the Great Central Railway; and HS2 is currently under construction in the south of the area.

In addition to, the Northamptonshire Ironstone Railway Trust is based within the ground of the Hunsbury Hill Country Park which is located at Hunsbury Hill, southwest of Northampton. The trust has a small museum and workshop which is free to visit and features a 1.5 mile long Heritage Railway line that runs through the park, of which a small section has been approved for public use. NIRT was set up to celebrate the historical success of the railway innovation and links that Northampton has been pivotal too. It offers an opportunity to educate our celebrate the success of the town and the role of British railways in the futureproofing of our towns.

Northampton also has a key role in the history of model railways in Britain, principally through the various enterprises of Wenman J Bassett-Lowke, whose business not only



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did much to popularise model railways in the first half of the twentieth century, but also constructed in Northampton the first steam locomotives to run on 15-inch gauge.

The proposed site of the development of the new HQ sits adjacent to the existing railway and therefore provides direct connections to the regional and local networks. Located on the London Northwestern Line, the station is well placed to provide connections that support the prosperity of the North and South of the UK.

### ***Value for Money***

The proposed site for the delivery of the new headquarters, forms part of a wider regeneration project that is supported by West Northamptonshire Council, Network Rail, SEMLEP and Blocwork.

The development of the site is proposed to come forward in 3 stages, stage 1 being the development of a new multi storey car park, with stage 2 and 3 paving the way for a new hotel, offices and residential neighbourhood.

West Northamptonshire Council Cabinet approved the proposed Council commitment to support the delivery of a new multi storey car park on 7th December 2021. The approval crystallised many years of collaborative working with Network Rail and its station development company Blocwork.

The Council recognise the importance of rail in relation to the future growth and prosperity of Northampton and the surrounding areas. With this in mind the Council intends to enter into a long-term funding agreement with an institutional funder to support the delivery of a new car park adjacent to the railway station in Northampton. Despite uncertain projections of potential car parking demand in the near term the Council is fully committed and aligned to the long term growth aspirations of rail usage as a sustainable transport method. The new MSCP will provide up to 1150 new car parking spaces to support future growth of railway usage in Northampton and the surrounding areas.

Alongside the delivery of the new MSCP the Council is facilitating funding for the initial enabling works that allow the wider site to be opened up for the next stages of development, which could include the proposed GBR HQ.

The decision to support a new MSCP not just facilitates potential increased rail usage, but also has a dramatic impact on connecting communities which is a key priority for the Council.

A number of the key financial benefits of this site are listed below:-

- The site is already owned by Network Rail, this will save resources in having to acquire a site, but also the site could be appropriated by GBR for the new HQ building. This approach will not only save money but will allow for early site preparation works to be undertaken without programme delay.



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- The site forms part of the existing Waterside Enterprise Zone, therefore the site is already designated as strategically important, but importantly through its EZ status may allow for GBR to apply for funding directly from SEMLEP. Obviously, any funding request will need to be independently reviewed.
- Because the Council, Network Rail and the developer Blocwork have an agreed strategy and procurement compliant approach to deliver the new MSCP, this arrangement could be adopted by GBR to deliver the new HQ. This approach if agreed will bring with it significant efficiencies in regard to procurement of construction works notwithstanding the significant programme benefits.
- The Council and Network Rail already have collaborative trusted partner relationship which will enable the delivery of significant delivery benefits.
- The proposed site is a comparatively clear site, which will allow for the construction of a carbon neutral building rather than attempting to retrofit an existing building.

The site proposed for the new HQ offers considerable financial efficiencies, due mainly to its current ownership structure and the current collaborative working relationship between the Council and Network Rail.

### ***Public Support***

The Council has clearly stated ambitions and to realise those ambitions the Council must work with partners across and beyond West Northants. This project is well aligned to the Council's ambition to work with partners to deliver a clear vision for the town and its surrounding areas.

The development of the site and the strategies and policies that sit behind it have been guided by community and stakeholder consultation that have been pivotal to inform the challenges and opportunities presented within Northampton. We recognise that empowering locally led teams will create accountability and furthermore succession planning for the town.

Train stations are integral to placemaking, offering accessibility that is a key factor in the regeneration of an area. Accessibility is not the catalyst for regeneration, but the making of place itself; offering commuters and visitors alike an opportunity to access the town by foot minimising both their carbon impact and also their time to embrace the rich history and heritage of town centres.

West Northamptonshire's Corporate Plan 2021-25 sets out a collective vision for the future making of West Northants as a great place to live, work, visit and thrive; four key characteristics that would positively support the location of the headquarters within the town. There are six priorities adopted within the corporate plan and we have demonstrated below how the intention of a national HQ will positively support these objectives:

- Green and Clean – creating a vibrant and accessible space within a walkable neighbourhood connecting visitors and employees alike;





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- Improved Life Chances – an aspirational town that is safe and secure, where investment in our town promotes healthy choices;
- Connected Communities -leveraging opportunities to promote, enhance and improve existing transport modes that have been created for and by our local communities;
- Thriving villages and towns – regenerating and renewing our town centres to flourish, protecting our heritage assets and shaping a place for new and existing communities;
- Economic Development - building on the rich heritage to attract visitors and communities into our town and create opportunities for inward investment; and
- Robust Resource Management – open and transparent conversations with public and private stakeholders to manage and mitigate risks across the borough

The proposed development would be classified by West Northamptonshire Council as a Land and/or Building asset, and would be recorded, valued and accounted for based on its significant component. The main intention of the new asset would be to facilitate economic growth, in a potential development area.

The suitability of this site in relation to the Councils and SEMLEPs strategic objectives can be summarised as follows:

- Contribute to growing the local economy;
- Supporting the Council's long term financial strategy;
- Enabling investment to be secured;
- Creating opportunities to support and enhance local communities;
- Creating and safeguarding jobs; and
- Unlocking future development opportunities.

**End**