

Report to Cosgrove Parish Council Annual Meeting From Cllr Ian McCord

I have taken a recent Councillor's update from the Leader and used that as the basis of a corporate Annual Report that does set out the breath of the work that is done by the council across the whole of the district.

As you are aware there are three of us and Ken, William and myself continue to work closely with each other on ward matters. We do have areas of first contact and I continued to have Yardley Gobion, Cosgrove, Ashton, Grafton Regis and Alderton for the past twelve months.

Planning continues to take up a lot of our time. To date there have been some encouraging signs. The Environment Agency have continued to maintain their objection to Furtho Pit. While that may not mean the end of this I see it as a major problem for them to overcome. Can I thank Andy, Wayne, Scott and the others who have done great work in sifting through reams of information on this application and drawing to our attention things that need clarification and better explanation.

Recently in Deanshanger an appeal against the council was withdrawn by the developers, following a loss of a similar appeal in Bugbrooke. Whether that is a tactical retreat, time will tell, but for now those 74 houses are not going ahead. Others are in the queue for planning committee.

I have also called on the council to take firmer action in respect of Persimmon Homes who are in breach of their planning obligations for the Towcester South estate. It is disappointing that WNC will not act but swallow whole, all the excuses put forward by the developers.

The council has balanced its budget for the past year. It recognised early in the financial year that it was likely to be in deficit unless action was taken. Unlike its predecessor, action was put in place and while the actual final figures are not known yet I expect it to be in balance for the year. I have the privilege of chairing the Corporate Scrutiny Committee during the past year that does attempt to get some oversight and accountability on budget matters.

The council did make some decisions that I continue to oppose. Double charging for green waste continues and this cost now at £55 per year

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smacks of opportunism. I did have a minor victory for common sense in getting the Saturday free parking period for Country Parks accepted by council in February.

Whilst I have no statistics it feels like I am reporting a fly tip more frequently than before. I want to thank all those at WNC waste services, especially Tove Depot in Towcester, for their help in removing these quickly. I have also help organise litter picking a few times across the ward.

Finally, I am sure that I speak for William and Ken in thanking the Parish Councillors for your work over the year. Our roles as ward members is made a lot easier having fully functioning parish councils across the patch. I am particularly grateful to Derek who has served this community valiantly for decades. I trust he has a long, happy, healthy and well earned retirement. To David and Wayne and now Jenny thank you for your help, guidance and support.

Cllr Ian McCord – Independent

*Deanshanger Ward – West Northamptonshire Council
May 2023*

ANNUAL REPORT



Reflecting on another year of service to communities across West Northants

Residents will be aware WNC celebrated its second birthday at the end of another extremely busy 12 months serving communities across West Northamptonshire.

2022/23 was not without its challenges for all of us, as we found ourselves dealing with significant cost of living rises in an uncertain international and economic climate.

Nevertheless we can be proud of our achievements over the last year, and I would urge you to read on for a flavour of just a few of the many highlights as we've worked towards our priorities this year.

Our Priority: Green and Clean Places

Over the past 12 months we have prioritised the environment and considered the carbon cost of our decision-making, working hard towards our sustainability goals – from improving energy efficiency, reducing waste and achieving net zero emissions by 2030, to making our streets, parks and open spaces cleaner and greener.

Here are some of the many highlights:

- Establishing a new dedicated sustainability service was key to steering and developing our response to climate change and as a result more communities, partners and businesses have been engaged over the past year.
- We published a robust set of baseline CO2 emissions data for our Council's first year, giving us a baseline against which to progress a detailed action plan to monitor and reduce these.
- Government funding of £1.25m was secured to make over 100 council-owned homes more energy efficient and a further £7m towards decarbonising our leisure centres.
- Working with many partners, we have pledged to plant over 11,300 new trees across West Northants as part of the Queen's Green Canopy initiative.
- We retained international Green Flag Award status for the high quality of Daventry Country Park, Abington Park, Bradlaugh Fields and Delapre Park, with plans to work towards achieving similar accolades for Towcester's Water Meadows and Hunsbury Country Park.
- We expanded the success of the Northampton e-scooters scheme with the rollout of new e-bikes for hire across the town centre.



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- Our new garden waste service was successfully rolled out to include South Northants residents and with increased take up for 2023-24 and we introduced kerbside recycling for small electrical items and batteries in the Daventry area.
- We introduced a Public Spaces Protection Order across the Daventry and South Northants areas to promote responsible pet ownership and ban smoking in more public spaces, with consultation now taking place on similar proposals for Northampton.



- We received nearly £300,000 government funding to roll-out new initiatives aimed at researching and improving air quality in Northampton.
- Our Cleaner Communities campaign was launched with partners to crackdown on fly-tipping and littering and change public behaviour.

Our Priority: Improved life chances

Helping our residents through the ongoing cost of living crisis has been our top priority over the past 12 months and we've worked with a range of partners to provide a broad range of practical and financial packages.

- WNC developed and approved a new Anti-Poverty Strategy, setting out how we will support people struggling financially or with food security, what we will do to help people avoid falling into poverty and how we will work to influence the Government and other national organisations to get the best deal for the people of West Northants. This crucial strategy has brought support to many families, as a collaboration between the Council and all the relevant voluntary organisations.
- Over the past 12 months we have distributed approximately £5million of the Government's Household Support Fund (HSF) to support thousands of vulnerable households in West Northants, including 23,500 free school meal vouchers, Over 7,000 pension credits to the elderly and nearly 10,500 food vouchers via a network of around 20 local voluntary and community groups.
- WNC worked with our partners and local communities to set up a network of 97 welcoming warm spaces across West Northants and set up a dedicated Cost of Living hub online and by phone to offer residents a range of tailored advice and information.
- WNC prioritised work to create more school places for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including progressing plans for a new 250-place special school in Tiffield near Towcester, with the budget approved and detailed design work under way. This is in addition to a £1.1 million expansion and creation of 50 new specialist places at Hunsbury Park Primary School, 20 of which have now been delivered. This year a further 20 places were also created at Hardingstone and Castle Academies and new 'SEND Ranges' have also been introduced which provide a set standard for each child or young person in an education setting to better outline what support is needed based on children's individual needs or behaviours.





- A new integrated care system for the whole of Northamptonshire was established in July 2022 which sees the Council working more closely in partnership with all local health and care partners to deliver better joined-up services under a new 10-year strategy to help residents to 'Live Your Best Life'. This has subsequently led to the establishment of Local Area Partnerships across West Northants, a pioneering approach that has for the first time brought together council, health, police, the VCS and other services to identify and meet the specific needs of local communities.

- Our Reablement West service, which provides vital care and support to people upon discharge from hospital to enable them to continue to live confidently and independently in their own homes – received a Good rating in the latest inspection from the Care Quality Commission (CQC).
- Our Shared Lives Service, where carers share their lives and homes to support others was rated 'outstanding' by CQC which found that "people received exceptional care and support from dedicated carers.
- We made encouraging progress in our work towards protecting vulnerable children across West Northants, with Ofsted lifting its rating of Northamptonshire's children's services from 'inadequate' to 'improvement to be good'.
- We received almost £575k to help improve adult numeracy in the area - the first tranche of funding approved from a £1.9m bid submitted to the Government's Multiply Fund. Money will be allocated over a three-year period and could benefit more than 3,000 people in the area during that time.
- More than 300 primary school students from across West Northants took part in this year's Young Citizen's Scheme organised by WNC, Northamptonshire Police and Northamptonshire Children's Trust, where they learned about online safety, fire and water safety, and anti-social behaviour.
- Our School Attendance Support Service arranged virtual sessions for parents and carers who home school children aimed at helping young people to stay safe online.
- Services helping domestic abuse victims find safer accommodation across West Northamptonshire received extra funding of over £273,000 under plans to boost the funding provided to the Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse Service (NDAS) and eve, Domestic Violence & Abuse support services.
- We also staged our annual campaign to bring comfort and joy to those staying in West Northamptonshire refuges, with donations of Christmas hampers.
- Less than a year after achieving bronze status in the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme we were awarded Silver status for our work in supporting our armed forces community, also setting up community hubs and resigning the Armed Forces Covenant for the year ahead.



Our Priority: Connected Communities

- The launch of our new highways service in autumn saw our appointed contractors Kier set out their commitment to working with WNC on sustainability goals to achieve net zero emissions by 2030, as well as increasing social value to benefit the wider West Northants community and economy, such as supporting local disadvantaged groups and working with local sub-contractors. Within weeks Kier embarked on a Community Enhancement Plan, reaching over 161 parishes, clearing over 3km of vegetation and cleaning more than 1,500 road signs to date. Alongside this, Kier has also rectified over 1,494 road and footpath defects, which includes nearly 5,633 carriageway repairs, since the contract was launched.
- We then set out further plans in our budget for the year ahead to invest an extra £1m towards repairing local roads and potholes, particularly following harsh winter conditions.
- Introducing free parking up to 10.30am on Saturdays at Daventry and Brixworth country parks and reducing the proposed maximum daily charge at the two sites by a third to £8.



- Investing £215,000 in the year ahead towards bus services while the Council shapes a new bus strategy and considers the most viable options for supporting and delivering the services in the future.
- Progressing proposals for the Abington Park Area Active Travel scheme which would introduce segregated cycleways and footways to provide better alternatives to driving, reduce traffic and increase safety for walkers and cyclists.
- Starting preparatory work on the new Northampton North-West Relief Road which will link the A428 Harlestone Road to the A5199 Welford Road. Over the past 12 months, WNC has worked with

partners to acquire the land for the £54m development, working with experts to scope and begin the relevant archaeological field work – while protecting our environment and manage the careful construction of the rail and river bridges

- Continuing to work with partners to future-proof the digital connectivity of West Northants through the Superfast Broadband scheme and with partners. CityFibre, the UK's largest independent full fibre platform, has now laid a staggering 840km of full fibre internet cables through Northampton as part of its £40m initiative for the area.

Our Priority: Thriving villages and towns

- We embarked on a comprehensive review of how the Council deals with Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) to thoroughly investigate concerns raised by residents. The review will include a robust analysis of current policies concerning HMOs in Northampton, alongside looking at ways we can use best practice from elsewhere in the country.
- A fresh three-year strategy was developed and approved for improving housing for residents across West Northamptonshire whilst tackling issues including homelessness and the cost-of-living crisis.

- We organised a packed summer weekend of bank holiday events and activities for thousands of residents to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Commemorative beacons were lit across our area, including a virtual beacon at the Northampton Lift Tower, followed by a spectacular countywide pageant through Northampton centre involving military and emergency services personnel, youth and community groups and businesses and a Big Lunch community event for residents at Delapre Abbey.
- Our Council also supported The Birmingham 2022 Queen's Baton Relay which visited Northampton in July in the run-up to the Commonwealth Games, providing an opportunity for local communities to experience the excitement in the run-up to the big event.
- We supported over 400 West Northants residents who welcomed over 700 people fleeing conflict as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, arranging support, welfare and safety checks on their arrival and staging workshops for parish councils. We also increased payments for Homes for Ukraine hosts to £550 a month from December through to March 2023, with the additional £200 to help cover rising living costs.
- We also continued to provide resettlement support for Afghan refugees and liaised with Home Office officials over future proposals around bridging accommodation to ensure our local communities were represented and their needs met.



- We worked with partners to construct and open the award-winning Northampton Bike Park to provide new sustainable leisure facilities in the town, linking to existing cycle networks and improving the wellbeing of residents.
- Northampton Museum and Arts Gallery received full accreditation from the Arts Council England after nearly a decade, recognising its ongoing commitment to providing an outstanding facility that helps visitors to engage with collections and protect them for the future.

- We worked with our partners to stage over 30 community events and activities to bring our communities together, celebrate diversity, foster good relationships including Srebrenica, International Youth Day, International Women's Day, Northampton Pride, Diwali, Holocaust Memorial Day, Refugee Week, the Male Role model awards.
- Nearly £100,000 was received from the Government's Safer Streets fund to improve lighting and CCTV and create youth engagement activities in Blackthorn and Bellinge, two areas of Northampton with disproportionately high crime levels partly due to the prevalence of alleyways, underpasses and deprivation.
- West Northamptonshire joined the rest of the country and people around the world in mourning the loss of Queen Elizabeth II, with memorial services taking place across West Northants. Our Council supported the Lord Lieutenant of Northamptonshire in leading Operation London Bridge, the countywide response to death of the late Queen and proclamation of King Charles III, co-ordinating arrangements for official events, ceremonies and services.
- We continued our work in bringing together and improve planning services across West Northants, welcoming an independent review of the service and shaping an action plan for development. Priority is being given to improving the way in which WNC handles section 106 agreements and getting payments to local organisations in a timelier fashion. Colleagues across the service have also been taking part in planning focus weeks to concentrate on processing exceptional numbers of planning applications.



Our Priority: Economic development

Attracting inward investment, breathing new life into our urban areas, and supporting businesses across West Northamptonshire have underpinned our work to drive economic development during our second year as a Council, with a broad range of activities moving forward.

- Vulcan works – a brand new £14 million hub of revitalised office space supporting start-up businesses in creative industries opened in the heart of Northampton's Cultural Quarter.
- We supported the launch of the new Social Enterprise Development Fund aimed at growing and developing social enterprises in Northampton that are making a positive impact on the community and the environment, while also generating income and creating jobs.
- The final stages of developing Daventry's Mulberry Place leisure complex were completed with the opening of two new restaurants alongside The Arc multiplex cinema.
- We were successfully granted more than £5.4m from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund to boost our local economy over the next three years. This is the largest allocation in the Southeast Midlands and will be used to improve people's life chances, increase skills, create stronger communities, and support local businesses.



- Work started to demolish the old derelict Co-op supermarket in Towcester's Sponne Arcade to make way for additional parking spaces in the heart of the town centre.
- Our Council received a prestigious Federation of Small Business Local Government Award for supporting the local small business community, beating off competition from around 250 other councils to achieve the 'All-Round Small Business Friendly' regional category.
- We exchanged contracts on the former BHS and M&S stores in Abington Street to progress plans for modern new residential, retail and leisure units in the town centre.
- We worked with partners to progress plans to restore the Old Black Lion public house in Marefair, Northampton, with conservation repair work starting recently to bring the derelict premises back into use for our local community.
- Work started on the multi-million-pound redevelopment of Northampton's historic Market Square, which will include a flexible event space, bespoke fixed stalls, more trees, tiered seating and an interactive water feature.
- Our partners at NN Contemporary Art unveiled plans for a major new cultural centre at 24 Guildhall Road – a £4.7 million project supported by the Government's Towns Fund and part of the Town Centre Masterplan.
- We encouraged residents across West Northants to shop local and support our independent traders as part of activities for Small Business Saturday.



Our Priority: Robust resource management and good governance

- Our work on transforming and improving public services inherited from the old legacy councils continued at pace throughout our second year, with the new unitary council's efficiencies on course to save taxpayers a further £34million than originally anticipated by the end of 2025/26.
- This year we worked hard to set a balanced budget for 2023/24, despite facing severe financial pressures like other councils due in the current economic climate, with high inflation rates driving up running costs and an increase in demand for services, particularly around supporting children in care and vulnerable adults.
- We made tough choices to set a Council Tax increase of 4.99% for 23/24, significantly below current inflation levels but crucially generating an extra £12m to protect essential frontline services – with 2% of the increase going towards adult social care. This represents an average increase on a Band D property of £80.50 a year, the equivalent of £1.55 a week.
- 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.



- The previous countywide approach to public health services changed as we established our own service focused on the wellbeing and needs of West Northamptonshire residents
- We gave our feedback and recommendations to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England as part of its review of our Council's electoral boundaries which are due to be introduced at our next elections in May 2025.
- Our Revenues and Benefits colleagues worked around the clock to distribute a

range of benefits and payments to residents struggling during the cost-of-living difficulties, including the government's £150 Council Tax energy rebates to households.

- We reviewed our buildings as part of ongoing work to bring our services together more economically and efficiently for residents and pursued plans to relocate from our current Daventry offices at Lodge Road to a new locality hub at the nearby Abbey Centre.
- We continued to develop the way we inform, engage and interact with residents, including key improvements to our website, the launch of our residents e-newsletter, regular briefings for town and parish councils, and increased audiences on our social media channels.
- Our efforts to improve outcomes for residents this year have resulted in widespread recognition, with key projects and activities being shortlisted for six national awards. WNC is among only a small number of finalists out of hundreds of entries from councils across the country for two leading local government sector awards ceremonies, the LGC (Local Government Chronicle) Awards and MJ (Municipal Journal) Awards.