

28th September 2023

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

A New Local Transport Plan

Work has commenced on the development of a new Local Transport Plan for West Northamptonshire. This will be our key transport strategy document setting out a vision for the future of transport in West Northamptonshire and include an updated set of policies and proposals to deliver this. Members and other stakeholders will be engaged throughout the development process, and the draft plan will be subject to a public consultation next summer.

North West Relief Road

Works started on site in April 2022 and completion remains to be programmed for late Summer 2024, with the project team continuing to work hard to explore all opportunities to mitigate risks, delays, cost increases along with considering potential scheme savings to ensure delivery remains in budget.

Significant work in the last period has focused on the construction of the river bridge and railway bridge structures, which were critical tasks. All key work has now been completed successfully thanks to close working with Network Rail and proactive decision making from Balfour Beatty when strong winds prevented the beam lifts to be completed on a single day as planned. With the beams installed and bridge deck now also poured, this key element of the scheme, has removed the most significant risks associated with the scheme, especially those relating to Network Rail, with all required rail possessions in the future being only minor in nature / duration.

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 continues to be important in ensuring an understanding of the interactions between each of our schemes and the programme and future requirements of land currently within our control and when this will be returned to Persimmon as agreed, further mitigating risk to our scheme.

The team working on the off-site mitigation works for Boughton village now have reached a preferred option. After an initial briefing with the Boughton Parish Council Chairman (also a Ward Councillor) and myself, work now focuses on producing a briefing to all Moulton Ward and Kingsthorpe North Ward Councillors in the near future. Following this, a briefing will be held with the relevant Parish Council Chairmen of Boughton, Moulton and Pitsford, along with all the Moulton Ward Councillors, and Kingsthorpe along with all the Kingsthorpe North Ward Councillors to present findings and consultation proposals.

Kier continue to develop the following three Conditioned schemes, with detail designs expected shortly:

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

Northampton Growth Management Scheme

Work is ongoing within WNC to review funding arrangements for the delivery of both schemes at the Queen Eleanor and Brackmills junctions on the A45, which would ideally be progressed from April 2024 and April 2025 respectively. With decisions needing to be made around funding sources, it is proposed a Cabinet report will be presented to outline the delivery approach prior to Christmas 2023.

In parallel, myself and Officers continue to liaise with local Parish Councils to inform them of scheme progress, with a meeting proposed to run through scheme design and delivery details.

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

Liaison with National Highways continues to secure Technical Approval for the Queen Eleanor element, with Submission 6 currently under review.

Upton Adoptions

With the northern roundabout now adopted, the next significant area of work in the north-east of Upton commenced during late Summer, running throughout September. Adoption will follow thereafter as each contract area is completed, with further phases being scoped alongside the inspection of this current round of work.

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

Cliftonville Corridor

A post-scheme traffic survey report is currently being finalised to assess the benefits achieved, as per the grant requirements. Air quality comparison surveys will be undertaken during October 2023 to ensure a like for like comparison of atmospheric conditions and the overall scheme assessment will be completed by the end of 2023/24.

Farthinghoe Bypass

Consultants working on behalf of the council have completed a Strategic Outline Business Case for a bypass which has identified a revised Benefits to Cost Ratio (BCR) taking into account savings based on accident reduction and environmental benefits. This work has considered the implications of both Route Option 0 and Option 1. The draft report has been shared with representatives from the parish council, local members and the local MP.

Northampton Public Realm / Developments

Collaborative working continues between the Highways and Regeneration teams to support the development and implementation of the Abington Street / Fish Street public realm

scheme. Kier Highways have taken a really proactive approach to working on this scheme which has been hugely beneficial to the Regeneration team.

Active Travel

The 'Abington Area Active Travel Scheme' consultation report is now finalised, and I was briefed on 14th September. Following that meeting the report will soon be published and decisions will be made for next steps including the detailed design and delivery. The capability projects for this year and last have been procured and payments will be made imminently to the providers of these initiatives.

A draft Interim Active Travel Strategy that sets the direction for the next two years while the Local Transport Plan is developed was presented to the Active Travel Oversight group in late May. A further meeting has taken place earlier in September to go through the Action Plan for 2023-25 in more detail prior to internal sign off to the document.

Following submission of our Self-Assessment form to Active Travel England, we received an indicative revenue funding allocation of £152,723 for the Capability and Ambition Fund 2022/23. Our submission was based around a number of elements, including developing a LCWIP for Towcester, feasibility design on emerging draft proposals from the Brackley and Daventry LCWIPs and behavioural change (interactive travel map, cycle training, loan e-bikes) centred on the Delapre cycle hub. The final Towcester LCWIP stakeholder workshop was held at the end of July where the draft proposals were presented, and views sought. Officers have now received a first version of the draft report which they are currently reviewing. Work will start on the feasibility design of key corridors from the Brackley and Daventry LCWIPs in the coming weeks.

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. We are in the process of seeking planning approval and procuring a contractor for the work. Construction is planned for Autumn 2023.

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. The Partnership will meet for the first time in October. A key focus for the initial meetings will be to input into updates to the West Northamptonshire Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and agree how the council spends the BSIP plus grant it has been allocated for 23/24 and 24/25 (£684k for each year).

We will be consulting in the Autumn on outputs from the Bus Network Review we have been undertaking since 2022. This will include an updated bus policy guiding our approach to how we support the local bus network, and which Cabinet will be asked to adopt in early 2025. A cross party bus steering group is continuing to provide oversight of this work.

Government is continuing their support for the capping of single bus fares at £2 until 31 October 2023. This will then be replaced by a longer-term fare cap of £2.50 that will run from 1 November 2023 to 30 November 2024. This is a voluntary scheme and operators will need to re-confirm their participation beyond October 2023.

Over the summer the council responded to a consultation by train operating companies on proposals for changes to how train tickets are sold at stations in future. We will continue to monitor how these proposals develop and what it means for the three rail stations within our area, as well as those stations used by our residents in neighbouring areas.

Traffic Enforcement

Over the summer we were successful in our application to extend our existing powers to enable us to enforce Moving Traffic Offences, work is now ongoing to implement the sites that were included in the consultation that ended earlier this year. Other sites for enforcement are also being considered.

Highway Maintenance

The new contract with Kier has now been operational a year and we are starting to receive positive feedback from members and residents alike as well as beginning the process of what will be included in the annual plan for 24/25

We have managed to catch up following a good summer and are now fulfilling our timescales for repair effectively. We are looking at refreshing the inspection guidance to give more flexibility and quicker times to repair our network. We are also looking at using more data and member input to effectively deliver proactive maintenance across the authority.

Thanks to the additional budget agreed for this year we now have both the JCB Pothole Pro and additional thermal road repair machine actively operating on our network. This new machinery 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 as well as providing more transparency to the residents of WNC.

VOI Scooters

A Member Briefing Session regarding Voi Scooters has been arranged to take place on Teams at 5 pm on Wednesday 11th October. All Members have received an invitation to this event, and I hope as many as possible will do so. However, this may become an in-person session so the arrangements may change.

Car Parking

The ANPR parking system is now well established. Roll out to the Country Parks has been delayed due to the need for fibre optic connections, quotes have been obtained and orders placed for these connections. We expect installation by Openreach within the next 4 to 5 months at which time the new equipment can then be installed.

Support continues for the temporary market relocation with the parking discount offered for customers spending over £5 at a stall.

Remote parking validation has been put in place at the Derngate to allow customers to validate parking tickets at the theatre to reduce any queue times at pay stations after leaving a show.

We are in the initial stages of rolling out a Pay by Phone solution across all on and off-street parking places to allow more choice for customers and enhancing the parking provision.

WASTE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Waste Collections

The refuse and recycling collections continue to perform at a good level with few complaints. Garden Waste Subscriptions for 2023/24 have now reached 85,400 which is slightly more than originally predicted.

Household Waste Recycling Centres continue to operate with no issues even with unprecedented visitor numbers during April and May 2023, when an additional 19,000 people used the sites compared to the same period in 2022. On average, the HWRCs received 60,000 residents each month in the six months from March to August 2023.

Various communications campaigns have progressed as follows:

- 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 is progressing. Information will be going out to Northampton area residents very soon, since use of the separate food waste collection service is lowest in this area.
- New “tri” stickers which stage “No Batteries, No Food Waste and No Recyclables” have been placed on all domestic residual bins across West Northamptonshire.
- The contamination campaign to improve the quality of recyclables collected in the co-mingled kerbside bin continues. Veolia continue to take action when they find the wrong materials in the recycling bin, initially by ensuring residents understand what can be placed in the recycling bin. The Council launched a series of videos on social media to help people to use the right bin and dispel myths about what can be recycled.
- The waste team were at the Northampton Balloon festival in August to promote these campaigns and answer resident’s questions about their waste and recycling services.

Work on developing a resources and waste strategy for West Northamptonshire has continued over the summer with a public consultation exercise. Over 3,000 residents and other interested parties completed the online questionnaire and provided their views on the future of waste services. The strategy will provide a future direction for the waste services as current contracts expire. The consultation with residents on the waste and resources strategy has now concluded and the results are being analysed. The consultation responses and the strategy itself will be presented to Cabinet in November.

The project to set up the “Report It” element of the West Northants app is progressing well and should be available to app users by the end of the year. This will be widely promoted to all residents and will replace the original Northampton app.

Litter and Street Cleansing

Crews continue to cleanse the public spaces across West Northants. We collaborated with National Highways to operate night-time litter picking of the A43 in the south area when the road was closed. This worked well and we will look to do this wherever possible in the future to minimise the need for separate traffic management.

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, mobile gum and graffiti removal equipment was purchased for use around West Northamptonshire. So far it has been used to deep clean Gold Street in Northampton, remove graffiti in Brackley and Daventry and will soon to be used to remove gum in Daventry, Towcester and Brackley. After the gum has been removed, preventative signage will be erected.

We continue to liaise with the Northants Litter Wombles to provide sacks and collect the waste from community litter picks.

Grounds Maintenance

The warm and wet weather has created some lush grass growth throughout the summer months when we would have expected the grass to stop growing. Unfortunately, the wet summer has also hindered the application of weed treatment but we continue to work where possible (i.e. dry days). Both grass cutting and weed spraying will continue until the grass and weeds stop growing. In the meantime, preparations for winter works such hedge, bush and tree maintenance are ongoing.

Grass cutting and grounds maintenance work has been taking place throughout the spring and summer months and will wind down as we head into autumn when winter maintenance will commence. In Daventry, the planted areas around the Arc Cinema have been attended to and replanted in some cases.

ENVIRONMENT, COUNTRYSIDE & OPEN SPACES

Update on Play areas:

Eastfield Park – We have installed new Wetpour safety surfaces in the small children's play area.

Dallington Park – We have installed a new set of swings and new Wetpour safety surfaces in the small children's play area.

Racecourse – We have refurbished the dragon mound and installed new safety surfacing in the small children's area.

Redruth Pocket Park, Mereway – We have installed a new metal trim trail to replace the old wooden one that kept being damaged by arsonists.

We have a few ongoing projects at other play areas that we will report on at future meetings.

Everdon Outdoor Learning Centre

Everdon has been closed for the school summer holidays, but have held a few summer events for Home Schooling and Pre-School children at Brixworth Country Park.

Everdon's new outdoor learning classroom project is now at planning permission stage where we should have a decision in late September. A decision paper has also been submitted for review by the Leadership Team.

Daventry Country Park

Daventry Country Park has retained its Green Flag Award status for the last 24 years, so we would like to thank the Park Rangers Alan Malin and Tony Newbury and the parks volunteers, which also includes Community Payback, for their continuous hard work within the park.

The Open Water Swimming has proven to be very popular again this year with several new members taking up the sport.

We are working with Delapre Angling Club to see what opportunities may exist for starting a new Daventry Country Park Angling Club on the reservoir.

Daventry's West Northants Council's Green Heath Allotment Volunteers entered some of their own grown plants and vegetables into the Daventry Flower and Vegetable Show (19th August) and won several Rosettes. This is a great outcome for their dedication to the allotment.

The Racecourse

The Racecourse Garden in the Park project is progressing well with many community groups now involved. However, with the schools being on their summer holidays, many volunteers have been spending more time in the garden looking after the schools' plots during this time. The growers have produced a variety of vegetables, such as peas, beans, cabbage, radish, lettuce, onions and much more. The volunteers take some of their produce home, and the rest is given to the local community. Vikkie Maloney, Park Ranger opens up the Community Garden twice a month to allow the local community to participate and pick some of the vegetables on offer. Vikkie is in the process of starting a community steering group to take this project further and it will allow them to apply for external funding to purchase more equipment and to enter the Garden for a Community Green Flag Award next year.

Bradlaugh Fields

Bradlaugh Fields at this time of year requires extensive grounds maintenance and thanks to Community Payback, the park is kept in tip-top condition. They have a weekly placement at Bradlaugh and are a real asset. They carry out tasks such as, planting donated trees, looking after the orchard, wood chipping paths, clearing the pond and maintaining the outdoor classroom.

Once again, Bradlaugh has retained the Green Flag Award after being inspected by one of their mystery shoppers.

WNC's Live Team run the Barn Café three days a week. The fantastic team are adults with various learning disabilities and the opportunity of working in the Café gives them life skills, independence and a sense of ownership. They also had a visit from Environmental Health and were given a 5* food hygiene rating.

Vikkie Maloney, Park Ranger, attended Bradlaugh Community Day and carried out children's nature activities, planting sunflowers, decorating wooden cookies, wand making and more. The children really enjoyed the day despite the weather.

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.

Our priority is to recruit to the post of Nature Recovery Strategy officer, the post is currently being advertised and will close in the next 2 weeks. We hope to have a positive outcome to this process and have an officer in post in the coming months.

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 net zero in construction strategy has been split into two approaches (a) the strategy itself and (b) practical operating procedures for the construction management team to implement in concept, design, and delivery of construction projects. A key focus on new construction is in net zero in operation. Alongside the construction strategy buildings are being reviewed to reduce their carbon footprint.
- ***Fleet Climate Strategy:*** The potential funding for a fleet review by the Energy Saving Trust is no longer available. We are therefore looking to develop the strategy internally and are awaiting confirmation of Transformations support to do so. The new Fleet management contract is underway, and this will see older vehicles replaced with electric, hybrid and newer vehicles which will have a positive impact on our emissions. 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.

We are now seeking to start the recruitment for the flood and water team including its team manager. In doing so we will look to recruit bright new talent as well as individuals that can provide development support. In the meantime, the Council does not have adequate competency or resource to manage flood and water incidences and therefore has appointed Binnies as consultants to provide a turnkey solution for a range of services including LLFA statutory consultee responses, strategy development, support to develop Council byelaws etc.

The RAIN project continues to progress with gusto. A range of key support posts have been appointed to start to collate flood data, develop models and put in place community resilience etc.

Councillor Phil Larratt

Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste Services