

## **Ruskington Ward Report (May 2024 to May 2025)**

### ***Ruskington Parish Council Annual Meeting***

**20<sup>th</sup> May 2025**

This report provides an overview of key developments, achievements, and ongoing projects delivered by North Kesteven District Council over the past year (May 2024–May 2025). It highlights major district-wide initiatives, from commemorating NKDC’s 50th anniversary to significant investments in assets, housing, and community projects and notes how these have benefitted communities across North Kesteven, including Ruskington. The report also outlines upcoming plans and priorities for the district in the year ahead.

#### **Celebrating 50 Years of NKDC**

**Golden Jubilee Tree Planting:** To mark NKDC’s 50th anniversary (1974–2024), the Council launched a commemorative tree planting scheme. Fifty free specimen trees were offered to communities and have now been planted across the district in public locations.

This initiative has been “*hugely successful*,” with trees awarded to local schools, parish councils and community groups in every corner of North Kesteven. The fiftieth and final tree – an English oak in Sleaford – was planted in May 2025 as a symbolic “living legacy” of NKDC’s half-century of service. These trees not only celebrate the Council’s history but also contribute to its environmental goals by enhancing green cover and biodiversity.



**Community Orchards:** In tandem with the jubilee trees, NKDC promoted the creation of community orchards. During 2025, free fruit trees (apple, pear, plum, including local heritage varieties) were provided to plant small orchards under the Coronation Living Heritage Fund. This scheme has similarly been popular, with multiple schools, villages, and groups establishing new orchards. Building on this success, the Council plans to relaunch the community orchards project in summer 2025 to further support green spaces and community food-growing across the district.

## **Investing in Community Assets and Regeneration**

### **Sleaford Market Place Revitalisation:**

A major enhancement in the town centre was the completion of works to Sleaford’s Market Place. By January 2025, the final section of new sandstone paving and landscaping was finished, transforming the Market Place into a pedestrian-friendly public square.

New benches, cycle racks, planters, and lighting have been installed, and Blue Badge parking is now carefully managed on certain days to keep the area largely traffic-free. This allows greater community use of the space, residents and visitors can move freely and enjoy events without parked cars dominating the square. Indeed, a “Winter Light” festival weekend in December 2024 officially welcomed people back to the rejuvenated Market Place, and further UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) sponsored activities and events are planned to animate this space.

The improvements, which include upgraded CCTV security funded by UKSPF and additional seating and greenery, have been warmly received and position the Market Place as a focal point for community gatherings, markets, and cultural events going forward.



### **Carre Arms Hotel Acquisition and Refurbishment:**

In 2024 NKDC took a bold step to secure the future of the Carre Arms Hotel in Sleaford, an important local business and historic asset. One year on from its purchase, the Council has already implemented a number of behind-the-scenes improvements and is moving forward with a comprehensive renovation programme.

Over the past year, the hotel’s operations have been stabilized under a Council-owned management company, with upgrades made to critical infrastructure: *“the kitchen has been upgraded along with the tills and booking systems and various repairs have been carried out”* to improve safety and customer experience. In April 2025, NKDC approved a further £1.8 million

investment (funded through retained business rates) to modernise and refurbish the Carre Arms over an 18–24 month period. This refurbishment will create additional guest bedrooms, improved accessibility (new lifts/entrances), roof repairs, a refreshed reception area, and an enhanced exterior frontage. The Council’s goal is to “respect the past and embrace the future” preserving the hotel’s heritage while ensuring it remains a viable, attractive venue for visitors, weddings, dining, and events.

Early results are promising, with a five-fold increase in weddings and functions booked, boosting the local hospitality economy. Tourism contributes over £220 million to North Kesteven's economy annually, and preserving this vital accommodation asset supports that growing sector.



**New Town Centre Car Park (Former Ambulance Station Site):**

To address parking needs and reduce congestion in Sleaford, NKDC has purchased the disused East Midlands Ambulance Service station site on Kesteven Street. In March 2025 the Council agreed to redevelop this derelict brownfield lot into a new public car park conveniently located near the town centre. Plans include offering additional free and low-cost parking e.g. The first hour free of charge, and modest fees thereafter (only £1.50 for up to 3 hours). By intercepting vehicles on the edge of town (off Eastgate) before they enter the one-way system, this new car park is expected to ease traffic congestion and vehicle idling in central Sleaford.

It will especially support shoppers, workers, and visitors to nearby destinations like the Hub and the leisure centre. Implementation is being fast-tracked; the Council's Executive Board has directed that the site be made operational as soon as possible to meet the perceived parking demand and contribute to the town's economic vitality.



This initiative, alongside a continued freeze on parking charges (no increases since 2019) and the roll-out of modern pay-by-phone options, demonstrates NKDC's efforts to improve infrastructure and the visitor experience in towns.

## **Housing, Energy Efficiency and Decent Homes**

### **Retrofitting Council Homes & Energy Efficiency Award:**

NKDC has made significant strides in upgrading its council housing stock to meet the 'Decent Homes Standard' and improve energy efficiency. Over the last few years, the Council embarked on an ambitious £21 million "retrofit" programme to install insulation and green technology (solar panels, battery storage, heat pumps) in its older homes, targeting those with lower energy performance ratings.



By early 2025, over 300 council houses had already been improved, with tenants reporting warmer homes and lower bills as a result. Building on this success, NKDC secured a further £9.1 million Government grant (matched by £9.36 m from the Council's budget) to extend the retrofit initiative to over 750 more homes between 2025 and 2028. Each property will receive on average £24,000 worth of measures to make it "*warmer, greener and typically cheaper to run*". This large-scale investment not only benefits residents through reduced fuel costs and healthier living conditions but also drives progress toward NKDC's climate goal of carbon neutrality by 2030.

NKDC's leadership in social housing decarbonisation has earned external acclaim. In March 2025, the Council won the "**Regional Council or Local Authority Body of the Year**" at the East Midlands Energy Efficiency Awards 2025. This award recognized NKDC's retrofit project, which by that point had delivered energy-efficiency upgrades to 305 council homes across the district. The accolade is a testament to the Council's proactive approach in tackling fuel poverty, cutting carbon emissions, and improving living standards for its tenants. As Council Leader Cllr Richard Wright noted, this achievement "*reflects our wider commitment to making great places for our residents to live*" and to pursuing net-zero ambitions through practical action.



**Growth of Lafford Homes (Housing Company):** NKDC’s arms-length housing company, Lafford Homes Ltd, has continued to grow and deliver new homes over the past year. Wholly owned by the District Council, Lafford Homes was established to “unlock more housing choice” in the local rental market. It develops and acquires properties for let at market and affordable rents, complementing the Council’s own social housing.

By April 2024, Lafford Homes had completed all projects in its first development phase and fully let those new homes. Recent flagship schemes include a 42-home development at Station Road, Waddington, which was finished in late 2022. That project transformed a derelict former nursery site into a mix of one- to four-bedroom flats, houses and bungalows – 28 for private rent and 14 for affordable rent – all built to a high energy-efficient standard. Similarly, in 2023 Lafford completed 20 new homes in Metheringham (including flats, houses and bungalows, with 5 let at affordable rent) by regenerating a former depot site and built 6 family houses at Furlong Way in Sleaford. Earlier developments at North Hykeham (33 apartments) and Lincoln have also added to its portfolio.

Through these projects, Lafford Homes is providing dozens of high-quality rental properties to meet local demand, while any financial surpluses ultimately benefit the Council and community. The company is now preparing for its “next exciting phase,” with significant new investment planned. £58 million will be directed into Lafford Homes over 2024–27 to enable further housing growth and increase local housing options.

### **Community Funding and UKSPF Impact**

**UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF):** Over the past year NKDC has successfully delivered the final phases of projects supported by the Government’s UKSPF, a major funding stream aimed at “levelling up” communities and boosting local opportunity. North Kesteven was allocated just under £1 million in UKSPF, which has now been fully committed to a range of initiatives benefiting residents across both towns and villages. Key focus areas included “communities and place,” local business support, and skills. For example, NKDC used UKSPF to enhance public spaces and cultural vibrancy – notably by funding free community events like Sleaford’s

WinterLight festival and upcoming RiverLight arts festival, and by installing infrastructure such as new CCTV cameras in Sleaford town centre to improve safety.



Through the **Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF)** – (A ring-fenced portion of UKSPF for rural areas) the Council provided capital grants to numerous parish-led projects. All available rural grant funding has now been allocated to local communities.

Additionally, NKDC directed part of the UKSPF toward business support programs – for instance, a Small Business Grant scheme was launched to help local enterprises grow and innovate, and investment was made in skills and training opportunities to boost employment.

As the UKSPF programme period concludes, NKDC is reporting strong outcomes in line with the fund’s aim to increase local pride of place and life chances. The district’s ability to draw in this external funding and deploy it effectively across multiple projects has been a noteworthy achievement this year.

### **Local Initiatives in Ruskington**

Residents of Ruskington have directly benefitted from several NKDC initiatives and funding streams over the past year, demonstrating the Council’s commitment to supporting its villages as well as larger towns:

- **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Funding:** NKDC’s growth and development in Ruskington has generated CIL contributions that are being reinvested locally. For example, in April 2024 Ruskington Parish Council received £3,356 in CIL funds from the Flaxwell Fields housing development, which, in a proposal By Cllr Cox and supported unanimously, has earmarked toward refurbishing the Pavilion in the village. An additional ~£1,930 from another development (off Lincoln Road) was allocated, in part to support a community garden project. These investments – enabled by NKDC’s planning gains – will improve recreational facilities and community spaces for Ruskington residents.

- **Speedway Corner Traffic and Verge Concerns:**
- Ruskington Parish Council raised concerns over the activities of a used car dealer at Speedway Corner, where vehicles were being parked on the verge. This was causing difficulties for large vehicles heading toward Anwick and contributing to general congestion in the area. We thank the Parish Council for highlighting this issue. In April, many bollards were installed at the site to prevent verge parking. I am sure we can all agree that this intervention has significantly improved traffic flow and road safety at this busy junction.



- **Housing and Decarbonisation:** Ruskington is among the villages that stand to gain from NKDC's district-wide housing initiatives. Any Council-owned homes in Ruskington are candidates for the ongoing retrofit programme, meaning some local tenants could see their homes upgraded with better insulation or green heating systems. Similarly, Ruskington residents looking for housing have more options thanks to NKDC and Lafford Homes developments – for instance, the Northfields Road affordable housing scheme in Ruskington delivered 13 modern homes a few years ago, regenerating a brownfield site into an award-winning mix of bungalows and houses for local people.

In summary NKDC's work over the past year has had tangible impacts at the village level. The Council continues to engage with Ruskington representatives to identify needs and opportunities – such as potential locations for electric vehicle charging points or supporting local events – ensuring that Ruskington remains an integral part of the district's success.

### **Looking Ahead: Priorities for 2025 and Beyond**

As NKDC moves into the next year, it maintains a clear set of priorities aligned with its corporate plan and the needs of the district:

- **Continued Climate Action and Decarbonisation:** Environmental sustainability remains at the forefront. The Council will advance its Climate Emergency Action Plan toward the 2030 net-zero target. This includes rolling out the newly funded phase of housing retrofits (750+ homes by 2028), exploring further grants for green initiatives, and encouraging community sustainability projects. Tree planting and biodiversity efforts will continue – for example, the Council is relaunching its community orchards scheme in summer 2025 to support more tree cover and local fruit production. NKDC's

leadership in this arena will build on the momentum of its recent Energy Efficiency Award, striving for both carbon reduction and cost-of-living benefits for residents.

- **Housing Delivery and Quality:** Addressing housing need remains a core priority. Over the next three years, NKDC plans to invest £29 million in building new council homes and improving existing housing stock. Several small affordable housing developments are expected to come forward across the district's towns and larger villages, and the Housing Revenue Account business plan lays out a 30-year investment program for sustained improvements. Simultaneously, Lafford Homes will embark on its next phase of market rental developments, backed by the substantial £58 m investment mentioned earlier. This will likely yield new rental sites and acquisitions, further widening the choice of good-quality homes for local people. Ensuring all homes meet Decent Homes standards (including energy performance) is a fundamental goal.
- **Economic Growth and Regeneration:** NKDC will continue to drive economic development to create jobs and thriving town centres. At Sleaford Moor Enterprise Park, phase one is nearly fully occupied by businesses; the Council has allocated £17.7 million for the next phases of this strategic business park, which will expand capacity for high-skill employers and green industry. In Sleaford town centre, a planned £5 million investment will target further regeneration opportunities– potentially including the ongoing Maltings area revitalisation (NKDC owns adjacent land and is consulting on ideas to bring the historic Maltings buildings back into use). We will also see the completion and opening of the new Kesteven Street car park project, as well as initiatives to boost the arts, leisure and tourism offer (such as the return of the RiverLight festival and development of heritage trails).
- **Community and Leisure Services:** The Council's focus on community wellbeing will guide upcoming plans. There is a continued commitment to freeze or minimize fees for services where possible (e.g. parking, green waste, etc.) to ease the burden on residents. Grant programs like Community Champions awards and parish funding schemes will carry on celebrating volunteers and enable local projects. NKDC's leisure facilities and cultural programs are expected to progress in the next year, fostering greater community cohesion and healthy lifestyles.
- **Governance and Partnerships:** Proposals have been laid out by the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Angela Rayner MP in the English Devolution White Paper for changes in the way local government is organised. The reforms outlined will have a significant impact on every council and community. Among the suggestions is the formation of unitary councils that would be responsible for delivering a wider range of services through one council and across a larger area than the district and county councils currently do separately, but in tandem. NKDC will continue collaborating with Lincolnshire County Council and neighbouring districts on this front.

Additionally, the Council remains financially prudent; its Medium-Term Financial Plan underpins a £278 million program of capital investment over the next decade, directed at the five corporate priorities (Our Environment, Our Homes, Our Communities, Our Economy, Our Council). Residents can be assured that NKDC is planning for the long term, with robust finances and innovative approaches to maintain quality services in a challenging economic climate.

## **Conclusion**

Over the last year North Kesteven District Council has marked a proud 50-year milestone while delivering tangible improvements across the district – from tree planting to town centre upgrades, from housing refurbishments to new business infrastructure. The achievements outlined in this report underscore NKDC’s commitment to its vision of “flourishing communities.” Importantly, these initiatives are not confined to Sleaford or the larger towns; villages like Ruskington have felt the benefit through targeted funding and shared district-wide projects.

As Cllr Matt Waldeck presents this report to Ruskington Parish Council, it is with confidence that NKDC will build on these successes in the coming year. The Council’s forward plans – investing in housing, embracing green technologies, stimulating the local economy, and empowering communities signal an ambitious but attainable future. By working in partnership with parish councils and residents, NKDC will continue to make North Kesteven a safer, greener, and more prosperous place for everyone.

**Sources:** Official reports and press releases from North Kesteven District Council and local news coverage

[www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/](http://www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/)

[lincolnshireworld.com](http://lincolnshireworld.com)

[laffordhomes.co.uk](http://laffordhomes.co.uk)

[ruskington.parish.lincolnshire.gov.uk](http://ruskington.parish.lincolnshire.gov.uk)