

30th November 2023

ENVIRONMENT, COUNTRYSIDE AND OPEN SPACES

Update on play areas

Briar Hill, The Causeway - We have enhanced and extended the existing play area by adding four new pieces of play equipment, new safety surfacing and new safety fencing. We have supplied local volunteers with specialist paint, so they can repaint the existing pieces of play equipment to give them a new look.

Daventry Country Park – We have removed the old and broken items of gym equipment and replaced them with six new pieces of gym equipment, which now forms part of the fitness trail within the park. We have also added new play equipment to the existing play area and installed new safety surfacing and fencing.

Abington Vale Pocket Park (Milverton Crescent) – We have repaired the existing set of three swings, after one side had subsided. Working with the ‘friends of’ group, we are going to install a noticeboard and bench that they have purchased for the park and WNC are providing new welcome signs.

The Racecourse – We have removed the old broken Zip-Wire from the middle of the Racecourse and replaced it with a new one near the play equipment at the Leicester Street entrance.

Brixworth Country Park – We have installed a new wooden fence around the main play area to ensure the younger children can play in a safe and secure environment. We have also installed a new basket swing for the older children.

Cemetery Welcome Signs

Working with the Cemeteries Forum, we have installed the new style “Welcome” signs at Duston, Dallington, Towcester Road, Kingsthorpe, Billing Road, and Great Houghton.

Everdon Outdoor Learning Centre

The new outdoor classroom is well underway with the groundwork being completed mid-October. The prefabricated wooden classroom is expected to be delivered mid-November and will be erected by the qualified Park Rangers with the assistance of volunteers.

New security gates have also been installed at the front and to the side of the Centre that are in keeping with the character of (former school) building.

Each year the Centre organises a Christmas Event for the children from the local villages. So popular is this event, all the tickets have now been sold.

We've had some very positive feedback about our GCSE River Study Days. Two of the secondary schools we work with have already rebooked for next year and we have had enquiries from another two schools for those sessions. The Centre is proactively promoting the River Study Days to encourage other schools to participate.

The Centre will be looking to hold some special events in 2024, as this year will mark 50 years of the Centre offering its services to schools and groups.

Brixworth Country Park & the Brampton Valley Way

We were approached by Fermyn Woods Contemporary Art (FWCA) about providing space for an art installation, as part of a two-year project exploring “xylophobia” (an irrational fear of wooded areas). The exhibition called ‘Ways of Knowing’ developed following meetings with the FWCA director James Steventon and guest curator Yasmin Canvin. We agreed to host the artwork throughout the park as a temporary attraction that would elicit new responses from visitors about their experiences in open spaces, parks, and woodlands.

The exhibition ran 19 August 2023 – 31 October 2023. It had a varied response from new and returning visitors, all offering a unique perspective on art and the natural world they enjoy visiting. Without any cost to the Council (as an Arts Council England funded project), this has been an educational activity for the park’s team and showcases how our parks can interact with our residents in new ways.

With a large following on Instagram FWCA have showcased the park on their page with multiple photos and text that has resulted in many ‘likes’ of their posts, and an increase in followers of our social media accounts.

Swimcube is a privately run business within Brixworth Country Park that helps people improve their swimming techniques. This year they introduced open water swimming on Pitsford Reservoir, which has proven to be very successful. This additional activity managed by Swimcube has significantly raised the profile of the Country Park nationally on their social media. This in turn should increase the number of visitors to the Country Park.

Daventry Country Park & Borough Hill

At Borough Hill we have been working with a company called Cummins, which has a large plant in Daventry, to finish off a fully sponsored tree planting project. Together, we are developing a grounds maintenance plan that will also include the installation of park benches and picnic benches in areas where visitors can relax and enjoy the wonderful surroundings the park has to offer. Initial feedback has been positive, and many of the regular visitors are excited about the plans.

At Daventry Country Park, the WNC LIVE Team (adults with learning disabilities) now meet weekly, as they have taken on the maintenance of the sensory garden and are looking to plant more sensory focused plants that will have a variety of colours and scents. They also help with litter picking and other horticultural tasks around the park.

The Community Payback Team continue to be a valuable resource with the maintenance of such a large country park. This month, they have used their skills to help the Park Rangers to build a shelter at the rear of the Rainsborough Centre.

The Open water swimming and paddle boarding has finished for the 2023 season having been, again, very successful. Northamptonshire Sport will continue to operate the open water swimming sessions in 2024, and we are looking at further opportunities for non-powered water sports on the lake.

The Racecourse

Students from Bosworth College attend the Racecourse on a Thursday after college to carry out tasks within the Garden in the Park, as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Next year, some of the produce will be donated to St David’s Church Food Bank.

The Friends of the Racecourse have been busy over a number of Sundays planting daffodil bulbs near the newly refurbished dragon mound. These should look lovely come spring.

Bradlaugh Fields

October-November is the time of year that the Park Ranger and Idverde update the Green Flag Management Plan and Ranger Report in preparation for submission at the end of January 2024, ready for next year's full judging visit.

WNC's LIVE Team now run the Barn Cafe four days a week, Monday to Thursday and the Friends of Bradlaugh Barn run it from Friday to Sunday. This partnership works well and has been very much welcomed by members of the community. Bradlaugh Barn Café is being promoted as a Warm Space with its new opening hours in place.

WNC's LIVE Team also supports us with a gardening group once a week, which helps in coaching the clients with outdoor skills whilst at the same time having fun.

On Wednesday afternoons, the Eco Council, which is a group from Northampton School for Girls, helps us carry out tasks within the Orchard. This placement gives them outdoor experience and helps them with their own Green Flag Award (school status).

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.

Interviews have started for the post of Nature Recovery Strategy officer. We hope to have a positive outcome to this process and have an officer in post in the coming months.

Tree Strategy

The Tree Consultants that have been tasked with the development of a West Northamptonshire Council Tree Strategy are making good progress, as they continue to consult with numerous stakeholders. The Consultants have a target of producing a draft strategy for Cabinet by May 2024. Work on recruiting a permanent tree officer is also underway.

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 completed, and the strategy was presented to Cabinet and approved on November 14th. It includes an understanding of emissions the Council is responsible for and a range of measures to address these. In the light of the Council's financial challenges, assessment of potential for photovoltaic (solar cell) production of electricity is being accelerated. The Council is working with Clear Futures to prepare the business case for this.
- ***Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy:*** Work is completed, and the strategy was presented to Cabinet and approved on November 14th. The net zero in construction strategy has been split into two main parts (a) the strategy itself and (b) practical operating procedures for staff to implement in concept, design, and delivery of construction projects.

- ***Fleet Climate Strategy:*** We have now secured the support of a Project manager from the Transformation team. They will work closely with the Fleet management and lead on the development of the strategy. To support this the project brief has been reviewed and approved.

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. This work is thus complementary to work on the Tree Policy & Strategy and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Flood & Water Service

The Council has recently appointed RSK Binnies as a 'turnkey' interim solution to support its response to statutory consultation as lead local flood authority, to provide additional capacity to deliver capital grant funded projects, and provide other technical services, whilst the Council recruits to its flood team.

LLFA consultations - we have reduced the backlog of statutory consultation responses and since Binnies appointment ensured that we meet the 21 days response deadline. The team are working with planning colleagues to ensure that all applications are dealt with promptly and key strategic applications are robustly assessed to ensure development does not increase the risk of flooding.

We have made an interim appointment of the Bedford Drainage Board to support the Council's assessment and consent of outfalls into ordinary watercourses. This arrangement comes to an end in April 2024. In the meantime, the team are developing policy which will come before Members for approval to introduce our own byelaws.

Proposals have been prepared for applications for national flood management funding available from DEFRA. There will be two applications (a) one relating to Deanshanger and (b) Far Cotton. The Far Cotton application will look to improve drainage and water run-off into natural solutions and working with local schools to reduce surface run off.

The team are addressing flood risks issues at Tanfield Lane by clearing watercourses neighbouring Bedford Road and ensuring culverts and headwalls are maintained and clear of obstructions.

Transport & Associate Facilities

West Northants Parking Places Order - Work has begun on creating a single order regulating all WNC car parks in a clear and consistent fashion.

Parking App – New fibre lines have been ordered for the ANPR car parks. Once in place this will allow us to launch a parking 'app' allowing customers to pre-register vehicles and payment methods so they can just enter and exit without having to stop to pay.

Pay by Phone – Another payment option to allow customers choice and flexibility when parking is the ability to pay by phone. Work is currently underway with colleagues managing the on-street parking to introduce pay by phone across the entire parking portfolio. Pay by phone would see a new cashless payment option for on-street parking which is currently restricted to coin only as well as offering an additional payment option for off-street parking alongside, coin, cash and contactless that are already in place. Pay by phone also offers a

degree of flexibility by sending reminders of a parking period that is due to expire and an option to extend a stay.

Northampton BID parking offer – The council recently launched a parking offer to support the lower paid employees from Town Centre BID member companies using parking spaces which otherwise are typically not used (the upper levels of St Michael's MSCP). The offer provides a 20% reduction in parking charges once a customer has signed up to the scheme.

Country parks ANPR parking – Work continues into providing the new ANPR parking solution at Brixworth and Daventry Country Parks. This will provide increased reliability and flexibility to users at the Country Park, allowing multiple payment options as well as allowing the Council to electronically offer parking concessions as it sees fit. Obtaining the necessary Internet connections has proved challenging, particularly at Daventry, where there is also a power supply issue.

EV changing infrastructure – The Council continues to work on a concession contract to deliver large-scale EV charging infrastructure on car parks and roads it controls, and car parks of any partners who wish to participate. £3.3m of Government funding received or provisionally allocated will increase the range of range points which can be provided. The Council, like many other Councils, is facing issues with recruitment for EV related roles; we have found a solution which has been approved by the funder and we are currently finalising the implementation with the support of HR.

Drone technology and innovation – The Council is looking into the use of drone technology to support several service areas in dealing with issues such as fly tipping, property maintenance, and event management. Drone technology has grown significantly over the last few years and can provide a natural extension to the fixed camera CCTV network already in place. Drone-mounted cameras can, for example, help detect roof faults where it would be expensive and potentially risky to use people.

Bus shelter advertising and maintenance contract – The Council will shortly be inviting tenders for a contract to provide bus shelter maintenance funded by advertising. It is intended that the new contract will include shelters across the whole of West Northants. It would provide some upgraded shelters whilst also looking to achieve and support the Council's green ambitions with features such as photovoltaic and living roofs ('buzz stops'). The arrangement would also be designed to secure an income for the Council if the tenderers judge advertising income is sufficient to offer this. The contract would allow the Council to require the provision of new shelters, at its cost.

Changing Places toilet provision – The Council has now entered into an agreement with Fernie Fields Sports Club supporting the creation of a new Changing Places toilet at the club. This facility will extend the club's offer to the most disabled and physically challenged. The Council secured £40,000 in grant funding for this purpose and looks forward to this scheme opening before 31st March 2024.

Transport facilities services restructure – New job descriptions with supporting additional detail forms have been sent through for review and we await the outcome. Once confirmed we will draft the business case for review by via the Consultative forum in readiness to commence with the restructure consultation.

TRANSPORT & HIGHWAYS

A New Local Transport Plan

Work on a new Local Transport Plan for West Northamptonshire continues. 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. A round of stakeholder engagement was completed in the Autumn and a further round will take place in January to guide the emerging vision and objectives.

North West Relief Road

With work starting on site in April 2022, we're now 68% through the programme and still on track to be completed during 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.

Activities on site are ramping up to fully complete the earthwork elements which will enable the new main road section to start to become a reality. The first 650m of carriageway surfacing has been completed.

Additionally, the causeway section which introduces two new roundabouts at the Sandy Lane / Northampton Road and Brampton Lane / Welford Road junctions and a realigned link of Northampton Road between them is developing well. Close work with the local stakeholders continues including a bespoke site discussion with members of Church and Chapel Brampton Parish Council regarding future traffic management phasing.

Good progress has been made with Dallington Grange developers; Persimmon continues to fully understand dependencies and opportunities between each of our schemes and how best to maximise these within the wider programme.

As previously reported, a briefing to all Moulton Ward and Kingsthorpe North Ward Councillors will soon take place with regards to the North West Relief Road mitigation schemes and in particular the recommendations for meeting the Planning Condition associated with Boughton.

Kier continues to develop three other Conditioned schemes, with detail designs planned for completion prior to Christmas:

- 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 continues to review funding arrangements for the delivery of both schemes at the Queen Eleanor and Brackmills junctions on the A45, which would ideally see implementation start in 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 early in 2024.

In parallel, myself and Officers continue to liaise with local Parish Councils to inform them of scheme progress, meeting representatives of both Wootton and Hardingstone Parish Councils along with the Brackmills BID in-person to better explain the scheme, its delivery and provide opportunity for feedback, particularly regarding the traffic management required for such complex schemes. This was well received and all involved are committed to continuing engagement in this manner.

Liaison with National Highways continues to secure Technical Approval for the Queen Eleanor element, with Submission 8 currently under review.

Upton Adoptions

Further progress has been made in the period, with the area around Webb Drive, Clickers Place and Lacing Lane now adopted. Further work onsite continues, with the next phases of work being identified prior to Christmas and undertaken prior to the end of the financial year.

As ever, we work closely with Homes England, the developers and all local stakeholders (including Ward Members and the local MP) to ensure consideration is given whilst implementing all remaining work as swiftly as is reasonably possible.

Farthinghoe Bypass

With a debriefing on the Business Case work for key stakeholders now completed and a bypass deemed to not have a viable Benefits to Cost Ratio (BCR), alternative options are being explored to mitigate the concerns raised. These are currently being developed to explore and provide further feedback in the Spring to the parish council, local members and the local MP.

Northampton Public Realm / Developments

Successful collaborative working between the Highways and Regeneration teams has enabled Kier to progress many elements of the Abington Street / Fish Street public realm scheme. The approach taken by Kier Highways has been particularly proactive to the benefit of the Regeneration team and sees enabling work commencing this month and the meaningful scheme delivery onsite in late January 2024.

Active Travel

The 'Abington Area Active Travel Scheme' consultation report is now finalised, and I was briefed on 14th September. A further briefing was given to the relevant Ward Councillors on 13th October. The one hundred and seventy four page consultation report is now on the Active Travel Page of WNC website as well as a two page summary version. The scheme is now going into detailed design stage with a view to starting construction in June 2024. Active Travel England have indicated there may be a possibility of some additional funding to address some of the issues highlighted by the consultation feedback process. A decision is expected to be made this month by Active Travel England's change control board.

Transport – Buses & Rail

The public consultation on the interim bus policy closed on 12 November. This has been informed by our Bus Network Review and we aim to adopt the interim policy early in the new year. This clarifies our approach to supporting the local bus network. The Enhanced Partnership has a key role in directing expenditure to best effect to support and grow bus provision and met for the first time in October. In addition to the BSIP Plus grant we have already been allocated for 23/24 and 24/25 (£684k for each year), we have just been allocated a further £2.4m in 24/25. A focus for the next Partnership meeting in January will be to agree how some of this funding is allocated.

The additional bus funding next year comes from the Government's decision to reduce the scope of HS2. As part of these same announcements there was also a commitment to retain the £2 bus fare cap until the end of 2024. Funding has also been allocated to the A43 Phase 3 which was already in the Major Road Network programme, and we are confident this will be delivered subject to the Department for Transport being satisfied with its business case which continues to be progressed.

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. In late October it was announced that these proposals have now been withdrawn by the train operators following a significant consultation response and concerns at the impact on passengers.

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 contract with Kier continues its journey of continual improvement to ensure we continue to receive positive feedback from members and residents alike. The annual plan process for 24/25 continues and we expect to have our first draft of schemes in the next few weeks.

We have managed to catch up following a good summer and are now fulfilling our timescales for repair effectively. We are looking to have an audit on all policies carried over from previous authorities and refreshing these where necessary. We also continue to look at using more data and member input to effectively deliver proactive maintenance across the authority.

Both the JCB Pothole Pro and additional thermal road repair machine are actively operating on our network. This new machinery has allowed us to achieve beyond just fixing defects when they become unsafe by tackling defect hot spots proactively. Over the winter as the number of defects increase there is likely to be a reduction in the level of proactive work as Kier ensure that the network remains safe for road users, however in the spring they will return to the more proactive approach that has proved to be successful this year. 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.

Overall, our highway maintenance programme continues to deliver for residents, but we appreciate there is work still to do and we are working collaboratively with Kier to achieve this.

WASTE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Waste Collections

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

Garden Waste Subscriptions for 23/24 have now reached over 86,000 which is slightly more than predicted.

Household Waste Recycling Centres continue to operate with no issues; however, the visitor numbers have reached unprecedented levels between June and August 2023, seeing an additional 36,300 site users over the three months compared to the same period in 2022.

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 and information will be going out to residents directly very soon. 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 are progressing with taking action when they find the wrong materials 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. Links to these videos are available on the Council’s website.

A Resources and Waste Strategy for West Northamptonshire has been produced and was considered and approved by Cabinet earlier in November. Now approved, the text of the document will be reformatted and turned into an interesting and easy to read document which will include locally taken photographs and infographics. It will then be published on our website.

The project to set up the “Report It” element of the West Northants app was launched on 25 October. This has been widely promoted to all residents and will replace the Northampton app.

Arrangements for waste and recycling collections over Christmas and New Year have been finalised. All households who will have a change to their collections will receive a tag on their bin and the changes will also be advertised in the West Northants Life magazine which is distributed to all households. There will also be press releases and a social media campaign to highlight the changes. The garden waste service is suspended over Christmas and New Year as usual.

Litter and Street Cleansing

Crews continue to cleanse the public spaces in around West Northants. We collaborated with National Highways to operate night-time litter picking of the A43 in the south area again during October when the road was closed and arranged for a separate closure to sweep the road and clear the central reservations.

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. We are also applying to DEFRA for a grant to help support education and enforcement activity.

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 put into use. So far it has been used to remove graffiti in Brackley and Daventry and to remove gum in Daventry, with gum removal in Towcester and Brackley to be completed shortly. After the gum has been removed, preventative signage will be erected. Gold Street in Northampton has been cleaned of gum and the signs erected.

We continue to liaise with the Northants Litter Wombles to provide sacks and collect the waste from community litter picks. I attended a meeting with the Wombles and local MPs to discuss how to coordinate and support our cleansing activities in Westminster on 24th October 2023.

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 continue to work where possible (i.e., dry days). Both operations 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.

Councillor Phil Larratt

Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste Services