

**23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023****Highways and Transport Services****Northwest Relief Road**

Works started on site in April 2022 and is programmed to complete in July 2024. The project team continue to work hard to ensure that affected landowners, residents and the travelling public are all kept up to date with progress and any potential impact of the works.

Throughout the winter period, key site activities included the start of constructing the river bridge and railway bridge structures. All the agreements with Network Rail are now finalised, including the easement for the right to occupy the air space and place the beams, a significant milestone. The booking of Network Rail possessions is in hand via weekly updates shared between all parties to confirm these. Other site activities include the utility diversion works which are anticipated to be on-going over the next few months.

As we approach Spring, earthwork activities are programmed to re-commence and progress work to the mainline embankment. Archaeology fieldwork is predominantly complete, although further investigation work will be required around one of the culverts.

The team continue to assess the off-site mitigation works in Boughton village, whilst Kier in the meantime have been engaged to develop / deliver the following three Conditioned schemes:

- Mitigation Scheme 2 J3 Harborough Rd / Vyse Rd
- Mitigation Scheme 3 J7 Harlestone Road / York Way Roundabout / New Sandy Lane
- Mitigation Scheme 4 Harborough Road / Holly Lodge Drive junction

**Northampton Growth Management Scheme (NGMS)**

Liaison with National Highways continues, both to secure Technical Approval for the Queen Eleanor element of the scheme and a review of the overarching Memorandum of Understanding.

Kier are well underway in reviewing the estimates for both Queen Eleanor and Brackmills, junctions which will support the ongoing review of delivery and consideration of future approvals and funding requirements / options.

**Upton Adoptions**

The next element of the Upton adoption work has been completed, with Contract 8 (northern roundabout) now being formally WNC's responsibility.

Work continues to progress much of the other areas to full adoption during 2023, although the most central and south-westerly areas are likely to be delayed due to ongoing work by developers.

**Cliftonville Corridor**

Post-scheme survey work will commence in March to collate information required to assess the benefits achieved, as per the NPIF grant requirements. Air quality comparison surveys will be undertaken in October 2023 to ensure a like for like comparison of atmospheric conditions.

## **Farthinghoe Bypass**

WNC continues work on revised Benefits to Cost Ratio (BCR) to take into account savings based on accident reduction and environmental benefits. This work is now likely to be completed in May due to a slight slippage in the receipt of traffic survey data.

## **Northampton Public Realm / Developments**

The Highways team continues to support colleagues in Regeneration to provide advice on development proposals such as those at 4 Waterside and the Abington Street / Fish St public realm scheme, providing liaison with Kier and WSP, when historic information is of benefit.

## **Active Travel**

We have secured money from the Department for Transport for funding to help develop a new Active Travel strategy for West Northamptonshire. This strategy can be used to identify improvements to our active travel schemes, which in turn ensure that we can prioritise key routes across our area, creating a network that will encourage more walking and cycling thereby reducing congestion and contribute to the Council's carbon reduction targets.

Following the briefing held with Place and Overview Scrutiny committee, a draft ambition statement, the first phase of developing the strategy, has been prepared and this was presented at an oversight group on 18<sup>th</sup> October. Feedback will be used to steer the development of this new strategy. A draft strategy will be prepared by April 2023, with a further oversight group in May to consider it.

Work on the Daventry Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP) is well underway. Site audits were completed in August and draft proposals were presented in October 2022 to stakeholders for their feedback. A first draft of the LCWIP was produced in December 2022. Public consultation is planned for spring 2023.

Following submission of our Self-Assessment form to Active Travel England, we have received an indicative revenue funding allocation of £152,723 from the Capability and Ambition Fund 2022/23. We submitted our proforma on 30<sup>th</sup> September. Our submission was based around a number of elements, including developing a LCWIP for Towcester, feasibility design on emerging draft proposals from the Daventry LCWIP and behavioural change (interactive travel map, cycle training, loan e-bikes) centred on the Delapre cycle hub. We were successful and informed of the funding allocation in November although any official announcement was embargoed until 12<sup>th</sup> January. Work is now starting to deliver the Capability project with our partners.

On 8th February Active Travel England (ATE) launched the Active Travel Fund 4 (ATF4), a single year funding round to progress existing walking, wheeling and cycling networks. ATE were looking to fund new schemes that can be constructed in 2023/24. The indicative allocation for WNC was £708k, though there was the opportunity to bid for up to three times this value.

ATE are keen for Local Authorities to start to develop a pipeline of schemes for future funding rounds, so there was also the opportunity to bid for development funding to develop up schemes that are more complex and to allow for engagement and consultation.

Following endorsement of the Active Quarter at the January 2023 Cabinet, the focus of the bid was for 1.3km of traffic free routes that will link those living in the town centre and Far Cotton with employment in Brackmills via Delapre Abbey, supporting the ongoing wellbeing, social prescribing and cycling hub at Delapre Abbey.

In addition, two schemes were submitted for development funding, to undertake feasibility design on two key corridors. The value of these bids was over and above the indicative allocation so will be directly competing with other construction schemes that ATE have

indicated they will view more favourably. ATE have indicated that following submission on 24th February, confirmation of successful bids will be received in mid-March.

### **Transport – Buses & Rail**

Cabinet agreed to form an Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators in April 2022. This is one of the key steps in delivering the Government's National Bus Strategy - Bus Back Better - within West Northamptonshire. Unfortunately, along with many other authorities, we were unsuccessful in securing any Government funding to take forward improvements to our bus network.

We are currently progressing two key elements of work to progress our work on buses. The first is to work with commercial bus operators to co-design a sustainable network of services following the end of Government financial support for the loss of passengers. This funding was originally expected to end in October, but Government has now announced that funding will continue until June 2023. The second linked piece of work is looking at how we improve the provision of bus services for rural areas. A cross party steering group will continue to meet quarterly to help review and shape the work related to the implementation of the strategy.

Government have also announced their intention to extend fund the £2 maximum adult single bus fare that was due to end in March 2023 for another three months to 30 June 2023. This is a voluntary scheme and operators will need to re-confirm their participation beyond March 2023. New operators will also be able to join the scheme.

Cabinet agreed in July a paper setting out our aspirations for improved rail services for West Northamptonshire once the opening of HS2 has released capacity on the existing rail network.

It is disappointing that the Government are not considering funding the Aylesbury Link aspect of East / West Rail at this moment in time. This link would provide an alternative rail route into London from Northampton and Long Buckby and provide a connection to the new major rail hub at Old Oak Common in West London. We are working with the Sub Regional Transport body, England's Economic Heartland, (EEH), to lobby Government to reinstate the development of this link at the earliest opportunity.

### **Traffic Enforcement**

In December we consulted regarding the potential for WNC to apply to extend our existing powers to enable us to enforce Moving Traffic Offences, the consultation showed that a significant majority of those responding supported the proposal and the sites that have been selected for an initial phase of implementation. The application to extend our powers into this area was submitted in February and it is likely that we will receive the results of that application in the summer.

The consultation clearly showed an appetite for the enforcement of Weight Restrictions especially in rural villages. If we are successful in obtaining the powers we are seeking, we will progress the enforcement of these restrictions as soon as possible.

In April the traffic enforcement team will complete their disaggregation of the service and the WNC team will from that time onwards be dedicated to the WNC area. This will conclude the work to disaggregate the Highways and Transport Service, however we will continue to work closely with NNC and all our other neighbours.

### **Highway Maintenance**

The new contract with Kier has now been operational for six months and whilst with any new contract there have been some teething issues overall progress has been good. We are now in the process of agreeing the Annual Plan for 23/24 and once this is complete will be publishing programmes to inform members and residents of the works planned for the year. The weather in January caused a significant spike in potholes due to the very low temperatures. Kier brought

in extra resource to deal with this, and we are now back on track to continue delivering above the contractual requirements.

At the end of February, we visited JCB's headquarters in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Council to investigate the Pothole Pro machine. Having seen it in action we are now working with Kier to establish a business case comparing this with other forms of repair to inform a decision regarding future maintenance practices using this technology and deliver greater efficiency.

## **Waste Management Services**

### **Waste Collections**

The refuse and recycling collections continue to perform at good level with few complaints.

Garden Waste Subscriptions for 23-24 have commenced. Residents can sign up via the Council's website, or by phoning customer services and a new option to pay by annual direct debit has been included this year. At the time of writing, since the subscriptions for next financial year opened, we have received 31,600 subscriptions with approximately 20% opting for the direct debit option.

Household Waste Recycling Centres continue to operate with no issues. The WNC HWRCs received no complaints in September and received three compliments (two at Sixfields one at Brixworth).

Several campaigns are being planned, including:

- a battery fire campaign to reduce the number of batteries being disposed of with general waste;
- a food waste campaign (fully funded by a Public Health grant) to increase the number of residents using the separate food waste collection service and reduce the amount of food being disposed of with residual waste;
- a contamination campaign to improve the quality of recyclables collected in the co-mingled kerbside bin. Veolia have already started to take action when they find the wrong materials in the recycling bin. The Council will increase its communications to residents across West Northamptonshire to encourage everyone to use the 'right bin'.

Work on developing a waste and resources strategy for West Northamptonshire has begun. The strategy will provide a future direction for the waste services as current contracts expire. Three members working group meetings have already taken place, which have helped explore members priorities for the waste service, opportunities for improvements to the collection services and opportunities to develop waste infrastructure. We plan to consult with residents on the waste and resources strategy in the summer.

Our Waste App which currently covers the Daventry and South areas will be available for the residents of Northampton within the next few weeks. This will be for bin notifications and all the other modules we currently use the app for. The project to set up the "Report It" element of the app will take longer and is currently with the digital team to develop.

### **Litter and Street Cleansing**

Crews continue to cleanse the public spaces in around West Northants with a refreshed programme of cleansing on high-speed roads being planned. To keep our cleansing crews safe, we use traffic management when working on central reservations of trunk roads and this means we have to balance the need to cleanse the road with potential traffic disruption. We are reliant on National Highways to provide the necessary traffic management on the A5, A14, A43 (Oxfordshire border to Northampton) and A45 (M1 J15 to the border with North Northants).

Fly-tipping is still an issue in hotspots and colleagues continue to liaise with the Environmental Protection Team to reduce this anti-social behaviour. The waste team, regulatory services and the communities team are working together to develop local projects to help clean up local areas and encourage residents to take pride in their area and maintain the cleanliness.

Using a grant received from Keep Britain Tidy and The Chewing Gum Task Force, we have purchased a piece of gum and graffiti removal equipment which can be towed around West Northamptonshire.

We will be clearing areas of Towcester, Brackley and Daventry of gum and then erecting signage to say that it has been done. Gold Street in Northampton has already been cleaned of gum and the signs erected.

### **Grounds Maintenance**

Winter maintenance (trimming of shrubs and hedges) operations are beginning to wind down and preparations are afoot to begin mowing operations, these are provisionally planned to commence week commencing 13th March but we will continue to monitor the weather and ground conditions and update accordingly. Spring bedding plants in our parks & open spaces are also beginning to bloom.

### **Environment, Countryside, and Parks**

#### **General parks issues**

Across many of our parks we have installed memorial benches, carried out brick and stone walls repairs either by pointing or full rebuild, installed new fencing and repaired broken ones, repaired wooden bridges and replaced broken or missing bollards.

As part of the Park Rangers' patrols, they inspect play areas, trees, bollards, footpaths and walls for any defects that could potentially become a health and safety hazard for our park users.

The parks service has taken over the issuing of the country park season parking permits from the Daventry Contact Centre. We have worked with the Contact Centre Team to develop a system for an easier online application and payment. We will be utilising the Council's hybrid mail system to post permits more efficiently. This new approach should all be up and running by the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

#### **Bradlaugh Fields**

Community Payback continue to play a large part in keeping our major parks looking clean and tidy. They assist with minor grounds maintenance work, painting and the clearance of graffiti. It is 50 years of the probation service this year and to celebrate the work that they have done for the Council the Attorney General visited Bradlaugh Fields to plant a tree in conjunction with the Queen's Green Canopy.

West Northants LIVE (adults with learning disabilities) have increased the number of days their volunteers work in the café to three days a week, which has been welcomed by the park users.

#### **Racecourse**

There are plans to install four new litter bins around the new and very popular basketball courts.

The newly created Community Garden is finished and will be ready for planting in March by Bosworth College and the Billing Brook School Students.

It is expected that the trading pitch near the football fields will be let to a mobile caterer to sell hot drinks on Sunday mornings to all those that are participating in, or supporting the football.

### **Abington Park**

The play area and the trim trail underwent extensive repair and renewal to enhance the wet pour safety surfaces. In addition, a new multi-play piece of play equipment has been installed, which has proved to be very popular with the youngsters.

### **Everdon Outdoor Learning Centre**

This is a fantastic facility that I have visited twice. On my last visit I was accompanied by the Leader of the Council and Councillor Fiona Baker.

From April 2022 to March 2023, we have engaged with 2,122 children from across and beyond West Northamptonshire, which is fabulous. These children have all participated in various environmental outdoor learning activities. Some having overcome their fears of maybe being away from home for the first time, pushing themselves to do things they would not ordinarily do e.g., getting muddy, wet, learning about bugs / birds / trees & wildlife. Here are some extracts from thank you letters received:

*I really liked steam dipping and found some bullheads and a whirligig beetle.*

*I found a dragon fly larva when I was pond dipping, roasting marshmallows was great fun and I found out that flint and steel really exists in real life and not just in Minecraft.*

*Thank you for our lovely time at Everdon, we would recommend it to everyone.*

We are looking forward to welcoming nine new schools to the Centre this year either for a day trip or a residential. We will be offering new outdoor learning sessions for pre-schoolers and home educators across Daventry & Brixworth Country Parks from May 2023.

We are participating in a countywide event for Girlguiding Northamptonshire by offering activities at Brixworth and Daventry Country Parks on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2023 for the Rainbows.

We have certainly seen an increase in demand for schools wanting to get their groups outdoors and will continue to look at what we can do and how we can improve and increase our offering to schools and other groups. We look forward to utilising both main country parks over the coming months.

### **Daventry Country Park**

The Friends of Daventry Country Park have claimed 200 woodland trees from "I Dig Trees", tree planting programme. The Rangers worked with the Daventry Scouts Group to plant them within the park. This contributed to our Council priorities to plant more trees and help to reduce carbon.

### **Brixworth Country Park**

A new holly tree was planted on the Memorial Meadow behind the Fire Memorial, bought for the park by Cllr Kevin Parker. The holly will create a nice backdrop to the memorial, providing yearlong colour and berries for birds.

The regular volunteers have been crown-lifting and thinning out Willow Wood. Focusing on smaller trees species to thin out, as this will benefit the remaining trees and ground flora, encouraging better growth through improved light and rainfall to healthier trees.

Those of you that visit the park will know that the large wooden map of the park in the car park has seen better days. We now have a replacement map, which will be installed in March.

### **Brampton Valley Way Linear Park**

Our winter work program with the volunteers has involved the usual work of clearing the gullies along the tops of the Kelmarsh & Oxendon Tunnels. Each year they become clogged with leaf litter and mulch, preventing water from running off the structures; by clearing the tops we ensure the water can flow freely & minimise water damage to the stonework.

We have also been "scalloping" the hedge / treeline from Spratton Car Park, south along the track. We thin out smaller hawthorns and blackthorns on alternate sides of the track. This allows a lot more light to reach the understory, which can help to dry out a waterlogged track surface. This work also allows us the opportunity to create space around some of the mature species that line the way, helping them to continue to grow well. It also means we can see any damage or disease in good time to maintain safety.

### **Climate Strategies**

Three strategies are in various stages of progress to support the Council's achievement of net zero by 2030:

- Estate Climate Strategy: Work is well underway, with an understanding of emissions the Council is responsible for being established and a range of measures to address these being explored. In the light of the Council's financial challenges, assessment of potential for photovoltaic (solar cell) production of electricity is being accelerated. This is likely to involve working with a commercial partner or partners. Arrangements are being made to use the Clear Futures framework to support this work.
- Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy: A wide range of material exists and is being assimilated. A useful seminar for Council staff and partners was held. Key issues identified included the need to plan for carbon at the earliest stage of projects, ensuring that what was designed and built was only what was truly needed to meet the client's requirements, and the value of materials such as timber which lock up carbon.
- Fleet Climate Strategy: The fleet review by the Energy Saving Trust was delayed by the number of projects they received. However, it is hoped to secure a place in the next round of their work. The review will identify opportunities for WNC to decarbonise road transport fleets and transition (ideally) to zero emission vehicles, thereby contributing to our aim to be net zero carbon by 2030. Whole-life cost, and energy and carbon comparisons will underpin recommendations to change.

All three Strategies seek to address scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions relevant to their functional scope. The Estate Climate Strategy will be expected to resolve any emissions which cannot be mitigated within the other Strategies.

### **Flood & Water Service**

The Council has a vital role as Lead Local Flood Authority and Land Drainage Authority. The service responds to large number of formal consultations and investigates flooding incidents. Strategically it works to identify and secure measures to reduce the risk of flooding to homes and businesses.

Approval to recruit has been provided and subject to pay grading the flood team and managers posts will be advertised. We are working with internal HR support to ensure that the advertisement reaches a wide audience. In the meantime, the Council does not have adequate

competency to manage flood and water incidences. We have appointed an external consultancy whilst the drainage / water team are recruited to address the backlog of statutory planning consultation obligations. To date the resource has cleared 50 of the 200 backlog applications with the intention to complete the backlog by the end of March.

With a team in place, the Council would have better control over delivery of statutory duties, and work would be able to commence on updating the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, which will define how we plan to manage local sources of flood risk in the district.

A site meeting was held with the local MP, Environment Agency, Seven & Trent Water, parish council and local residents at Yelvertoft. The problems at Yelvertoft are complex, with flooding caused by both main river and surface water, and potentially sewerage systems.

The RAIN team with support from colleagues within the wider Assets & Environment team will be undertaking another flood resilience event in Collingtree, hopefully during March.

### **Parking and CCTV**

Parking and CCTV services supported Operation London Bridge following the death of Queen Elizabeth II, providing secure VIP parking over several key events throughout the mourning period.

The new parking equipment tender was won by Scheidt & Bachmann. A project implementation plan is in action with installations already complete at St Johns MSCP, Grosvenor MSCP, St Michaels MSCP and Commercial Street surface car park. The new parking equipment provider has also provided quotes for introducing the new equipment into both Daventry and Brixworth country Parks and funding has been agreed allowing this work to commence. This should greatly improve the experience for users of the car parks.

Issues have transpired at St Johns MSCP since the new equipment was installed when a large volume of vehicles are attempting to leave the car park at the same time, i.e., after a Derngate performance. We are investigating and monitoring the situation to see how the issues and delays being experienced at these busy times can be overcome.

Free parking was offered in support of the Sixties event on 24<sup>th</sup> September and for the Northampton Christmas lights switch-on event. A new staff parking scheme was set up and introduced to provide staff of WNC, and also the Children's Trust, with a number of parking options to suit both budget and location. This became effective from 1<sup>st</sup> October. Arrangements are in hand to implement the revised parking charges agreed by Council as part of the budget from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 or as soon as possible thereafter.

The CCTV system has continued its valuable work deterring and detecting criminal activity. Work has started on producing the tender for the CCTV monitoring contract that is due to renew in April 2023. Funding has been secured from the Police, Fire, and Crime Commissioner to install four new CCTV cameras between the Northampton International Academy and the Racecourse.

Councillor Phil Larratt

**Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport, Waste & Environment**