



## Press Release

8 November 2024

### March transformation marks new chapter for historic market town

A major transformation scheme to revitalise the heart of March town centre and ensure it remains thriving and ready for the future is now complete.

Once dominated by traffic and heavy congestion, and battling the decline of the UK high street, the town centre has been renewed in a way that drives growth, improves experience and helps ensure long-term economic sustainability.

The completion of work in Broad Street was the final step in a programme of inter-related schemes by different partners which attracted a total investment into the town of £12.6million.

Representatives from Fenland District Council, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and Cambridgeshire County Council, and the Broad Street contractor Octavius Infrastructure, celebrated the culmination of the joint project with an official visit to see the transformation on Friday, 8 November.

The visit included a poignant flag-raising ceremony at the town's War Memorial ahead of Remembrance, and an official ribbon cutting by North East Cambridgeshire MP, Steve Barclay.

The Union Flag and flags of the British Armed Forces were flown upon four new flag poles surrounding the War Memorial, which was sensitively refurbished as part of the works and is now an even greater focal point in the town centre.

**Cllr Chris Seaton, lead member of the project's March Future High Streets steering group and Fenland District Council's Portfolio Holder for Transport, Heritage and Culture, said:** "This regeneration project marks an exciting new chapter for March. The investment we've seen is a vote of confidence in our town's future, ensuring that it remains a thriving, safe and welcoming place for residents and visitors alike.

"We are proud to have delivered a scheme that not only enhances the look and feel of the town centre and greatly improves traffic flow, but also ensures it remains relevant in today's rapidly changing retail environment.

### Market Place Regeneration

Investment in March's historic Market Place kickstarted the regeneration works in January 2023, enhancing its position as a key community space in the heart of the town centre.

Works included new sandstone and cobbled paving, including levelling and widening of paved surfaces adjacent to the Town Hall, new seating and planters and a significant upgrade to underground drainage systems. The car park area was also re-lined and resurfaced and the layout improved to accommodate more modern, larger vehicles. The revamped Market Place opened in April 2023.

### **Broad Street Transformation**

The transformation of Broad Street, which began in July 2023, involved replacing three lanes of traffic and traffic lights at the northern end of the road with two lanes in opposite directions and a mini roundabout. The change has significantly improved traffic flow, with less congestion also expected to improve air quality, and enabled the layout of the town centre to be transformed into an open, social and pedestrian-friendly space, with greater flexibility for community events and entertainment.

The scheme has enhanced pedestrian safety, with new zebra crossings, and there are new trees, plants and planter benches for people to use to sit, relax and meet.

Work also included the sensitive restoration and relocation of March's historic fountain to a more accessible space within the public realm. The War Memorial is also now greatly enhanced, with people able to visit and enjoy the monument without being surrounded by traffic.

Lieutenant Colonel Nigel 'Spence' Spencer MBE, of March, said of the War Memorial: "The Armed Forces community is very pleased that the War Memorial remains the focal point of March, and its new accessibility allows people to reflect and Remember everyday instead of once a year."

### **Riverside Enhancement**

A key part of the works involved opening up the riverside area between the bridge and Grays Lane so people could enjoy the river running through the middle of the town centre. The project involved demolishing the old toilet block and shelter and removing dead trees and undergrowth from the riverbank, as well as riverbank replanting.

The paved public realm area also extends towards the riverbank, with more trees, planter benches and bike racks.

Other improvements have included the refurbishment of two town centre buildings – 26 Market Place, now beautician business Lauren & Co at Be Fabulous – and March Dental, thanks to Future High Streets Fund grant funding.

The inter-related schemes making up the regeneration work were funded and delivered by various partners.

The public realm changes to Broad Street, Market Place regeneration, riverside enhancements, and grant schemes were delivered by Fenland District Council through the

£8.4million March Future High Streets investment programme, funded by the Government's Future High Streets Fund (£6.4million) and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Market Town's Fund (£2million).

The transformational road layout changes to Broad Street were delivered by Cambridgeshire County Council with funding from the county council's March Area Transport Study (£4.2million), the March Future High Streets Fund programme (£3.6million) and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Market Town's Fund (£2million).

### **More improvements to come**

Although the project is now officially complete, there will still be other improvements in the town centre in the months to come.

New public toilets, with modernised disabled and family changing facilities, will be built along the western edge of Grays Lane and the riverbank early next year. Temporary toilets in the car park of the old Barclays building will remain in use until then.

Replacing the old toilet block with a new facility was not in the original regeneration plans but proposals were brought forward following feedback from the community.

The old Barclays Bank building, which was purchased as part of the regeneration after becoming empty six months into the scheme, will also eventually be demolished and sold for redevelopment that will complement the conservation area within the heart of the town.

Purchasing the prominent site ensured the disused building did not fall into disrepair and become a blot on the new town centre.

In addition, there will be numerous improvements to town centre shopfronts as the March Shopfront Grant Scheme begins to make an impact.

Round One of the grant scheme closed on 30 August 2024, but details of future funding rounds for town centre businesses will be added to the Fenland for Business website as soon as they are available: [March Shopfront Grant Scheme - Fenland for Business](#)

**Cllr Steve Count, district and county ward member for March, member of the county council's March Area Transport Study (MATS) Group and member of the March Future High Streets steering group, said:** "We're incredibly proud to have delivered this once-in-a-generation transformation of March and its completion comes at a crucial time. As town centres across the UK face ongoing economic uncertainty and changes in consumer behaviour, March's renewed potential has already been recognised with two national retail chains, and new independent food and personal care businesses opening since the project started.

"We hope the town will serve as a model for other towns aiming to blend market town charm with modern functionality, promoting footfall and long-term sustainability."

**Cllr Jan French, Deputy Leader of Fenland District Council, town, district and county ward member for March, Chair of March Area Transport Study (MATS) Group and**

**member of the March Future High Streets steering group, said:** “This project is a significant milestone in March’s history. The improvements have not only addressed congestion issues but also created a town centre that people want to spend time in, with better facilities and a more welcoming atmosphere.

“It’s wonderful to see the vision come to life, and I’m confident it will have lasting positive impacts for years to come.”

**Cllr Alex Beckett, Chair of the Highways and Transport Committee at Cambridgeshire County Council, said:** “We’re delighted to have collaborated with our local partners and contractors to deliver this project successfully, on time and on budget.

“We all want to feel happy about where we live, to protect and enhance our environment, and to foster jobs and investment in our communities. We all want to support our local retail sector and drive growth by creating attractive spaces to shop, meet and connect. This multi-million-pound investment developed the town centre infrastructure and directly addressed these priorities. It’s fantastic to see the renewed high street busy trading, being enjoyed by everyone in the community and attracting new investment.”

**Dr Nik Johnson, Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, said:** “March deserves every penny of this investment, and we’ll all benefit as a result. These works prove what real cooperation can achieve and serve as an excellent example of genuine community power in action – congratulations to everyone involved.”

**Jamie Harrison, Delivery Director Highways for Octavius, added:** “It has been a delight to work on what can now be considered as an historic transformation for March. The success of this project is a testament to the collaboration, energy and professionalism by the many people, organisations and interest groups who have participated. At Octavius we always strive to leave a positive legacy within the communities in which we work. On this occasion this feels extra special, noting Cllr Steve Count’s hopes that this solution for March could potentially become a demonstration model for others seeking to rebuild the social and economic wellbeing of their town centre and high street communities.”

**MP Steve Barclay said:** “I am thrilled to see the project finished today and am eagerly looking forward to the town benefiting from this multi-million pound investment from the previous Conservative Government.”

## **Ends**

### Photo captions

**Ribbon cutting:** MP Steve Barclay, centre, cuts the ribbon with Cllr Jan French, right, and Jamie Harrison, Delivery Director Highways for Octavius, left, and, in the background, project partner representatives and armed forces representatives, who raised the flags.

**March Regen 1:** Pictured in front of the War Memorial in Broad Street are, from left, Phil Hughes, Head of Leisure Services and March Future High Streets Fund project officer at Fenland District Council; Cllr Chris Seaton, lead member of the March Future High Streets Fund steering group and Fenland District Council’s Portfolio Holder for Transport, Heritage and Culture; Cllr Jan French, Deputy Leader of Fenland District Council, town, district and

county ward member for March, Chair of March Area Transport Study (MATS) Group and member of the March Future High Streets steering group; Nicola Foster, Project Communication and Stakeholder Manager at Octavius Infrastructure and Jon Miller, Framework Manager at Octavius Infrastructure.