

## **ST NEOTS INITIATIVE (SNI) – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT - 2023/24**



As my tenure as Chair of SNI for a second-year ends, as indicated previously I stated that I would stay in post for no more than two years, unless I was fired (which surprisingly did not happen!). I have had some time to reflect on what has been achieved in the two years. This has reaffirmed my view that I want everyone from our vibrant, diverse communities to have the opportunity to make a difference, lead their best life and enjoy the benefit of a strong growing economy.

My perspective on where we have come from has mixed feelings if I'm honest, whilst we have advanced significantly, especially with regards to the awareness of the Initiative, it has not come without challenges to me personally and those driving our growth. We started with ambitious plans, with a shared agreement we needed to see more action that addresses the needs of our town and the business plan we set out matched that intention. However, the structure of SNI did not allow for us to do much, with it being essentially an unofficial partnership the liability for all our actions were with us all personally. That was not going to foster an innovative, action-oriented initiative.

Whilst exploring future structures we could adopt, with thanks to extensive professional advice from the likes of Shakespeare Martineau and Hunts Forum, we came to the collective conclusion that going for charity status had to be the direction of travel. Then we came to look at the constitution, to see something that quite frankly looked to be written by 50 lawyers, it was so dated and broad that we would be rejected. I then discovered that the voting rights for the Initiative was dominated by public organisations, 40% of the voting rights were with St Neots Town Council, Huntingdonshire District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council. We are funded by local businesses and individuals, this did not make sense.

Here is where I made my first big mistake, what I put forward to the Initiative management was to have these votes removed as mandatory. The part that did not come across as intended, was that we still want to work with them all but in a more structured partnership that was agreed on new mutual terms. Although it was voted through almost unanimously, this could have been handled better.

We are past this now and SNI has been working in collaboration with local authorities, indeed leading on projects and addressing challenges/opportunities locally – we can work with community conscious businesses and citizens who recognise the potential here and delighted to invest in a brighter future for the town. To highlight we are working collaboratively with Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) and eVolve Your Future based at the Citizen Hub, providing training and career advice. The Money Advice Group also utilise the Citizen Hub on a weekly basis. More recently we have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Serious About St Neots, so people have additional access to the Opportunities Board.

I am particularly proud of the monthly Business Leaders Events held at the Citizen Hub, which provides opportunities for businesses to network and share ideas and potential solutions. SNI have brought in various Subject Matter Experts, representatives from both local authorities and HM Government. We also hold monthly Citizen Gatherings, the first one addressing infrastructure, our follow up meetings being a two-part series to focus on Education, as we know is a huge challenge in our local area.

SNI were successful in setting up the Job Finder, an Opportunities Board can be found in the Citizen Hub and also vacancies can be accessed online. Since its launch in 2023, we have now seen over 100 job applications submitted via the service. This has been done despite very limited resources and our thanks to local employers who believe in what it offers. It should be noted here that Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) Job Centre in Huntingdon are indeed referring people to the Citizen Hub.

SNI have been growing citizen membership which has now reached 588 (as at the time of this report). I have included a graph showing the increase in membership. We still have some way to achieving the 51% of citizens, but word is growing, and more people are signing up. In return they receive monthly Newsletters about the recent activity and potential items coming up in the future. In turn the Newsletters are actually being opened have attached another graph which demonstrates that SNI is performing above the national average and that citizens are actively engaging.

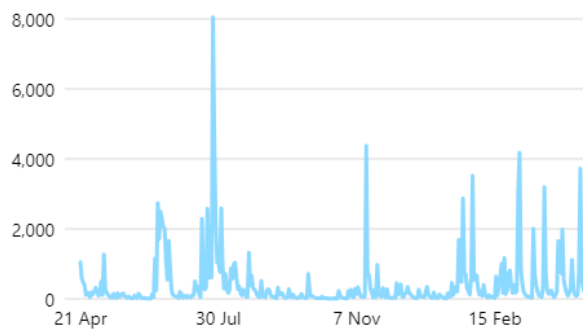
## WEBSITE VISITS (12mo)



## FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM

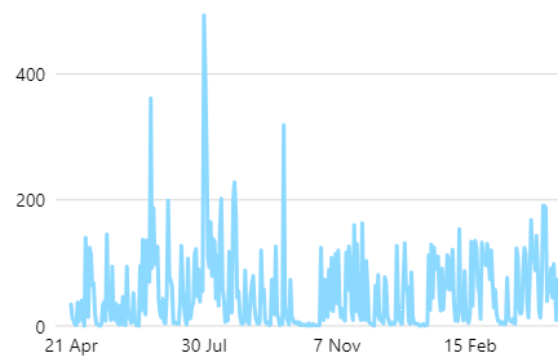
### Facebook reach ⓘ

32.4K ↑ 53.3%



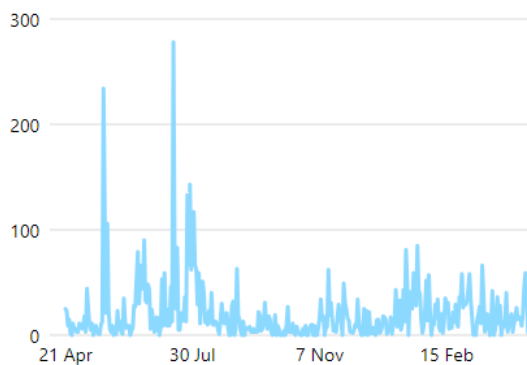
### Instagram reach ⓘ

3.3K ↑ 559.5%



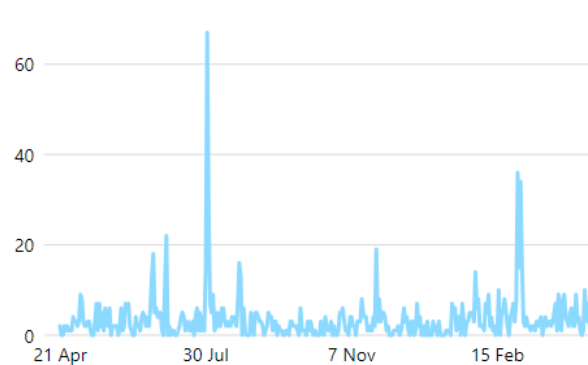
### Facebook visits ⓘ

7.4K ↑ 108%



### Instagram profile visits ⓘ

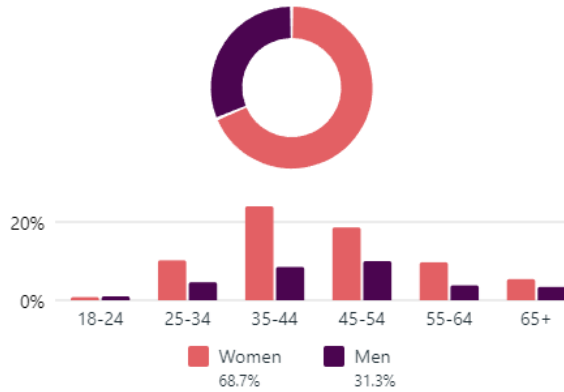
1.3K ↑ 193.8%



Facebook followers ⓘ

695

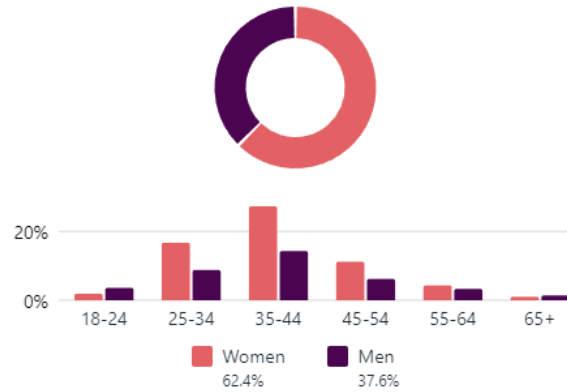
Age & gender ⓘ



Instagram followers ⓘ

537

Age & gender ⓘ

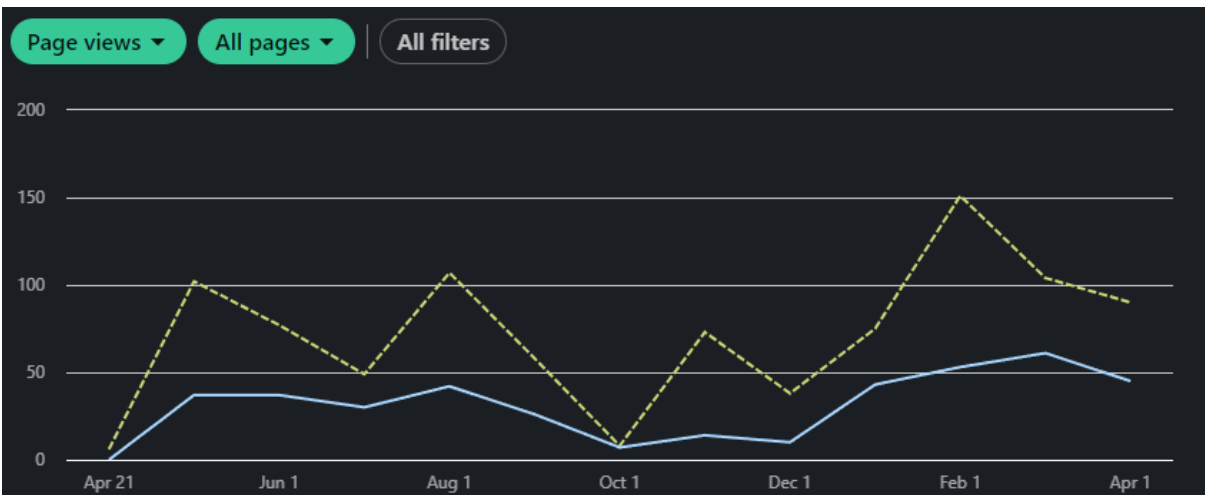


LINKEDIN

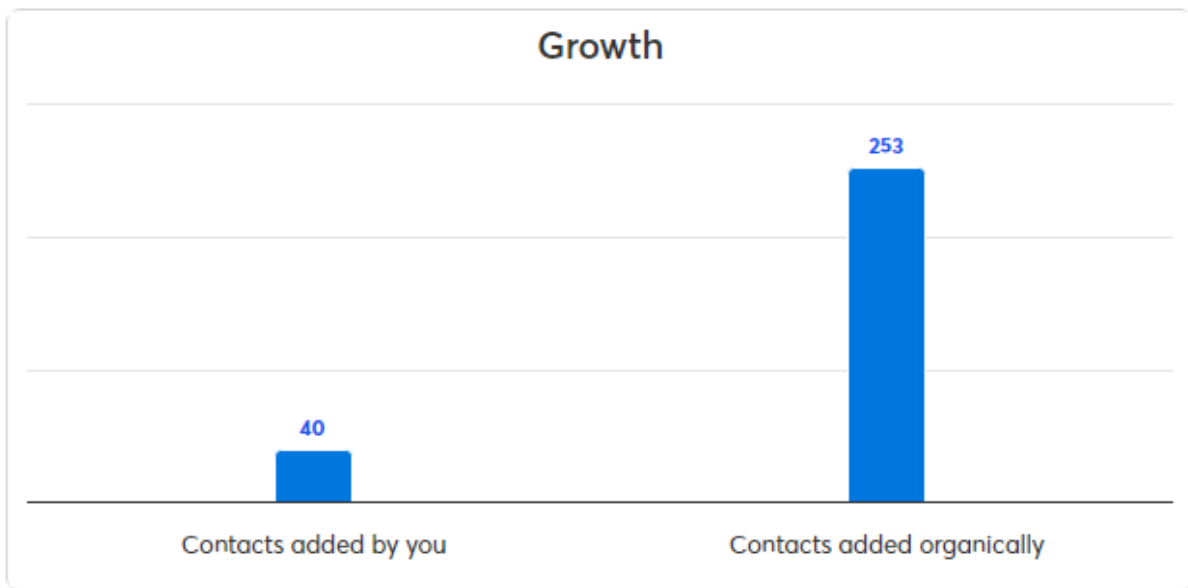
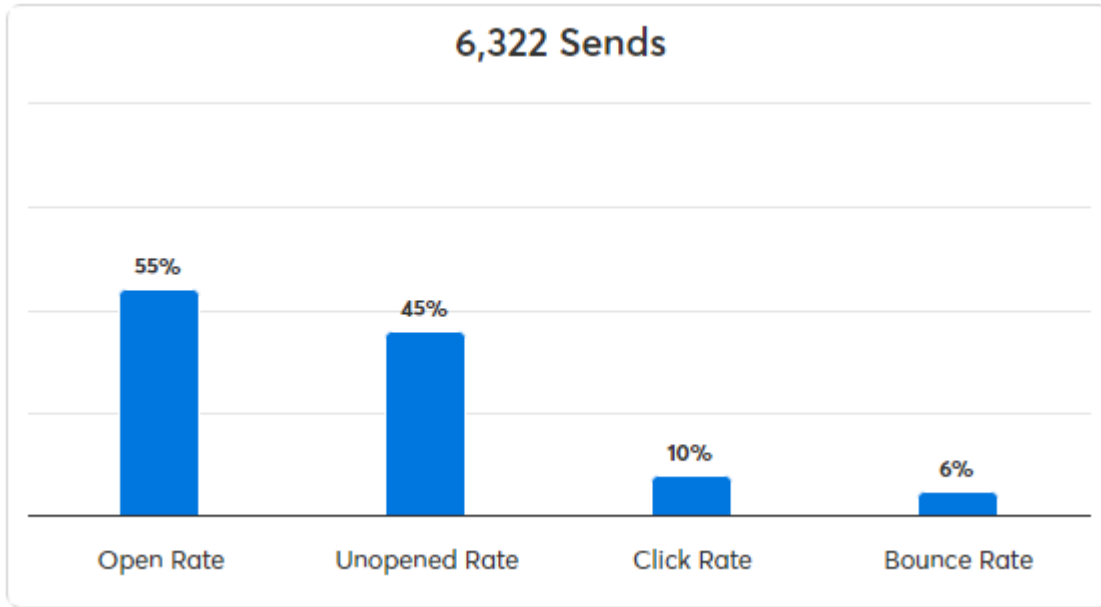
Visitor highlights ⓘ

1,343  
Page views

591  
Unique visitors



## EMAIL MEMBERSHIP



**TOTAL SUBSCRIBERS: 588**

**TOTAL ORGANISATIONS: 104**

\*With no ongoing marketing spend, this was achieved thanks to volunteer time, creating content, spending time at local events, championing organically and sponsoring local events. There is growth trends compounding on each platform and a growing team of specialist volunteers joining to support that growth.

In March 2023 we relaunched the SNI at Wyboston Lakes, in addition we presented three awards – Sue Jarrett Award for Services to the Community, John Davies Awards for Services to Business and Community and John Donnell Sports Award. The audience consisted of a diverse group of businesses, citizens, organisations and an MP. We also had Malcolm Howarth present who was the original Chair of the then St Neots Town Centre Initiative. Malcolm was delighted that SNI was continuing on after 29 years and how it evolved. Sadly, Malcolm passed away in March 2024, his daughters were not aware of the significant contribution he made to St Neots, who were delighted to hear about his significant contribution to the town.

Our various sub-groups and associations have been working tirelessly in the background to adjust their Terms of Reference, ensuring they are fit for purpose and continue in the support of St Neots and the surrounding area. More to come later.

As members of the St Neots Initiative, we are committed to holding our government-funded organisations accountable for their commitments and progress. We have received vocal commitment from all levels of government that St Neots Initiative will be engaged and involved throughout these critical years. Our active participation will help shape a prosperous and sustainable future for our town and we are actively negotiating with leadership to formalise our relationships with both governments and business representative organisations such as Chambers of Commerce and Huntingdonshire District Council.

Together, let's continue to stay informed, engaged, and involved in the journey towards a thriving St Neots. By working collaboratively, we can make a significant difference and create a town we can all be proud of.

SNI still continues with its four pillars of focus:

<b>People:</b>	What quality of life do we wish to see over the next 10 years?
<b>Place:</b>	What qualities of place are required for this quality of life?
<b>Prosperity:</b>	What are the qualities of a 'good economy' to support our aspirations?
<b>Principle:</b>	What is the message we want to send to the rest of the country?

This format is now embedded within SNI to build an effective project team to deliver on the activity which is continuing to evolve.

The SNI's biggest challenge for the past year to be set up as a Charity. With the support of Shakespeare Martineau (a well-known legal practice) [www.shma.co.uk](http://www.shma.co.uk) and our local Hunts Forum [www.huntsforum.org.uk](http://www.huntsforum.org.uk) this has been made slightly easier. Our first application was declined, which has resulted in additional work to reflect on SNI's Objects. The original Objects were in place for when SNI was set up some 20+ years ago, as SNI has evolved, and budgets withdrawn it can no longer be a major player and influencer. As a result of the Charity Commission's change of rules and clarity it is being proposed that SNI changes its Objects to one of promotion of community capacity building for the benefit of the public relating to the advancement of citizenship and/or community development. At the next Annual General

Meeting (AGM) a motion will be presented for those with voting rights to agree to this change, this in turn will require the Constitution to be amended once again.

SNI has had considerable engagement with local authorities including Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC), Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) and St Neots Town Council (SNTC). Contact has been made as we have similar interests and also various subgroups of SNI engage as part of their every-day business.

SNI also welcome Ed Davey MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats, together with Ian Sollom the candidate for St Neots and mid Cambridgeshire for the Liberal Democrats. SNI were able to explain how SNI operates, the Citizen Hub and met with various local businesspeople in St Neots. The outcome was very positive. SNI have also been contacted by various other parties who have expressed a wish to visit St Neots.

Plenty of activity has been taking place and the various headlines are shown below.

### **Promotion and Tourism Group:**

This reporting year has been one of change, with the Change in Chair from Gordon Round to Liz Davies. The group has also been reviewing its future, its purpose and how its proceeds. This is still a work in progress, but the group have decided to focus on a small number of key items:

- SNI have now successfully taken responsibility for the Information Boards located around St Neots. SNI are required to meet certain criteria on what can and cannot be displayed, the Promotion and Tourism Group have also established a charging rate for those who wish to advertise a business, thereby possibly generating some income.
- Annual Awards – will take place on 25 October 2024 at the Citizen Hub. We will have five awards presented this year, Sue Jarrett Award for Services to the Community; John Davies Award for Services to Business and Community; John McDonnell Sports Award and two new awards – Manufacturing Award and Young Person Award (Age 17-25 years). Nominations can be made digitally or on paper.
- Information Data – is being developed under the leadership of Chris Barnard, this is a collation of data from the Footfall Equipment installed in St Neots High Street, liaising with the Foodbank, accessing public data relating to other social aspects of life. It is intended that this report will be issued on a quarterly basis.
- A small project group are looking at the feasibility of a separate website to attract more visitors to St Neots and the surrounding area. This is in the early stages of development.
- A big thank you for all those who are and have been members of the Promotion and Tourism Group. If you would like to join us, please do not hesitate to contact us via the St Neots Initiative website – [www.stneotsinitiative.org.uk](http://www.stneotsinitiative.org.uk)

**Redevelopment, Transport and Environment Group and the Manufacturing Club:** The group has continued its pattern of well attended bi-monthly meetings kindly hosted by Wyboston Lakes venues, where their ongoing support is much appreciated. Each meeting with a speaker on environment, transport or redevelopment (including archaeological investigations)

**Manufacturing Club:** Restarted its meetings programme at the end of 2022 having maintained communications during the National Lock Down. We had a full programme of meetings in 2023, finishing with our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Meeting at our original hosts, Bosch Rexroth Limited. The Manufacturing Club appeared in ThinkLocal following our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

Following the meeting we are looking to increase our work with our partners, especially our startup partner, The Institute for Manufacturing in Cambridge.

### **Sports Collective:**

**Executive Summary:** This annual report provides an overview of the performance and activities of our Sports Collective in the year 2023/24. Our organisation continues to promote health, teamwork, and excellence across various sports disciplines. Despite facing challenges, including fluctuating participation rates and funding constraints, we made significant strides towards our strategic goals.

**Membership:** The membership count stood at six active member clubs. Efforts to boost membership included targeted outreach campaigns and introduction of clearer identify for the group.

**Achievements:**

- Progressed the conversation around the improvement to facilities in St Neots.
- Supported charitable activities centred around sport.
- Defined the steps we need to take in order to progress with the activities that progress us.

**Future Outlook:** Looking forward to the next year, our strategic focus will be on increasing member engagement, enhancing the quality of training and facilities, and expanding our presence in the digital space with interactive platforms and social media marketing. This will happen with new leadership at the helm to drive the project forward.

**Conclusion:** Our Sports Collective remains committed to fostering a robust sports community that promotes physical activity and competitive spirit. We thank our members and keep focus on the outcomes we want in the end.

### **The Future Group (previously The Youth Group):**

Since the last AGM, the SNI Future Group has achieved significant progress by embracing a vibrant mix of young, activated local leaders from diverse backgrounds. This eclectic assembly has not only enriched SNI with varied perspectives, but also set a solid foundation for future endeavours.

Since the beginning of 2024, these energetic leaders have convened monthly, crystalising a vision that aligns with the overarching pillars and values of SNI. Their efforts have extended beyond internal meetings, as they have actively engaged with local youth groups and key



youth workers in the town. These collaborations have been instrumental in ensuring that young people of St Neots are seen, heard and most importantly served.

We are particularly proud of initiating 'The Future Spotlight Series' in the SNI monthly Newsletter, which celebrates the personal stories and aspirations of our youth board members.

Another standout moment was an exclusive article in the latest edition of ThinkLocal magazine featuring youth board member and 'adaption guru' Maxwell Knight. His inspiring journey to raise £100k and climb Snowdon in a wheelchair not only garnered national acclaim, but also fostered local community support through significant donations. This story underscores the profound impact The Future has had on identifying and amplifying the potential of young leaders in our town.

Looking ahead for the coming year, we aim to assemble an ultimate Steering Group to support our youth board with a diverse blend of youth workers, organisation leaders, and specialist support services. This will enhance our ability to gather and analyse quality data from young people, informing impactful decisions. We also set our sights on creating a 'Future Zone' specifically tailored for young people using the Citizen Hub, ensuring that the voices and minds of our young people are full of inspiration and ideas after every interaction with the space.

Our ultimate goal is for members of the future board and young people who have actively participated in our initiatives to present their impact at the SNI Awards in March 2025.

'The Future' is bright!

#### **How SNI is Funded:**

Income is generated via businesses located within St Neots and the surrounding area. This enables SNI to support its volunteers by working with St Neots citizens, organisations, academia and businesses. In the not-too-distant future we should be accepted with our submission for Charity Status by the Charity Commission, that will allow SNI to seek alternative and additional streams of funding that will allow SNI to deliver its key objectives in line with our four pillars of focus.

#### **Acknowledgements:**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Wyboston Lakes, Bosch Rexroth Limited, and the Citizen Hub (eVolve Your Future) for kindly hosting our various meetings without cost to the SNI. Their hospitality has been well received and thank them for making time to allow meetings to take place. I also wish to express my thanks to Shakespeare Martineau for their support with SNI's proposal to transition to Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) status. In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to anyone that has given their time up to support SNI in any way you have, the relentless work that has gone into this foundational period will pave the way for the next generation of SNI members to make an impact with us in 2024 onwards.

May I record my thanks to our Vice Chair, Dan Dodson, Treasurer Ste Greenall, Secretary Debbie Phillips and other members of Management Group for all their input and support throughout the last 12 months’.

As I hand over the Chair I will continue to support whoever that may be, which will allow me to invest my time, resources and energy in different areas to make a difference to SNI and continue to work on the five-year strategy with the community codesign work ongoing.

We will finish my term with a forward business plan for the Initiative and with that, I will work closely with all members to find the best-in-class leadership to implement that beyond my tenure here.

The business plan stands true to its objectives, the timelines were a challenge with the structural work having to take precedence, but the AGM will provide the clarity on that front to enable us to move into the rest of the year with far more dynamism and agility. I welcome the 100’s of new members that have joined and I look forward to working closely with you all moving forward.

The philosophy I always lead with is called CoGrow, it stands for collaborative growth through community, and it is one that will be needed moving forward, with the UK far from stable market conditions and the many layers of government still trying to figure out how to function effectively. It is this philosophy that will act as a beacon for support and initiative for those that are focused on building St Neots to become the best place to live, work and play in the region.

I love this town, I was born and raised here, it is my hope that the foundations I have spent the time building will create a path forward for a more collaborative and peaceful period for St Neots Initiative to grow into. The opportunity to be central to the town’s social and economic growth for the next 10 years is what lays before you all, it is up to us if we take that with the right mindset to build something exceptional together. I will champion the town from every corner of the UK and personally offer my support to anyone who requests the support needed to get involved in that opportunity.

**ALEX HUGHES**

May 2024