

**SUPPORT TO
NORTH
WARWICKSHIRE
MARKET
TOWNS**

**END OF
PROJECT
REVIEW**

Produced by
Heartflood Ltd

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Prepared by Heartflood Ltd for North Warwickshire Borough Council, 2025.

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1.0 Executive summary

Heartflood were commissioned by North Warwickshire Borough Council in July 2023 to support the ongoing development of improvements in Atherstone, Coleshill and Polesworth. The following report details the extensive successful progress made towards all of the objectives of the project. Whilst the work undertaken has resulted in significant improvements to each location, there are many factors which were beyond the remit of our engagement and which require ongoing action in order to raise the vitality of each of the three places to the required levels. We therefore strongly recommend all of the following, which we consider should be implemented by September 2025:

1. Share this report with North Warwickshire Borough Councillors and key partner organisations, including, but not limited to:
 - Atherstone Partnership
 - Atherstone Town Council
 - Coleshill Partnership
 - Coleshill Town Council
 - Polesworth Parish Council
 - Polesworth Partnership
 - Warwickshire County Council
2. Nominate a key senior manager within NWBC to be responsible and accountable for the delivery of the recommendations outlined within this report.
3. Convene ongoing meetings between all three tiers of local government in each location to plan how they can 1) Become more active enablers and ambassadors for the work & development of each Partnership 2) Collaborate more effectively on the public sector improvements which need to be enacted in each place, including those detailed within Figure 5 of this report.

4. Embed ownership of all outstanding actions, particularly those identified within Figure 5 of this report, with officers from Warwickshire County Council, North Warwickshire Borough Council and the three Town & Parish Councils and ensure that the Partnerships in each location are fully involved in advising on the delivery of these outstanding activities.
5. Support focused efforts to address the barriers facing the effective operation of place management in each location, particularly those linked to collaborative working with stakeholders.
6. Identify a plan to provide the resources required to both fund future management support for each location from April 2025 and to deliver funding of at least £30,000 per year to embed the new place action plans which have started in each location.
7. Commission a feasibility study to consider the introduction of a Business Improvement District for Atherstone, which would be likely to generate approximately £375,000 over the next 5 years.

2.0 Project objectives

Heartflood were commissioned by North Warwickshire Borough Council in July 2023 to support the ongoing development of improvements in Atherstone, Coleshill and Polesworth and the main objectives of this piece of work for each location were to:

1. Raise the profile.
2. Increase visitor numbers.
3. Improve trading conditions.
4. Support the partnerships, to ensure sustainability.
5. Increase membership of the partnerships.

3.0 Heartflood background

Heartflood have a significant range of experience in town and city centres and the members of the project team have over 30 years of combined experience of town & city centre management work. We have an excellent track record in supporting place improvements in over 125 UK locations and the project lead, Chris Gregory, has a cutting-edge knowledge about the economics of towns and cities, having gained an MSc in Place Management & Leadership and also having recently served as one of a select number of national High Streets Task Force Experts.

4.0 Delivery against objectives

During the course of the project, significant progress was made against the key objectives of the commission, particularly given that the contract funded only 20% of a full-time post in each of the three locations. Our extensive delivery against all objectives is outlined as follows.

4.1 Profile raising

Our work supported a range of measures to raise the profile of each location, and examples include:

- Providing advice and support to updated and more dynamic visitor websites
- Digital marketing initiatives, including new social media channels
- Issuing press releases regarding the projects undertaken
- Commissioning a suite of professional photography for each location
- Liaison to increase the prominence of each place with national place bodies

4.2 Increase visitor numbers

A key component of the project involved monitoring footfall across the three locations and, during the course of our support, overall numbers to the three locations increased by almost 30,000 visitors to the three locations, as shown in Figure 1 below. Even if a very conservative spend average of £10 per visitor is applied to this data, the increase in numbers during the course of our involvement would have generated an additional £274,840 into the local economy.

Figure 1 – Footfall 1st August 2024 to 31st March 2025, compared to 1st August 2023 to 31st March 2024.

Location	Change
Atherstone	Up by 36,401 (7.6%)
Coleshill	Up by 1,566 (1.6%)
Polesworth	Down by 10,383 (8.1%)
Total	Up by 27,484 (4%)

Source: Traffic Technology Ltd.

4.3 Improve trading conditions

A key component of the project involved activities to improve the trading conditions for businesses in each of the locations, and examples of this include:

- The creation and distribution of quarterly business newsletters to inform businesses of activities and signpost them to further support initiatives
- Enacting streetscene improvements to improve the public realm and so make the centres more attractive to visitors
- Supporting and strengthening the partnerships in each location, including the recruitment and involvement of more business representatives
- Supporting new events & activities to draw people into each location
- Coordinating new flood defence systems to improve business resilience

4.4 Support partnership sustainability

Our work in supporting the project involved a range of activities to support the financial sustainability of each partnership and key activities included:

- Delivery of over £125,000 of funding to the partnerships from a range of organisations
- Creation of further funding applications for immediate submission
- Advice on key partnership improvements, aimed to positively position each location moving forwards
- Recommendations on testing the feasibility of a Business Improvement District for Atherstone, which would be likely to generate approximately £375,000 over the next 5 years
- Production of this report, which provides clear recommendations on the delivery of key future place management improvement activities in each location
- Provision of key ongoing support beyond the duration of the contract at no additional cost

4.5 Increase membership of the partnerships

Our expertise is grounded in the development of place management partnerships and project activities included all of the following:

- Recruitment of key new business members, including new Chairs for both Coleshill & Polesworth and a key business representative for Atherstone
- Regular business visits in each location, to both drive support for the partnerships and to encourage participation in project initiatives

- Organisation of open business meetings to update on progress with local improvements
- Advice on the expansion of each partnership via the introduction of structured membership schemes
- Creation of updated business databases for each location to allow more accurate business to business communication

4.6 Key place management improvements

Our expertise lies within the creation and support of place management systems and we would emphasise that, during the project, we have established a new partnership in Polesworth and supported an emerging partnership in Coleshill. We would therefore emphasise the following key progress in each location.

- Formation of the new Polesworth Partnership, to include 1) Recruitment and establishment of the Steering Group 2) Creation of administrative and governance systems 3) Appointment of a Chair and Treasurer 4) Establishment of a bank account and financial signatories 5) Development of operational systems and policies 6) Creation and delivery of a plan of improvements
- Support to the Coleshill Partnership, to include 1) Appointment of a new Chair 2) Creation and implementation of sub groups 3) Establishment of closer working relations with the Town Council 4) Coordination of a bid for HS2 funding 5) Development and management of a robust action plan & associated budgets

4.7 Case studies

The following are examples of successful projects we have undertaken in each location.

Case study 1 – Atherstone Church Lights



Removal of redundant lighting
Installation of improved equipment
Automation of the lighting via timers

Heartflood 

Figure 2 – Atherstone case study.

Case study 2 – Coleshill Farmers' Markets



Launched in March 2024
Monthly event
8 stalls

Heartflood 

Figure 3 – Coleshill case study.

Case study 3 – Polesworth streetscene



New flower planters
New benches & litter bins
Painting of street furniture

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Figure 4 – Polesworth case study.

Our work also included a significant range of specific actions and a summary of these is shown as Appendix 1 of this report. We would also emphasise that this range of achievements was delivered against our part-time appointment, with our commission representing only 60% of a full time equivalent post.

5.0 Current barriers

Whilst a range of achievements have been made, there are considered to be a number of factors which are hampering further progress in each place and which need to be addressed in order to realise the potential vitality of each of the three locations and these include the following:

1. There is no discernible sense of a shared vision, or strategy, for the future development of any of the three locations, meaning that there is an absence of clarity as to how ongoing improvements will be delivered and by whom.
2. There are significant stakeholder issues, particularly within Atherstone and Polesworth, which are creating considerable barriers for the required levels of partnership working on key projects.
3. The central areas of Atherstone, Coleshill and Polesworth do not appear to be priority areas of focus for any of the three tiers of local government, or any of the various regional agencies.

It is therefore considered that, until these challenges are addressed, the required levels of improvements to the three locations will continue to be significantly stymied.

6.0 Critical outstanding requirements

As well as the challenges outlined above, there are a number of outstanding actions from the recent independent reports from the Institute of Place Management, which are summarised in the following table. These actions should become a priority for delivery within a collaborative approach, with main activities being led by the three tiers of local government in each location, with recourse to the partnerships in each place. We would emphasise that the required actions for Coleshill and Polesworth were identified well over a year ago, with the actions required in Atherstone still being outstanding after a period of over 3 years.

Figure 5 – Outstanding IPM report recommendations for each location.

Atherstone (March 2022)	Coleshill (Oct 2023)	Polesworth (Dec 2023)
Refresh the existing vision for Atherstone.	Improve connectivity through basic signage and pathfinding, e.g., use planters and simple creative installations to mark routes and amplify pedestrian links and parking locations.	Complete an audit of public realm and construct an itinerary of basic repairs and improvements.
Improve communication between key local stakeholders.	Complete an audit to identify micro public spaces, alleyways, and side streets, which could be activated to provide additional pedestrian and trading space.	Complete an audit of shop fronts and displays.
Review how the Partnership is resourced and rethink how it is supported by local government.	Trial and evaluate the dynamic rebalancing of highways to create space for temporary events.	Review and change how Polesworth is currently represented via official websites.
Identify eyesores which detract from the visitor experience and assess the quality of gateways, signage, street furniture, planters, lighting, commercial waste, and general litter.	Review barriers to alfresco trading and hospitality and trial community, cultural, leisure and hospitality meanwhile uses on underutilised sites or in vacant/ underused buildings.	Conduct wider stakeholder engagement with people and organisations to evaluate joint promotion and offers to drive footfall and spend on the high street.
Refresh networks to widen diversity and add capacity.	Undertake an audit of shop fronts and displays and provide guidance on merchandising.	Focus on connecting canal/river walking routes through Abbey Park to the high street and existing parking areas.

Figure 5 – Outstanding IPM report recommendations for each location (continued).

Atherstone (March 2022)	Coleshill (Oct 2023)	Polesworth (Dec 2023)
Identify any key retailers or other services currently absent in the town centre, which might see Atherstone as a viable investment option.	Undertake a community led green audit to identify hard landscaped sites amenable to simple planting schemes.	Reinvigorate the poetry trail e.g. extend and promote – make it more visible and connected – extend beyond towards the river and canal.
Review existing plans or visions for the town and update them to ensure alignment with the Local Plan.	Encourage local traders to put planters/floral displays/hanging baskets, outside premises.	Win MP backing and engage with transport providers to assess public transport options.
Work with local DMO to ensure a clear, consistent messaging is used to promote Atherstone and nearby tourist attractions, festivals, and events.	Encourage volunteer led micro-gardening and informal planting.	Undertake a visioning exercise.
	Complete an audit of poor-quality public realm under council ownership as well as private ownership and identify community-led micro projects to improve each site. e.g., artwork, street furniture, bollards.	Engage landlords and commercials agents to ensure to curate new tenants.

Source: Adapted from Institute of Place Management (2022 & 2023)

7.0 Conclusions and recommendations

Whilst a great degree of activity has taken place in each of the three locations and each can be considered to be in a stronger position as a result of this project, there are a number of problems which still remain. Given our experience, we would therefore suggest the following immediate recommendations, which we consider should be completed by September 2025 at the latest:

1. Share this report with North Warwickshire Borough Councillors and key partner organisations, including, but not limited to:
 - Atherstone Partnership
 - Atherstone Town Council
 - Coleshill Partnership
 - Coleshill Town Council
 - Polesworth Parish Council
 - Polesworth Partnership
 - Warwickshire County Council
2. Nominate a key senior manager within NWBC to be responsible and accountable for the delivery of the recommendations outlined within this report.
3. Convene ongoing meetings between all three tiers of local government in each location to plan how they can 1) Become more active enablers and ambassadors for the work & development of each Partnership 2) Collaborate more effectively on the public sector improvements which need to be enacted in each place, including those detailed within Figure 5 of this report.

4. Embed ownership of all outstanding actions, particularly those identified within Figure 5 of this report, with officers from Warwickshire County Council, North Warwickshire Borough Council and the three Town & Parish Councils and ensure that the Partnerships in each location are fully involved in advising on the delivery of these outstanding activities.
5. Support focused efforts to address the barriers facing the effective operation of place management in each location, particularly those linked to collaborative working with stakeholders.
6. Identify a plan to provide the resources required to both fund future management support for each location from April 2025 and to deliver funding of at least £30,000 per year to embed the new place action plans which have started in each location.
7. Commission a feasibility study to consider the introduction of a Business Improvement District for Atherstone, which would be likely to generate approximately £375,000 over the next 5 years.

Heartflood would like to express their sincere thanks to North Warwickshire Borough Council for our selection for this key piece of work. We would also outline our profound gratitude to the individuals and partner organisations who supported the project in each location, and our particular thanks also go to Rachel Stephens and Stephanie Wagstaff for their coordinating roles throughout the project. It is clear that the North Warwickshire centres have a number of strengths and a significant degree of future potential, and we hope that this report will help to support positive momentum into the future.

Detailed delivery record.

Objective	Progress
Plan a programme of work to deliver.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Created and adapted a comprehensive monthly project planning and reporting template ▪ Liaised with all three Partnerships regarding key ongoing actions & activities ▪ Developed an inaugural action plan for Polesworth Partnership ▪ Advised on actions and activities of Atherstone and Coleshill Partnerships ▪ Organised and attended monthly client update meetings and produced project notes ▪ Planned and oversaw spending plans and budgets for Coleshill and Polesworth UKSPF funding ▪ Supported Jobs Fair in Atherstone ▪ Delivered Church lighting improvement project for Atherstone ▪ Delivered streetscene improvement projects in both Coleshill & Polesworth ▪ Delivered flooding mitigation project in Polesworth ▪ Delivered new Christmas lights project for Polesworth ▪ Supported capacity for Partnerships to deliver more projects in each location

Objective	Progress
<p>Work within each of the three towns.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attended an extensive series of Partnership meetings in all three locations ▪ Organised a regular and ongoing schedule of site visits ▪ Supported and attended events in each of the three locations ▪ Rotated client update meetings between all three locations
<p>Identify sources of funding and income.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prepared and submitted two successful funding bids for Warwickshire County Councillor funding for Atherstone ▪ Prepared and submitted a successful funding bid for UKSPF funding for Atherstone ▪ Prepared and submitted a funding bid for Warwickshire County Council Social Fabric funding for Atherstone ▪ Prepared and submitted a funding bid for Heritage Lottery funding for Atherstone ▪ Prepared two funding bids for Lottery Awards for All funding for Atherstone ▪ Carried out extensive planning for Severn Trent Community funding for Atherstone ▪ Advised on the possible income generation via a Business Improvement District for Atherstone ▪ Prepared and submitted two successful funding bids for Warwickshire County Councillor funding for Coleshill

Objective	Progress
<p>Identify sources of funding and income (continued).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prepared and submitted successful funding bid for UKSPF funding for Coleshill ▪ Began the process for a funding bid for HS2 funding for Coleshill ▪ Prepared and submitted two successful funding bids for UKSPF funding for Polesworth ▪ Prepared and submitted two successful funding bids for Warwickshire County Councillor funding for Polesworth ▪ Made enquiries regarding the Lottery Awards for All funding for Polesworth ▪ Made enquiries regarding the Heart of England Community funding for Polesworth ▪ Prepared two future funding proposals for Atherstone ▪ Submitted Heart of England Community Foundation funding bid for Polesworth
<p>Utilise appropriate means of communication to engage with local businesses, residents and visitors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Carried out face to face communication with businesses in all three towns ▪ Designed and analysed a survey for Coleshill ▪ Designed, printed and distributed newsletters in all three centres ▪ Delivered letters in all three locations ▪ Arranged and attended open meetings ▪ Supported website updates in all three locations

Objective	Progress
<p>Utilise appropriate means of communication to engage with local businesses, residents and visitors (continued).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Facilitated County Council promotional features in Atherstone & Coleshill ▪ Created and updated a new database of businesses and organisations in each location ▪ Oversaw publicity regarding the Polesworth improvement plan ▪ Produced regular marketing articles for Coleshill ▪ Advised the Polesworth Partnership on commissioning professional marketing support and assisted in the management of this
<p>Serve as a main point of contact for businesses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provided contact details to each business in each town ▪ Regularly liaised with businesses in each town ▪ Gained business feedback on current issues ▪ Attended business events across all three towns
<p>Support the continued development of the three partnerships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attended monthly partnership meetings ▪ Advised partnerships on key matters ▪ Redrafted the Atherstone Partnership constitution ▪ Enacted changes to partnership Committee & Steering Group structures in Coleshill & Polesworth ▪ Organised Institute of Place Management session for Polesworth ▪ Organised updated action plans for Coleshill & Polesworth Partnerships

Objective	Progress
<p>Support the continued development of the three partnerships (continued).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fulfilled the secretarial role for Polesworth Partnership, including setting meeting dates, providing agendas and producing & circulating minutes ▪ Created and supported a new Flood Action Group for Polesworth ▪ Procured external marketing and promotional support for the Polesworth Partnership ▪ Created Coleshill meeting & events calendar ▪ Create analysis and funding focus from the Coleshill IPM report
<p>Maintain a good dialogue with stakeholders.</p>	<p>Undertook stakeholder liaison with a number of bodies, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Association of Town & City Management ▪ Atherstone Civic Society ▪ Atherstone Town Council ▪ Arragon Properties ▪ BEAM ▪ Coleshill Town Council ▪ Heart of England Community Association ▪ HS2 ▪ Institute of Place Management ▪ K Hulse Consulting ▪ National Flood Forum ▪ National Lottery

Objective	Progress
<p>Maintain a good dialogue with stakeholders (continued).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ North Warwickshire Borough Council ▪ Polesworth History Group ▪ Polesworth Library ▪ Polesworth Parish Council ▪ Severn Trent Water ▪ The Environment Agency ▪ Warwickshire County Council ▪ Warwickshire Police ▪ Warwickshire Towns Network
<p>Create opportunities to network between the three partnerships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encouraged interaction between three partnerships and facilitated introductions ▪ Organised joint meeting to share experiences and best practice ▪ Helped create a business skills event for Coleshill, which all three partnerships were invited to participate in
<p>Collect information and data relating to the health and vitality of each town.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Created a business database for each location ▪ Regularly monitored footfall and vacancy levels for each centre ▪ Provided monthly footfall reports ▪ Researched and reported direct business feedback on trading conditions in each location ▪ Created annual footfall reports and summary

Objective	Progress
<p>Monitor the physical environment and work with relevant agencies and services to rectify areas of concern.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Highlighted streetscene issues in all three locations ▪ Undertook extensive liaison with a range of parties regarding the delivery of the Coleshill & Polesworth improvement plans ▪ Conducted streetscene assessments in each location ▪ Worked extensively on plans regarding the flooding problems in Polesworth, including the creation and administration of a Flood Action Group ▪ Advised on need to create a public sector task group for all three tiers of local government to collaborate on required improvements
<p>Other support</p>	<p>Funded a range of factors, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Newsletter design & print ▪ Photography ▪ Promotional blogs ▪ Meeting costs ▪ Networking event ▪ Event queuing app <p>Provided additional client support, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monthly advice on project risks ▪ Detailed project reviews

Objective	Progress
Other support	<p>Liaised in great detail with a range of suppliers for improvements, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Blachere Illuminations ▪ Black Country Metalworks ▪ Broxap ▪ Floodshield ▪ Hi-Lite ▪ K Hulse Consulting ▪ M3 Floodtec ▪ Nuneaton Signs ▪ Peter Richards Plant Hire ▪ Prontaprint ▪ Shelley Signs ▪ Start Safety ▪ Tables Ready ▪ The Engraved Oak Company ▪ Turnock Ltd ▪ UK Safety Store ▪ Warwickshire County Council

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