

Silverstone Ward Report For Parish Councils April 2024

I would like to start by **highlighting** a few of last year's local WNC news, in no particular order -

- The redevelopment of the Towcester centre car park with the capacity increased from 70 to 150 parking places. The £850,000 work also includes new charging points and upgrading the public toilet. We will try to ensure that car parking in town will remain free of charge
- The Towcester Watermeadows has undergone significant work including a hard surfaced pathway, suitable for wheelchairs, prams and buggies and which has made the Saturday mornings Park Run possible. There is more seating and a play area
- It is great to see The Towcester Town Centre regeneration project completed. As well as the Forum council offices and state-of-the-art library, there are new shops on the High Street and Whitton's Lane, plus the refurbished short and long stay car parks on Northampton road
- West Northamptonshire Council has secured £25 million from the Government's Town Fund to regenerate Northampton Town Centre. This project is the first to benefit from the funding and reach completion. It will complement the wider regeneration of Northampton Town Centre where works can already be seen at the rejuvenation of the historic Market Square and the empathetic restoration to bring the former Old Black Lion Pub back into use for the community.
- Northampton Town Centre is going through extensive transformation over the next decade, with the appearance of Fish St and Abington St being sympathetically enhanced to match the neighbouring St Giles St area, and a new heritage park being introduced in Marefair offering community facilities and dedicated green space. The gateway to the town from the Railway Station and main roads will be transformed to offer grade A offices, high-quality homes and a hotel as the expansive 5-acre Four Waterside is regenerated

Next, I would like to talk about the **West Northants Council budget** for the 2024 – 2025 civic year started on 1st April. Despite the financial pressures, we are in a relatively good situation and the budget will protect frontline services

and tackle those challenges. We have a **balanced revenue budget of £889.5m** (£414.5m excluding the Dedicated Schools Grant).

The main issue is an increase in demand for services, particularly supporting **children in care and vulnerable adults**. We have to provide care, which makes budgeting impossible because we don't know what to expect. A vital area is support for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or (SEND). As part of our improvement journey, work has started on a much-needed **250 space special school at Tiffield**, for children and young people with SEND between the ages of four and 18.

The budget includes a Council Tax increase of 4.99%, which is in line with the Government's threshold, generating **extra funding of around £13.1m** – with 2% going towards funding adult social care.

Over **£164m will be invested in its capital programme**, to improve local infrastructure and assets such as land, buildings and equipment.

An estimated **£20m will be spent in public health support**, which is funding from the Government to progress a range of schemes.

£59m will be invested in social housing, which is part of a five-year capital programme, amounting to £287m.

Approximately £65m will be spent on managing and maintaining the existing housing stock, which is funded primarily by Housing Rents.

The **council tax** is relating to a Band D property, WNC's part increased by 4.99%. The Police part went up by 5.10% to £306.04 and fire by 3.25% to £75.39.

We restructured a range of service areas to improve efficiency, including bringing our community-focussed services together with a place-making collaborative focus, including libraries, economic regeneration, ports and cultural services.

2023 saw the first full year where **public health** has sat solely within West Northamptonshire Council, working closely with partners to serve residents of West Northants with services that meet their needs.

We have progressed with proposals to relocate the majority of our office workers to its base in **One Angel Square (OAS)**, Northampton. Council staff currently based in the modern part of the Guildhall in Northampton and some teams currently working from The Forum in Towcester will relocate to OAS in stages during 2024 and early 2025.

On to **planning**. **Consultation has started on the new West Northants draft Local Plan to 2041**, which will replace the three local plans from South Northants, Daventry District and Northampton adopted for West Northants. The new plan sets out a vision and objectives for the area, its ambitions for new development and commitment to dealing with climate change. It allocates land for housing and employment and contains policies and other topics such as leisure, transport, health and wellbeing, infrastructure, and the environment, and where development can and cannot take place.

West Northamptonshire residents are encouraged to have our say as too, of course, are the Parish Councils, which are already engaged in the process. When the final version is adopted, it will enable the Council to plan for the future positively and sustainably by guiding decisions on future development proposals and creating places where people wish to live, work, and visit. This together with the National Planning Policy Framework and other adopted policies, will form the rules by which planning decisions will be made.

The **consultation ends on Sunday 2nd June** and you can take part by going on line at **West Northamptonshire Council - Citizen Space**

While on planning here are a few **local planning updates** -

The DHL warehouse application on the A5 at Towcester will come before the Strategic Planning Committee in May. The National Highways response received recently is 13 pages long. They have withdrawn their objections which are replaced by recommendations focussed mainly on the A5 Tove roundabout and drainage. The adjacent Bell Plantation application is still working on its traffic modelling.

Regarding the **Shacks Barn** application, WNC Highways has now responded to the Shacks Barn amended transport assessment.

Moving on to Sponne School. Some parents have had problems getting their children into Sponne School despite living in the parish and attending Silverstone Primary School. This is due to a lack of places at Sponne and it seems that only those children living here who have siblings at the school are guaranteed places at Sponne. Others are being given places at Magdalen College School in Brackley and Elisabeth Woodville School in Deanshanger. Unfortunately, the school is an Academy which means that it is responsible for its own admissions policy.

Fiona Baker, WNC's Cabinet Member for Children Families, Education and Skills is waiting for a meeting with Sponne's head teacher to clarify exactly what their admissions policy says.

The developers of the 2,750 homes being built south of Towcester centre are contributing to Sponne, which has resulted in better science facilities and other significant improvements but not in more pupil places. This is because, within two years, there has been a drop in birth-rate and the number of children of secondary school age will have significantly dropped locally and with that the capacity should meet demand. But I have to say that Magdalen College School and Elisabeth Woodville School both have a very good reputation as does Sponne.

I just want to end by talking about potholes, which affect virtually everybody. WNC has neither the resources nor the money to fix them all at present – not even close to it as is the case for most UK authorities. However, we are doing something about reducing the number and to gradually reduce the total number. We have recently bought new equipment to both improve the speed and quality of repairs. In August we bought a machine called a JCB Pothole Pro. This machine has repaired more than 12,500 square metres of West Northants roads since its roll-out. It is a mobile self-contained machine which repairs potholes four times faster than standard methods, by digging out the damaged area, filling it and topping it off with surfacing, which the machine heats and rolls in. The joints are taped and the job done.

Please report any road defects on Fix My Street West Northamptonshire. Council This allows photos to be downloaded and the map marked exactly where the problem is. If you include your name and contact details, you will be kept informed of progress if appropriate.

Local communications if you want to ask me a WNC-related question or bring something to my attention – which please don't hesitate to do – contact me direct by email or phone and not via Facebook. There are three Silverstone Ward Councillors and we look after 26 parishes.

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