

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

31 January 2023

Multi-million pound transformation of March town centre is under way

The first of a string of multi-million pound projects to transform and futureproof March town centre is now well under way.

And was bolstered last week with approval by Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority Board of £4.2 million.

Work has now started on the regeneration of March Market Place, which is the first step in a jigsaw of inter-related schemes to transform and improve the high street following years of work to secure funding and finalise plans.

Cllr Chris Seaton, Fenland District Council portfolio holder for social mobility and heritage and lead member of the March Future High Streets steering group, said: "It's so exciting to see work getting under way.

"These investments represent a once-in-a-generation transformation of March that'll make it fit for the future and respond to the changing needs of town centre users.

"We know there is some concern among residents about the short-term disruption that is unavoidable in delivering such huge improvements. We want to assure people that everything possible is being done to minimise that.

"This programme of projects represent a show of unity from so many different partners, all working together to enhance March and ensure it continues to be a vibrant, attractive, effective town now and for many years to come."

Market Place regeneration

The £440k March Market Place regeneration, which began on Monday, January 9, is expected to be complete in March 2023.

Wednesday and Saturday markets are being held in City Road Car Park (behind Iceland) until work is complete.

The Market Place regeneration is part of the £8.4million March Future High Streets investment, funded with £6.4million from the Government's Future High Streets Fund and £2million from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

March was one of 72 towns awarded Government Future High Streets Fund following a successful bid from Fenland District Council.

Broad Street

The Future High Street Fund funding will also help towards costs of a multi-agency £9.8million project to prepare the infrastructure and public realm space of Broad Street for the future.

The project will create a more open, social and pedestrian-friendly environment and increase traffic flow through the town centre.

The project is being delivered with £3.6million from the Future High Streets Fund, £2million from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Market Towns Programme, and a slice of the Combined Authority's major funding of £4.2 million for the March Area Transport Strategy (MATS).

The Broad Street infrastructure improvement works will include the replacement of traffic lights at the junction with Station Road with a mini roundabout.

Current 30-minute limited stay car parking spaces in Broad Street will be replaced with additional parking and disabled parking in other town centre car parks, including City Road. The plan complies with more stringent modern safety standards that existing parking wouldn't meet and is designed to increase shopper dwell time in the town to help businesses thrive.

Broad Street improvements will involve vital under-ground gas and water utility pipe upgrades to prevent future gas and water main issues as experienced by the town recently.

The gas works are expected to be the first phase of the project and begin in February.

The main Broad Street works are expected to begin in May and last 12-18 months. Broad Street will remain open throughout.

The MATS project, run by Cambridgeshire County Council, which has responsibility for highways, is a much broader longer-term project to deliver overall transport improvements in the town all of which can help take pressure off the town centre.

Plans moving towards delivery in the longer term include a Northern Link Road and improvements to junctions at:

- A141 / Peas Hill roundabout
- A141 / Hostmoor Avenue
- A141 / Twenty Foot Road
- B1101 High Street / St Peter's Road.

On Wednesday (Jan 25), the Combined Authority Board approved the drawdown of £300,000 to complete the Full Business Case 2 (FBC2), focused on St Peters Road, Peas Hill, and Twenty Foot Road, as well as approving the £4,149,825 to build the Broad Street Scheme.

Wider Broad Street enhancements

The Future High Streets funding will cover £4.3m of further enhancements to Broad Street over and above those of a normal infrastructure project.

It will be used to upgrade paving to high quality material, install greenery, trees, planters, new cycle facilities, bus stops and street furniture.

This funding will also facilitate the relocation of the historic water fountain at the top of Broad Street to a much more accessible public space, within the newly created pedestrianised areas.

This will allow town centre users to really interact with the heritage of the town and the fantastic design of the structure.

Further improvements

The Future High Streets Fund is also funding a £1.25m [riverside enhancements scheme](#).

Works include [relocation of the toilet block](#). This will involve demolition of the existing block and a new enhanced Changing Places facility being created in a more western spot in Grays Lane. Changing Places Toilets, unlike standard accessible toilets, have an adult changing bench and hoist facilities as well as extra space for carers. This work is supported with £240k from the Changing Places Fund.

The riverside enhancement scheme will maximise river views, include enhanced lighting and planting as well as allowing repair and renovation of the moorings.

The Future High Streets Fund will also fund a £680k [Vacant Unit Activation Scheme](#) to provide grants to help property owners make improvements to vacant town centre properties to bring them up to a lettable standard.

The town is also benefiting from an ongoing £5m project by CityFibre to install superfast broadband.

Cllr Steve Count, district and county ward member for March and member of Cambridgeshire County Council's March Area Transport Study (MATS) Group, said: "This combination of schemes is about making the best of March's wonderful assets, such as the fountain and riverside, and supporting the town to prosper in the future.

"We have had many people get in touch to tell us how excited they are by the plans. Of course, there are also those with concerns over changes, especially to town centre parking and traffic flow.

"We want to assure people that these plans have been very carefully thought through, with input from experts on town centre development and traffic management.

"The combination of schemes, once complete, is going to bring incredibly positive improvements."

Cllr Jan French, Deputy Leader of Fenland District Council and town, district and county ward member for March, said: "A lot of work has gone into securing these investments for March and ensuring it benefits.

"It's wonderful to see work now beginning on the ground. As representatives of the community as well as members of it, we've put a great deal of effort into ensuring the plans can be implemented with the minimum of inconvenience and will continue to monitor that closely throughout.

"We're confident that once work is complete these projects will be a great boon for the town."

Deputy Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Cllr Anna Smith said:

"Investing in March is a huge priority for the Combined Authority. I'm proud that our multi-million support for Broad Street and MATS will help transform March's townscape for years to come, along

with the refurb of the town's historic railway station that the Combined Authority funded as part of our £9.5 million investment into regenerating Fenland stations.”

Rebecca Stephens, Regional Partnership Director for CityFibre, said: “We are making excellent progress in March. Our trenching activities are complete and work to install the fibre is progressing very well.

“This £5m full fibre investment in March will equip the town with the capabilities needed to thrive in the digital age, allowing residents and businesses to access gold standard connectivity, whether for work, leisure or to access public services.

“Together with other improvements planned for the town, it is the start of an exciting new era for March as one of the best-connected places in the country.

“Residents wishing to benefit from better broadband in Fenland can keep an eye on the CityFibre website to find out which providers will be offering full fibre services over our network, and where we're building next.”

- Details of upcoming roadworks can be found at: <https://bit.ly/3GAXHxM>
- For further information on March Future High Streets see: <https://www.fenland.gov.uk/MFHSE>
- Use CityFibre's postcode checker to see if its full fibre network is available in your area: www.cityfibre.com/about-us/rollout

ENDS

Artists impressions of how Broad Street, March, and the town's riverside will look.