

29th June 2023

Highways and Transport Services

North West Relief Road

Works started on site in April 2022 and is now due for completion during late Summer 2024. Works are now out of the ground and approximately 52% complete with of two identified programme delays relating to archaeological works and Network Rail possessions, unfortunately pushing the completion date out into early September. The project team continues to work hard to ensure this type of challenge through the contract mechanisms is robust and where possible, opportunities to bring savings to the scheme are fully explored to ensure delivery remains in budget, as is currently the case.

Constructing the river bridge and railway bridge structures is the next stage of major works, with focus being on the beam installation scheduled for July. Whilst all agreements are in place with Network Rail, this is the key area of risk in the coming period and completing this milestone on time will be a significant achievement.

Close liaison with affected landowners, residents and the travelling public continues to ensure all are kept up to date with progress and any potential impact of the works. Liaison with Persimmons and the Althorp estate in particular has been important in this past period, as flexibility in the working approach where our schemes abut each other has been necessary.

The team continue to assess the off-site mitigation works for Boughton village, now exploring opportunities to dissuade traffic from the Overstone / Vyse Road link and instead travelling east/west along Holly Lodge Drive and the A5076. Kier continues to develop the following three Conditioned schemes, with detail designs expected during September:

- 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

NGMS

Liaison with National Highways continues, both to secure Technical Approval for the Queen Eleanor element and the 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

With the northern roundabout now adopted, the next significant area of work in the north-east of Upton will commence during July, with adoption planned for September 2023.

Close liaison with Homes England continues to ensure consideration is given to implementing all remaining work as swiftly as is reasonably possible.

Cliftonville Corridor

Post-scheme survey work is expected to be undertaken during June 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, considering the implications on both Option 0 and Option 1 is now expected to be fully completed in early July, with initial BCR results available mid-June.

Towcester Relief Road

WNC recently hosted a meeting with National Highways and Persimmon. The meeting was positive in that National Highways are reviewing Persimmon's design information and requests for departures. They were of the view that it was likely that they would be able to agree to those departures in the next month and that this would pave the way for the design to be formally submitted with potential approval in the autumn – assuming there were no further issues.

Northampton Public Realm / Developments

Collaborative working continues between the Highways and Regeneration teams to support the development and implementation of the Abington Street/Fish St public realm scheme. This approach should see the successful use of the Highways Term Contract in delivering this key local improvement.

Active Travel

The 'Abington Area Active Travel Scheme' has now finished public consultation, with all comments, online survey results and feedback from the live exhibitions at Abington Museum and Bridgewater Primary School being analysed and compiled into the final consultation report, due July 23. The report will be publicly available and publicised via WNC's Consultation Portal so all stakeholders can view it. Where possible, specific enquiries by residents have been responded to. The overall opinions of the scheme are positive at this stage, with some further focus needed on the details of the scheme as presented as well as some pre-existing safety concerns in the area which the consultation usefully highlighted. Following presentation of the consultation report and next steps agreed, it is expected that detailed design will commence. This will be undertaken by Kier through WNC's Highways Service contract and we're currently in discussions regarding timescales, as this will inform when the scheme will be at a presentable stage to go to Cabinet for further decision making.

During May, a meeting was held with Active Travel England (ATE) to discuss design challenges identified through the consultation. As the key funding and inspectorate body for active travel schemes, the input and ongoing support from ATE is key. The main area of focus was the King Edward Road/ Abington Park/ Park Avenue South junction, which is the key area of pre-existing safety concerns. However, ATE suggested a few other improvements elsewhere to the scheme which will be considered. ATE have been approached very recently to enquire about increased funding to reflect increases in costs since the scheme was first proposed in 2021 and to enable the suggested improvements. The team have already secured around £870k from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), but it is expected that there will still be a funding shortfall. We await a response from ATE regarding this question and will update accordingly.

We secured money from the Department for Transport for funding to help develop a new Active Travel Strategy for West Northamptonshire. In October 2022, the draft Ambition Statement, the first phase of developing the strategy, was presented and agreed at the Active Travel Oversight Group. As part of a directorate-wide review to establish how all the strategies being developed fit together, it was agreed that the Active Travel Strategy needs to be developed in line with the vision and objectives set out in the Local Transport Plan. The Local Transport Plan will set out the high-level vision, objectives, policies and schemes for highways and transport within West Northants (draft to be produced by summer 2024). A draft Interim Active Travel Strategy that sets the direction for the next two years while the LTP is developed was presented to the oversight group in late May. A further meeting is being arranged in late June to go through the Action Plan for 2023-25 in more detail prior to internal sign off of the document.

A first draft of the Daventry LCWIP was produced in December 2022. Public consultation is planned for autumn 2023.

Following submission of our Self-Assessment form to Active Travel England, we have received an indicative revenue funding allocation of £152,723 for the Capability and Ambition Fund 2022/23. We submitted our proforma on 30th 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 12th January. We are starting to deliver the Capability project with our partners. The development of the Towcester LCWIP is now well underway. The second stakeholder workshop is scheduled for mid-July where we will be presenting progress to date and seeking input on which routes should be audited over the summer.

Active Travel England (ATE) announced on 19th May that we had been successful in securing £642,871 from the Active Travel Fund 4 (ATF4). Following endorsement of the Active Quarter at the January 2023 Cabinet, the focus of our bid was delivery of 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. The traffic free routes will be complemented by covered cycle parking, benches and wayfinding signage. Construction is planned for Autumn 2023.

We were not successful in securing development funding to undertake feasibility design on two key corridors. The value of these bids was over and above our indicative allocation so were directly competing with other construction schemes, that ATE indicated they would view more favourably.

Brampton Valley Way and Brixworth Country Park, two popular walking and cycling venues, are not directly connected other than by a rough track, Merry Tom Lane, despite being relatively

close. It is not an easy route for people riding or walking between the two venues, especially when crossing the A508 in the vicinity of the entrance to the Country Park. We are looking to establish a safe and accessible route between the two venues.

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.

Consultants undertaking the Bus Service Review will shortly deliver their final report. This will then be discussed at a meeting of the Bus Working Group.

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 June 2023 for another three months to 31 October 2023. This is a voluntary scheme and operators will need to re-confirm their participation beyond June 2023. New operators will also be able to join the scheme.

Transport for London (TfL) are currently undertaking engagement on their proposal to withdraw Day Travelcards, which will impact rail passengers in West Northamptonshire who currently purchase a Travelcard for onward travel in London. We have written to TfL to object and asking them to fully consider the increased cost to rail passengers outside of London.

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.

In April the traffic enforcement team completed their disaggregation of the service and the WNC team are now dedicated to the WNC area. This has concluded the work to disaggregate the Highways and Transport Service, however we will continue to work with all our neighbours.

Highway Maintenance

The new contract with Kier has now been operational for nine months and whilst with any new contract there have been some teething issues overall progress has been good, although there are still some aspects to be addressed. We have agreed the Annual Plan for 23/24 and we are now in the process of communicating what we are doing over the next year to members, residents and key stakeholders.

Following the continued cold and wet weather through spring we had a large volume of defects on the network. We have managed to maintain our response times throughout and anything deemed unsafe has been attended to within these timescales. We now look forward to what we can do to better prepare for the next colder season, and what we can do to be better prepared to respond to increased volume, and what information we can gather to proactively deal with our network.

To improve efficiency and deliver better quality repairs. we are in the process of investing in our fleet with the purchase of a JCB pothole pro and a further Thermal Road Repairer. This investment will allow us to achieve beyond just fixing defects when they become unsafe by tackling defect hot spots proactively. We are also using the contractual investment fund to provide greater information for FixMyStreet and new materials that will reduce time spent finding and fixing each defect.

Waste Management Services

The refuse and recycling collections continue to perform at a 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. Since the payment system went live, 79,207 subscriptions have been purchased with approximately 16% using the direct debit option.

Household Waste Recycling Centres continue to operate with no issues despite the visitor numbers reaching unprecedented levels in April and May 2023. During these two months, there were an additional 19,000 site users compared to the same period in 2022.

The various communications campaigns have progressed as follows:

- The battery fire campaign, "Never Bin Batteries" with the aim of reducing the number of batteries being disposed of in bins was launched in May.
- The Northampton 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 has commenced.
- The contamination campaign to improve the quality of recyclables collected in the co-mingled kerbside bin has commenced. Veolia are progressing with taking 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'.

A sticker highlighting these three campaigns, with 'directional messaging' will be added to every household waste bin over the summer months.

Work on developing a resources and waste strategy for West Northamptonshire continues. The strategy will provide a future direction for the waste services as current contracts expire. Four members working group meetings have 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 previously covered the Daventry and South areas is now available for the residents of Northampton. This is now being promoted by a communications campaign. The project to set up the "Report It" element of the app is currently with the digital team to develop, and we anticipate it will be 'live' for residents to use it later this year.

Litter and Street Cleansing

Crews continue to provide a regular cleansing service in and around the residential areas of West Northants and cleansing works are also underway on the local high-speed roads, although work on the A5, A14, A43 and A45 is subject to National Highways facilitating the safe clearance of litter on these roads.

A cross council initiative including the waste team, regulatory services and the communities' team is working to progress various projects in order to assist with cleaning up of local areas and encourage residents to take pride in their area and help maintain the environment.

Using a grant received from Keep Britain Tidy and The Chewing Gum Task Force, the piece of gum and graffiti removal equipment which can be towed around West Northamptonshire has now been delivered and staff training conducted. 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

Mowing operations are well underway and into their third cut, the grass has continued to flourish under the recent warm and wet weather conditions, but the recent equipment replacement programme has aided the service by providing new kit for this season and a faster, more efficient service will be provided this year. As part of the equipment overhaul, a number of electric devices have been introduced to reduce the services carbon footprint.

In Northampton, our contractor, is providing flower beds in our parks and gardens, as well as hanging baskets, troughs and jardinières as a part of Northampton in Bloom on behalf of the Town Council and some Parish Councils.

Environment, Countryside, and Parks

Countryside, parks, and outdoor learning

These services continue to provide a key frontline service for the people of West Northamptonshire. The Countryside and Park Rangers and Education Rangers have face to face contact with our customers daily. The Park Rangers and Countryside Rangers are multiskilled and carry out practical tasks, public engagement, and enforcement. The Education Rangers provide young children with an exciting way for them to learn and experience the countryside. They are given the opportunity to explore woodlands, ponds, rivers, meadows and to participate in orienteering, cross country navigation, and team building games.

Thrive Awards

I am delighted to congratulate Vikkie Maloney, Park Ranger, on being the winner of the 2023 Innovate Award at the Council's THRIVE Awards. Vikkie is a master at using existing materials and land to transform spaces into areas that can be used and loved by residents of all ages, so that they can connect with and learn about nature. Vikkie's passion and hard work is clear in everything she does, and her drive to create green spaces that allow residents and wildlife to THRIVE will help towards making West Northants a clean and green place to live, work and visit.

Creating an outdoor classroom at Bradlaugh Fields is a favourite of hers, where she runs groups with children and young people and provides outdoor activities and education to the groups

that attend. Her most recent project has been at the Racecourse where she has turned the bottom half of a disused building and surrounding space that was a hotspot for anti-social behaviour and drug use into a community garden. Vikkie has also just completed her Forest School Leader training to expand the passion she has with working with children and young people in our parks.

Bradlaugh Fields Wildlife Park

In March, the Park Ranger and Community Payback made a clearing amongst overgrown brambles to create a fruit tree orchard and they planted ten different varieties.

Racecourse

The newly formed Community Garden is progressing at pace with a fruit tree orchard also being created within the grounds. The volunteers planted four different varieties with others on the way.

Round Spinney Football Field

There have been issues with quad and motorcycles driving onto the football pitches and causing damage to them. We have installed safety railings at two locations in an attempt to dissuade them from accessing the football field from the neighbouring estates.

Borough Hill, Daventry

50 trees were donated and planted in Borough Hill by volunteers from Cummins and our Park Rangers.

Daventry Country Park

The Parks Community Projects Officer and Park Rangers have been working with volunteers from the Canal & River Trust to clear a new pathway from Daventry Country Park to the new Monksmoor Country Park extension, which is nearing completion.

There were 3 commemorative trees planted in Daventry Country Park that were donated by longstanding visitors to the park

Brampton Valley Way Linear Park – Kelmarsh & Oxendon Tunnels

The volunteers have repaired step risers at Kelmarsh Car Park, as well as filling in some smaller potholes. At Kelmarsh Tunnel they have uncovered the original Victorian rainwater drains that collect & redirect water from the top of the tunnels to culverts at ground level. This is an important development as we should be able to minimise further water damage to the interior and exterior brick work.

At Oxendon, the Volunteers have begun work on establishing steps along the diversionary route for the tunnel. Initially the path was only grass without steps, which quickly became a mud slide after prolific use throughout the pandemic and poor weather conditions. The steps have been made longer & wider to allow horses to traverse them safely and maintain a suitable surface for pedestrians.

Brixworth Country Park

Our Green Flag judging day has taken place with two judges attending the park to assess it against their eight criteria. We are looking forward to flying our 2023/24 flag on our new flagpole in a few months' time.

The Park Rangers and volunteers continue to make improvements to the orchard and have created a new pathway through it. This will make it easier for those that we want to encourage to forage naturally available fruits from the trees in the autumn.

The Mound, Long Buckby

In February, over a few days, Rangers from Brixworth and Daventry along with qualified volunteers thinned out an area of woodland that had been neglected for many years. They were able to chip the brush on site. There is still work to be carried out onsite, so they will return outside of nesting season. The Mount is the site of a Norman motte and baily castle and is a scheduled ancient monument.

Jacks Wood, Brixworth

Park Rangers and Volunteers have started to use lengths of sycamores, that were coppiced from Brixworth Country Park, as fence posts to help create a living hedge around a new Forest School area that will be used by the Educational Rangers.

ANPR At Brixworth & Daventry Country Parks

The ANPR parking payment system will be introduced later in the year. The equipment is ready for installation, but new broadband lines are awaited from Openreach. This will help give our customers a better experience when visiting the parks.

Urban Tree Challenge Fund

Last year the Council was successful in its bid for a grant to purchase and plant trees at the Racecourse, Eastfield Park and Bradlaugh Fields, as part of a two-year tree canopy planting plan. In March, 64 trees were planted between those locations and with another 63 trees to be planted by the end of the year.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

DEFRA has appointed West Northamptonshire Council as the responsible authority to produce a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for West Northamptonshire.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies were introduced in the Environment Act 2021. The Government has now published LNRS regulations and statutory guidance which work together to establish the 'rules' to enable high quality and consistent LNRSs to be prepared across England. The statutory guidance explains what information Responsible Authorities should include within their strategy.

It is estimated that the strategy could take up to two years to develop with implementation ongoing thereafter.

The job description for a Nature Recovery Co-ordinator has been produced and grading is underway prior to recruitment commencing. The Co-ordinator will be responsible for leading work to produce an ambitious strategy, which reflects the shared ambitions of WNC and stakeholders. Working with the Wildlife Trust and Nene Rivers Trust, work has already begun

to engage landowners and farmers and the initial preparation of the mapping required for the Strategy.

Outdoor Learning Centre, Everdon

The Centre is proving very popular, with bookings now being taken for residential courses for 2025. The Centre will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary next year, so events to celebrate are being arranged.

The service will be offering monthly home educator and preschool outdoor learning sessions across Brixworth and Daventry country parks from April 2023. Also starting in April, it will be running weekly sessions for The Cube disability centre in Daventry Country Park and will continue until July 2023.

It is proposed to create an outdoor classroom within their grounds, which will give more flexibility with day groups and other seasonal events.

The Centre had fantastic feedback from Silverstone University Technical College (UTC) after running a GCSE river study for some year 11 students. This was the first time the Centre had run that type of session. UTC was very happy and expects to use the facility again later in the year. This is something the service will be looking to develop and offer to other secondary schools.

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: Work on this is approaching completion. The strategy will propose a staged approach to achieving net zero by 2030, with key milestones being the implementation of carbon measurement, first in larger projects and then in smaller ones, followed by pricing carbon in tenders, so that the optimal balance of carbon reduction and offsetting can be achieved.
- 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 Council will also explore means of reducing the energy intensity of trips, seeking to use the lowest practical carbon mode for each personal or goods movement.

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. Where possible such offsetting will also secure other benefits, such as enhanced biodiversity and flood risk mitigation.

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 or resource to manage flood and water incidences. We have appointed an external consultancy whilst the team are recruited to deliver statutory planning consultation obligations. The historic backlog is now cleared.

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.

Parking

The new parking charges approved as part of the budget became active on Saturday 1st April 2023. The ANPR roll out has continued with St Johns, St Michaels, Grosvenor, Commercial Street, Upper Mounts and The Ridings car park all now live.

Councillor Phil Larratt

Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport, Waste & Environment