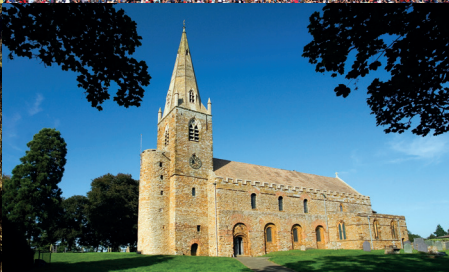


NORTHAMPTONSHIRE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN 2019-2024



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BRITAIN'S BEST SURPRISE**

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INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire is Britain's best surprise; a great destination in which to live and work as well as to visit.

Each year, Northamptonshire offers 20 million visitors stunning countryside, the country's best historic houses and some of the finest Anglo Saxon, Norman and Gothic churches to be found anywhere. Right at the centre of the country, and at the centre of the country's historical events including the trial of Thomas A Beckett at Northampton Castle, birth of Richard III and execution of Mary Queen of Scots, the county has a long association with rebellious activity including the Civil War, the Battle of Naseby and as the home of several of the key protagonists in the Gunpowder Plot. This spirit of making change and celebrating the counter-culture remains prominent today.

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Home to the Nene and Welland rivers and the Grand Union canal, perhaps most surprising is that amongst all this beauty and history sits a very 21st century county. The place where 80 per cent of the world's F1 cars are built and the Grand Prix is held, where some of the country's best artisan food and drink is made, is also the place that makes the world's most prestigious boots and shoes and the inspiration for the international hit film and musical, Kinky Boots. One of the best regional theatres in the UK in Northampton enhances a vibrant cultural sector that includes an independent art and music scene defined by its diversity.

To enjoy all this, visitors can stay in luxurious 16th century hotels or rural B&Bs and enjoy a series of established food and literary festivals at Althorp, the Nene Valley Festival, Greenbelt at Boughton, Waendal Walk, Oundle and Northampton Music festivals, Northampton Carnival as well as enjoy great motorsport at Silverstone, rugby at The Saints, football at The Cobblers, cricket at the County Ground and experience the best of the UK's inland waterways on the Grand Union Canal from Northampton.

Northamptonshire's uniquely special and surprising character is recognised but under exploited by its residents. For the nearby major conurbations of London and Birmingham, and the cities of Oxford, Cambridge, Leicester, Coventry, Peterborough, Derby and Nottingham, Northamptonshire is perhaps a place rushed through on the way to other better-known destinations. Many remain unaware of the tourism potential within one hour of their homes as they rush through on the A14 and M1.

As well as engaging the county's residents and near neighbours, Northamptonshire has considerable potential to attract more international visitors, most notably England's repeat visitors from growing European, US and Chinese markets. Having been the home county for four American presidents from George Washington onwards the county's links to the US are especially under exploited, the US being Britain's most valuable visitor market, with 4.3 million visits recorded in 2016, up 7 per cent on the previous year.

This Destination Management Plan brings together the aspirations of a range of organisations, groups and businesses from across the country including Britain's Best Surprise, Daventry District Council, Destination Nene Valley, Love Corby, Made in Northamptonshire, Northamptonshire Arts Management Trust, Northampton Borough Council, Northampton Business Improvement District, SEMLEP, South Northants Tourism Forum and the University of Northampton and to present a vision for the future, which aims to:

- Effect a step-change in awareness of Northamptonshire's destination offer
- Develop, coordinate and market Northamptonshire's surprising portfolio of destination assets;
- Facilitate increased investment in Northamptonshire's visitor economy; place shaping, infrastructure and skills;
- Stimulate growth in the sector including through partnerships between related businesses and bespoke business support

And:

- **Increase the value of the local visitor economy by 50 per cent to £1.5 billion annually in 2023**

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Visit England encourages and supports the development of Destination Management Plans (DMPs) as an essential tool in the delivery of a successful and sustainable visitor economy. A DMP is a shared statement of intent to identify and manage a destination over a set period of time, articulating the roles of the different stakeholders and identifying clear actions that they will take, as well as the apportionment of resources.

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Destination Management includes the planning, development and marketing of a destination as well as considering how it is managed physically, financially, operationally and in other ways.

In preparing this we have reviewed our current strengths:

We already have the foundations of a strong tourism business

- Northamptonshire welcomes 19.9 million visitors annually
- 2.4 million of these to the River Nene
- Our visitors generate £1.075 billion annually and support 13,685 jobs in the county
- Day visits to Northamptonshire generated £613 million local economic impact
- Staying visitors generated £462 million local economic impact
- Our tourism data is still current, last updated 2016/17

Our product mix is varied

- Historic houses, gardens, churches, food and drink, waterways, high tech and traditional sporting events, and cultural attractions are key reasons to visit
- Good range of national names and locally valued attractions across a range of sectors offers plenty of diversity and choice
- Mix of providers from private, voluntary and public sectors

Renewed enthusiasm for collaboration and supporting this sector

- LEP 2016 strategic economic plan prioritises Cultural and Creative Industries sector
- Acknowledgement that the visitor economy is amongst the fastest growing elements of the UK economy and a priority for the region; in the context of the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor and Local Industrial Strategy
- Recent concerted effort to coordinate destination marketing, especially through the Surprise Northamptonshire website and campaigns

We also face challenges:

Little coordination leading to unnecessary competition

- No established Destination Management Organisation (DMO)
- Districts and Boroughs less focussed on collaboration with regards to tourism
 - now undergoing political restructuring
 - lack of strategic awareness of importance of visitors to local economy
- Inconsistent and under-investment in infrastructure and activities

Communication needs to be improved

- Low current awareness of Northamptonshire as a visitor destination due to previous lack of consistent marketing
- While we are centrally located, we are perceived as a “drive through” area - one to pass through on the way to somewhere else
- Some negative perceptions of the geographical area (the County) are difficult to shift when the County Council’s (political area) economic collapse dominates national headlines
- Public transportation within rural locations is inefficient and east-west rail connections are poor (NIC proposals for road and rail improvements)

Product and markets don’t necessarily match

- While product mix is varied, there is not yet sufficient packaging of week-long itineraries and repeat visits
- Opening hours and seasons for historic houses need to be more consistent
- Renewed focus on identifying key strengths is a priority
- Lacking one, key paid-for attraction that helps define the county. New, technology driven and interactive visitor attraction opening Spring 2019 - Silverstone Experience - may fill this gap
- Fast changing regional demographic has resulted in changing marketplace and concerns the sector has not kept up with market demands
- Appeal of offer to younger and more diverse visitors needs development

But, we are determined to get stronger:

There are multiple opportunities to grow our sector

- Our research demonstrates that there is significant unmet potential in Northamptonshire's visitor economy
- 2016 saw a 6% increase in staycations in the UK
- In addition, domestic overnight holidays in England rose 7% to a record 20.4 million between January and June in 2017
- 2016 set a record for inbound tourism to Britain with 37.6 million visits and £22.5 billion visitor spend; includes notable 16% growth in North American/Canadian visitors which is a good fit with the county's strong and well documented US links
- Opportunities presented by growing European, Chinese and US markets and Visit England's international focus aligning with the area's international investment priorities
- Our location, at the crossroads of the M1/A14 provides untapped opportunity for business/conference tourism
- Our accessible rivers and countryside provide ample opportunities for day and short stay visitors seeking healthier lifestyle tourism experiences
- Increased investment in electric car and cycling infrastructure provides opportunities for green messaging
- Potential for significant jobs creation in Hospitality, Food & Drink sectors; in Northamptonshire, one in seven jobs are in Food & Drink

To date, the approach to marketing the County to residents and visitors has not been sufficiently resourced, or joined up. There has been little promotion of cultural tourism

- The development of the neighbouring Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge corridor provides an opportunity to market to new residents of the fastest growing region in the country

Our strategy identifies a need for greater levels of cooperation between cultural, heritage, private and public sector partners

- In the UK, Heritage tourism generated £16.4 billion in spending by domestic and international visitors in 2016
- Visitors embracing experience-led tourism will mean cross-sector/multi-partner itineraries need to be developed
- Ancestral tourism is increasing - making it easy for visitors to explore their heritage in our area. Needs collaboration and coordination between partners. USAF Vet sector showing particular promise.

OUR VISION

Northamptonshire is Britain's best surprise; a great destination to live and work as well as visit.

OUTCOMES

This Destination Management Plan brings together the aspirations of a range of organisations, individuals, groups and businesses to present a vision for the future, which aims to:

- Effect a step-change in awareness of Northamptonshire's destination offer
- Develop, coordinate and market Northamptonshire's surprising portfolio of destination assets;
- Facilitate increased investment in Northamptonshire's visitor economy and stimulate growth in the sector including through partnerships between related businesses

And:

- **Increase the value of the local visitor economy by 50% to £1.5 billion annually in 2023**

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FIGURE 1:

THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF HERITAGE

Source: Historic England





KEY THEMES

1. Focussed Destination Marketing
2. Enhancing the Overall Visitor Experience
3. Building Destination Strengths
4. Strengthening Partnerships with Businesses
5. Sector Development and Skills

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THEME 1

Focussed Destination Marketing

We have identified that there is currently low awareness of Northamptonshire as a visitor destination both regionally and nationally and that work needs to be undertaken to reinforce sense of place, build profile, increase awareness of star attractions, develop and promote experience led itineraries that match customer expectations and improve and enhance countywide signposting.

Pragmatically, doing so requires Northamptonshire to centralise or share resources and to create support services that enable the visitor economy businesses to thrive in an increasingly competitive market place.

We have established targets for growth, which on paper look very ambitious. However, if we can encourage every current visitor to “stay one more day” we can exceed our targets.

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Focussed destination marketing

Priorities

- Confirming funding and governance models for a new Destination Management Organisation (DMO)
- Establishing short and longer term funding models for future promotional activity at national level and themed/ joint regional marketing promotions
- Embedding significant Northamptonshire brands for local, regional, national and international campaigning
- Aligning key partners' policies with Destination Management Plan (DMP)
- Understanding the priorities of our potential future audiences and visitors

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Indicative Actions

- Legally constitute an accountable body, which will oversee the delivery of the Destination Management Plan, including the development of a strategic, measurable, appropriate, realistic and timely action plan
- To develop a considered data collection tool to provide an evidence-based approach that will inform action and assess progress of the plan
- Confirm the membership fee structure proposed by Britain's Best Surprise and launch the campaign to recruit first wave of members, including the high profile brands that can define the area's offer nationally
- Scope funding opportunities for the DMO and its campaign work, once constituted
- Maintain the central, comprehensive, searchable listings function of the Britain's Best Surprise website and maximise visibility of "what's on" across other digital platforms and search engines
- Contribute towards a Cultural Development Fund bid and explore opportunities for Visit England support
- Keep abreast of changes to local government structures, to ensure that the tourism sector features prominently within strategic plans for the new unitary authorities
- Commission market research to understand our current and potential audiences/visitors
- Maximise opportunities for international engagement through collaboration with partners including the University, the local authorities, Silverstone and non-tourist businesses located in the area
- Develop an ongoing programme of information, events and showcases in key business premises and leisure attractions to target the immediate drive time customer





THEME 2

Enhancing the Overall Visitor Experience

It is widely acknowledged that the offer for visitors is good and varied, but that more can be done to encourage overnight stays and increase visitor spend. Partners will need to commit to investing in research to develop a better understanding of how the offer is regarded and to identify where gaps might exist in current provision and infrastructure. Linked to Theme One, partners need to identify which segments of the market place are priorities and adapt their offer to match the needs of potential visitors.

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Enhancing the overall visitor experience

Priorities

- Identifying if our overnight accommodation offer matches the needs of our visitors; can it cope with increased demand, at the right price-points, in the appropriate locations
- Improve public transport access to tourism attractions; nationally currently 20% of people use public transport to undertake tourism related travel
- Deliver a cohesive countywide Tourism signage project
- Leveraging wider Northamptonshire awareness around established high profile events (e.g. Grand Prix)
- Making it easy for visitors to find out what's on, where to stay and how to spend more money locally
- To make all key attractions and destinations accessible for all

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Indicative Actions

- Commission an overnight stay study, to identify gaps in the market - to encourage new accommodation development as necessary
- Undertake a gap analysis of the visitor offer to identify what is missing from our visitor experience. What level of capital investment could transform our fortunes as a destination?
- Review current Tourist Information centre provision and make case for support for new facilities as required. Business case for sustainability of physical, online and mobile "tourist information" services to be made
- Communicate that the work of the DMO should be to manage the destination, which includes those elements that don't exist, yet; and that therefore the DMO should participate in all activity that encourages new activities or enterprises that are missing and make us uncompetitive
- Support initiatives that improve public transport and sustainable infrastructure (such as bike hire and electric vehicle charging) to enhance the visitor experience; provide data for decision makers
- Analyse the gaps in the existing public transport service to ensure that key visitor attractions are more appropriately served by buses
- Establish accurate, appealing and easy to read signage - developing a cohesive brand style for all membership organisations to use
- To explore opportunities to link cultural and heritage venues with the main transport routes and networks in a creative manner, commissioning high profile artists to do so
- Lead "dressing" activity - to ensure that the towns and visitors experiences are well dressed with a coordinated banner programme, maximising the visitor welcome and signposting to activities in the vicinity
- Map key events in the area and identify opportunities for collaboration - begin to create packages encouraging longer stays using the "anchor" events as leverage
- Undertake an audit of existing accessibility statements from tourism businesses and attractions. Develop an overarching accessibility statement which is communicated widely to encourage others to change their approaches and to promote that Northamptonshire is open to all
- Explore ways in which a Culture/Heritage/Visitor card may be of value and how it may be realised
- Create a "welcome pack" to give to incoming students, house buyers and relocating businesses - explaining the richness of the area's offer



THEME 3

Building Destination Strengths

Historic houses, churches, food and drink, shoes, waterways, sports and motorsports events, and cultural attractions are key reasons to visit Northamptonshire with a few nationally recognised brands including Silverstone, Althorp, Trickers, River Nene, Royal & Derngate and Northampton Saints regularly throwing a spotlight on the area.

Northamptonshire is home to a broad range of cultural and heritage institutions, from the formal to the more radical including nationally significant performing arts and live music festivals including Shambala Festival and Greenbelt.

However, there is much more on offer in Northamptonshire than just these higher profile options and the sector could experience a real boost if using these assets as hooks to encouraging longer stays and increased expenditure by visitors.

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Building destination strengths

Priorities

- Developing packages and resources that capitalise on our international reputation for boot and shoe making excellence
- Linking sites and attractions across county with common themes e.g. links to America, boot/shoe and leather industry, Civil War/ Tresham sites
- Support initiatives that enable the retention of F1 at Silverstone
- Incentivising overnight stays from visiting sports fans and enabling the clubs to grow their home fan-base too
- Develop key events and festivals; town based festivals that truly demonstrate how Surprising Northamptonshire can be
- Supporting Northampton's ambition to develop a UK City of Culture bid for 2025
- Work with NBC to ensure that the new museum expansion is a success
- Identifying gaps in current cultural and heritage provision, and identifying risks facing existing organisations
- Enhancing corridors and creating new Northamptonshire waterways and waterside attractions
- Encouraging active recreation such as walking and cycling
- Creating links between visitors and food and drinks producers

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Indicative Actions

- Support plans to develop a boot and shoe outlet experience for Northampton, a selling space for Northamptonshire's highest quality brands
- Confirm over-arching annual themes for campaign activity and communicate these widely to the sector to enable advance planning and fundraising
- Engage in lobbying activity to ensure that those with influence understand the importance of sustaining key organisations and events (such as F1) in the area. Use our data to make help make the case
- Cultivate relationships with the major sports teams, to co-design packages for their visiting fans
- Support initiatives that improve the possibility of Northampton hosting international sporting events, focussing on inclusive, more niche events such as The Bingham Cup, Womens Tour, Gay Games etc
- Undertake a study of the area's festival activities and challenge artists and organisers to fill gaps. Use data to help make the case for funding support that can deliver even more surprising activities in the area
- Work with NBC to develop their Cultural and Creative Industries strategy, ensuring that tourists and visitors are central to any future bid to be UK City of Culture
- Understand the priorities of Sport England and support their initiatives locally, aligning these to the activities of those tourism businesses promoting active recreation
- Participate in the Made in Northamptonshire food and drink activity - adding capacity to their campaigns and co-designing offers to promote the area as a foodie destination
- Support plans for enhanced visitor interpretation at the Naseby Battlefield site.
- Support plans for the development of the Justice Museum (in partnership with Nottingham) and Museum of Leathercraft
- Champion the development and marketing of specially curated experiences for high net worth inbound audiences. For example; USAF, sculpture and art, Handel and his Boughton House links
- Support the development of 'blue and green' infrastructure e.g. Bedford-MK Canal link



THEME 4

Strengthening Partnerships with Businesses

Previously, the Local Enterprise Partnership co-ordinated activities that supported the development of the tourism sector in Northamptonshire. For now, there is little centralised coordination of activity, with the potential for partnerships between Northamptonshire tourism businesses under-developed.

On a sub-regional level there have been efforts made to encourage collaboration with the Nene Valley, Love Corby and Northampton Business Improvement District all good examples of where it can work.

A well-established Growth Hub has a good track record of supporting the development of SME businesses in Northamptonshire and has demonstrated a willingness to extend its services to those working in the tourism sector.

Strengthening strategic partnerships will be central to the effective delivery of this plan, but it's clear that all partners will want to form alliances and make investments once the value of doing so can be proven. The area does have fairly up-to-date, credible data and a baseline, but should seek to ensure that this is regularly reviewed in order to monitor the value of the collaborations within the area.

Our location, at the centre of England and well served by the M1 and A14, provides untapped opportunities.

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Photography: Oundle Food Festival

Strengthening partnerships with businesses

Priorities

- Encourage tourism businesses to work in partnership and regularly share best practice
- Ensure that the STEAM Tourism Economic Impacts data continues to be updated
- Support co-design of visitor packages
- Seek opportunities to get economies of scale, by pooling resources for countywide activities
- Strengthen partnerships with all Northamptonshire based businesses, providing an opportunity to engage our 'home crowd' Northamptonshire ambassadors
- Support the development of the "Meetings, Incentive, Conferences and Exhibition" (MICE) sector; collaboration enables Northamptonshire to maximise opportunities for hosting large scale events

Indicative Actions

- Build strong links with the local hotel market; branded and independent
- Establish a countywide Tourism Forum
- Source funds to maintain STEAM data
- Review where pooling of resources and expenditure can increase impact - including working cross-border with colleagues in MK and Bedfordshire
- Revisit the potential of county's Meet in the Middle proposition, to maximise opportunities to host large conventions and conferences with some of the major employers in the area

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THEME 5

Sector Development and Skills

Northamptonshire is one of the fastest growing areas of the Country with comparatively low levels of unemployment. Businesses, in all sectors, report challenges in recruiting appropriately skilled employees, with the cultural and creative industries (within which the tourism sector sits) being no different.

Both the University of Northampton and Northampton college deliver well-regarded courses on Event Management and Hospitality Management but graduate retention rates are low.

Tourism related businesses have not created pathways for young people from schools into employment within the sector and need to challenge the perception that the tourism/hospitality sector is low paid, hard work and unrewarding.

Northamptonshire is not yet “famous for its welcome”, but could be.

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Sector development and skills

Priorities

- Establish a base-line of the sector's future workforce needs in terms of numbers and skills
- Ensure a talent pipeline is created, with support from schools, colleges and the Growth Hub
- Support capacity building initiatives that encourage life-long learning
- Monitor the diversity of our workforce and intervene to ensure the workforce is representative
- Improve the pay and conditions of those working in the sector
- Engender a new pride in Northamptonshire
- Investing in area-wide activity to improve the levels of customer service and welcome provided to visitors

Indicative Actions

- Undertake an annual workforce survey, or support others to do so, to identify where gaps exist and what providers might do to fill these
- Encourage SEMLEP and training providers to undertake campaign activity that communicates the upsides of working in the tourism industry - contribute towards any national campaigns which seek to address this too
- Celebrate the contribution that volunteers make to keeping our heritage and visitor sites open and engaging
- Secure resources to provide volunteer training as needed and to support recruitment campaigns which aim to diversify the volunteer workforce
- Host at least 2 paid internships/apprenticeships within the DMO each year, encouraging other tourist focussed businesses to do so - with an emphasis on supporting young people from more diverse backgrounds to enter the industry
- Explore viability of Northamptonshire being a "WorldHost" area
 - embedding a training programme across the area to ensure that the welcome is as great as the offer
- Working with partners establish a countywide focus on hospitality skills, including Chefs

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NEXT STEPS

This plan belongs to Northamptonshire and should be considered a working document. It is not intended to be a fully comprehensive action plan, documenting every action that needs to be taken to enable improved management of our great destination.

Actions need to be apportioned to those best placed to deliver them. Stakeholders should not give up their responsibilities for continuing to deliver well.

The next step is for stakeholders to agree that the themes are appropriate. If so, all partners should agree that the DMO, if established, will centralise and coordinate activity, taking this plan forward, communicating the impact of the sector and identifying opportunities for it to be strengthened.

The DMO will develop SMART actions, in collaboration with partners, and will lead on those tasks allocated to it. It will also review the progress made by all other identified stakeholders. But the success of this plan, and therefore the success of the destination, remains the responsibility of the businesses, stakeholders and individuals who already commit so much energy, passion, creativity and expertise to Northamptonshire's growing visitor economy.

Working closely with existing local visitor economy partnerships the DMO will ensure:

Full correlation between current governance arrangements, investment and activity and the proposals laid out in this plan.

Discussions continue with potential investors to establish the level of their future investment in the visitor economy.

Once the decision has been made with regard to new unitary Council for Northamptonshire, a reviewing group is established to facilitate dialogue regarding brand Northamptonshire.

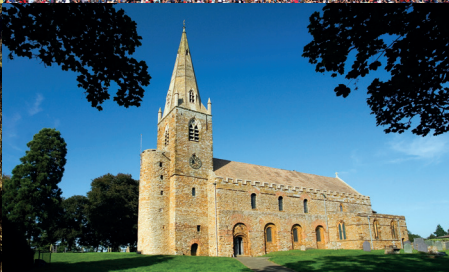
With thanks

The development of this Destination Management Plan has been overseen by the voluntary board, responsible for "Britain's Best Surprise" an ambitious destination marketing campaign focused on ensuring 'destination Northamptonshire' is more widely understood by target visitors.

Supported by partners and stakeholders countywide this low budget, high impact project was initiated by the Lord Lieutenant David Laing and his Deputies, with strong support from the University of Northampton. All sectors of the visitor economy are represented on the voluntary board: James Miller (Fine Art Consultant (Chair)), David Laing (Lord Lieutenant), James Lowther, (Owner, Holdenby House), Jane Bunce (Director of Student and Academic Services, University of Northampton), Rachel Mallows (Made in Northamptonshire), Cllr Andre Gonzales de Savage (Northamptonshire County Council), Martin Sutherland (Coventry 2021), Nick Read (Silverstone) and Craig Forsyth, Northampton Borough Council.

Many other partners took time to contribute towards the development of the themes contained in the plan including those attending a tourism forum in Kettering in 2017 and colleagues from Destination MK, Destination Nene Valley, East Northants District Council, Love Corby, Love Daventry, Made in Corby, Northampton Borough Council, Northampton Business Improvement District, SEMLEP, South Northants District Council, Visit England and Northamptonshire Food and Drink Sector Board.







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