



**Report of Phil Larratt
Cabinet Member for Environment,
Transport, Highways & Waste Services**

Thursday 15th July 2021

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SERVICES

Over the past couple of months, I have visited various sites across West Northamptonshire to look at highways issues and familiarise myself with HS2 works in the south of the district. I have also been sent details of the poor state of roads and footpaths in certain areas. I'm afraid there is a lot of work required to bring our roads and footpaths up to an acceptable standard. We cannot underestimate the task. I'll be working with officers to devise a strategy to achieve this standard, but I'm afraid that it will take a long time to deliver.

HS2

The first phase of the Chipping Warden Relief Road successfully opened on the 19 June 2021, removing HS2 construction traffic and through traffic from the village of Chipping Warden. Other junction improvements needed to support the delivery of the project at the A361/ Welsh Road and Sulgrave Road / B4525 have also been completed by HS2 in recent months. Regular pre-app meetings continue to be held with HS2 Ltd and their contractors on planning, landscape, ecology, noise and highways matters related to the construction period and the permanent arrangements, in advance of formal consents being submitted to the Council. The Council continues to facilitate meetings of the HS2 Liaison Group, a forum for local residents and other key stakeholders to receive updates from HS2 Ltd and raise issues directly. The Council continues to positively engage with HS2 Ltd to minimise as far as possible the impacts of the project on local residents as construction starts to accelerate.

North West Relief Road

Following the June 8th Cabinet meeting a funding bid, supported by Chris Heaton-Harris MP, has been produced and submitted to the Levelling Up Fund for £20 million. An announcement on whether our application has been successful or not is expected between September and November 2021. Meanwhile our Highways and Property teams are continuing to negotiate the acquisition of land by agreement whilst also preparing for a possible Public Inquiry into the Compulsory Purchase Order. The Public Inquiry will be held on a date which is yet to be advised. The contractor's costs are being assessed and discussions are commencing with them to understand the possible financial implications of a deferred start whilst we await the outcome of the Levelling Up Fund bid. The construction sector is particularly volatile at the current time, but we will be working with the contractor to identify any programme efficiencies which may be possible based on a start on site early in 2022.

Farthinghoe By Pass

An update paper regarding the Farthinghoe bypass will be brought to September Cabinet. The paper will provide the results of the latest consultation and the work proposed to progress this scheme. Positive discussions have been held with Dame Andrea Leadsom, with a view to developing an application for the Levelling Up Fund.

New Highways Contract

The procurement of a new contract for highways is progressing well. The portfolio holder for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste and the Portfolio Holder for Finance have been fully briefed on this project and will help steer the procurement to ensure a good outcome for the residents of West Northamptonshire.

Concrete Roads

Whilst the majority of our roads in the UK are asphalt-based, around 5.5% are made of concrete. These roads were built in the 50s and 60s and have stood the test of time well by supporting use and rising vehicle numbers over the decades. However, some are starting to show their age and we have received a few reports of roads that do not look good and residents are concerned the road is falling into disrepair.

When we receive a report of a defect, we inspect it and generally, concrete roads are structurally sound. Over the years a number of our concrete roads have also been overlaid with a veneer of asphalt and this means the road will become patchy when the overlay breaks up. Concrete roads may be a bit of legacy but they are actually not a bad thing to have. Potholes are actually less likely to occur on these stretches of road.

Active Travel

We have made an application to 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 will reduce congestion and contribute to the Council's carbon reduction targets.

We continue to work with Voi, who manage the electric scooters in Northampton with a view to resolving the issues that have been the subject of much press attention such as pavement riding, poor parking, etc. Voi plan to trial new technology starting within the next month, and their 'enforcement policy' is under regular review to penalise e-scooter users who do not follow the hire guidance.

The proliferation of non-Voi scooters, that remain illegal, is a matter of concern. Unlike Voi scooters their speed is not governed; many don't have lights and they carry no insurance. This is a matter that I'll be taking up with the police in due course.

Bus Lane Review

I have asked officers to revert the St James / Westbridge Bus Lane to its previous operating hours and that the controversial camera opposite the BP garage only be operational during the hours the bus lane is in force. Officers are currently reviewing matters with regard to my request and there will be a paper to inform a formal decision in due course.

Transport – Buses & Rail

On 8th June Cabinet committed to develop a Bus Service Improvement Plan by October 2021 and to form an Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators under the Bus Services Act 2017 by April 2022. These are key steps in delivering the Government's National Bus Strategy - Bus Back Better - within West Northamptonshire and allowing us to access the associated funding. Works is now beginning on these initiatives.

While the Council has no direct responsibility for rail services, we are following with interest the proposals in the Williams-Shapps Plan for the formation of Great British

Railways, and will use the opportunities we have through the various partnerships with which we are involved to seek positive benefits for West Northamptonshire's rail services.

Highways Maintenance

A schedule of highways maintenance in West Northamptonshire is published regularly and is available for all elected members. The maintenance team are using new technology to help improve the speed and quality of repairs, including the Thermal Road Repair Unit and the Roadmaster unit which have been bought using capital investment from the Council. A highways 'open event' introduction day is being planned for elected members (on 25th August 2021) and we would encourage everyone to come and find out more about the work that the team does on a daily basis. More details will be available shortly.

For information:

- Our current policy categorises safety defects on the highway according to their severity and have differing response times. Intervention levels vary significantly depending on the risks involved and whether they are carriageway, footway, kerb, drainage, etc. Safety defects are individually assessed using risk based assessments. For potholes, our intervention levels start at a maximum horizontal dimension greater than 250mm and a depth of 50mm for carriageways and maximum horizontal dimension greater than 75mm and a depth of 20mm for footways.
- In West Northants, the team manage 2500 km highway, over 2000 km footways, over 80,000 gullies, nearly 900 highways structures such as bridges, culverts, pedestrian subways, and over 100,000 highways trees!

Finally, we have made an application to the Department for Transport for funding for full renewal of traffic signals at two junctions. The renewals will reduce outages and improve performance. We hope to hear if we have been successful when DfT have assessed all the applications.

Highways Verges

In general, the mowing season commences at the beginning of April and continues through to the end of September. Specific programmes for works are highly dependent on the growing season, and the team try to achieve the best results possible with the resources and budget available, with the priority being the safety of all road users.

We are working on improved coordination with highways colleagues (including Highways England) to enable litter picking on verges at the same time as verges as mown.

We are also investigating options to plant wildflowers in our verges.

WASTE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Waste Collections

Waste collections in the three geographical areas of West Northamptonshire continued seamlessly through the transition to the new authority. The majority of services have remained fully operational during the latest period of the pandemic. Disruption to collection services caused by operatives having to self-isolate due to Covid have subsided and both they and cleansing services continue to perform to a high standard.

Household Waste Recycling Centres

In response to high demand for the Household Waste Recycling Centre Service, the 5 West Northamptonshire Sites opened for an additional day each week to help alleviate

queues. This was a temporary measure paid for with Covid funding. Since national lock down restrictions have eased, demand for the service has reduced and the sites reverted back to 5 day a week opening from 1 July.

Litter Charter

Officers in the waste management and enforcement teams have been working together to produce a Litter Charter for West Northamptonshire. The Charter has been developed to ensure that West Northamptonshire has a co-ordinated approach to tackling litter across the whole council area.

The objectives of the charter are to:

- improve the local environment.
- remove littering efficiently and quickly to provide a good visual image of the area.
- work with communities and partners to support them in their activities.
- educate the public into the detrimental effect of littering.
- enforce where necessary.

This Charter provides a detailed plan of action which is regularly carried out to tackle litter in West Northamptonshire. It is accompanied by “A Guide to Undertaking a Community Litter Pick”, which will provide community groups all the information they need when undertaking a litter pick to ensure that all volunteers remain safe. It also outlines how the council can help them in their work. The charter and guide are currently in draft form and will be ready for dissemination in the summer.

The team have also had positive discussions with local womble groups to help facilitate their work in the local area.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental approach, including climate

Firstly, I would like to thank Councillor Mike Hallam and Councillor Colin Morgan for all the work that they have done regarding climate issues.

After writing, on 13/07/21, Cabinet will be considering a report recommending adoption of the Environmental Framework proposed by the Task & Finish Group which worked during the shadow year to help prepare the new Council for a positive approach on these issues. The Framework seeks to provide ways in which the Council can both consider environmental issues in all its decisions and take positive steps as an organisation to improve its environmental impacts. This includes, but is not limited to, climate impacts, with a climate emergency declaration and a carbon neutrality target of 2030 (which is consistent with the recently adopted WNC Corporate Plan).

The report also recommends the endorsement of a set of Environmental Principles for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, as endorsed by the Arc Leadership Group, and support for the development of an Arc Environmental Strategy. These Principles are designed to secure protection, restoration and enhancement of the environment as a whole across the Arc. This includes an aim of Arc-wide carbon neutrality by 2040.

The Council has two roles in relation to climate. It has responsibilities as a major organisation and service provider, reflected in the target for internal carbon neutrality target of 2030. This will require a series of linked strategies covering:

- Assets (buildings).
- Energy, including renewable energy production.
- Fleet.
- Procurement of goods, works and services.

The Council's second set of responsibilities relate to its leadership of West Northamptonshire as a whole and include its activities as planning and highway authority, as well as a wider role in galvanising action across public, private and third sectors. Plans are being drawn up for a 'climate summit' and other actions to this end.

Parks and Open Spaces

Currently, the parks still have a very high footfall, as people are spending more time at home due to the pandemic travel restrictions. This has increased the amount of maintenance required on the parks, such as extra litter picking, play equipment maintenance and graffiti removal. The Park Rangers continue with their regular patrols and offer assistance and advice as required.

Grass mowing has been a challenge this season, due to an unseasonably wet and warm May and June which has led to increased growth later in the season than is usually experienced. In response the number of cuts has been increased and now that the warmer, slightly dryer weather is here, conditions and appearance of the grass will improve.

The Council's investment in Watermeadow Country Park, Towcester, is progressing well. Work has started on the new footpaths and play area near to the town centre entrance off Northampton Road.

Discussions about integrating the Council's country parks are at an early stage.

Flood management

The Council has an important role as lead local flood authority, now coupled with the former district function of 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.

Currently the Council is playing a leading role in the Northamptonshire Innovative Flood Resilience Project, working with the Environment Agency, Anglian Water and other partners. This project seeks to identify means of reducing people's vulnerability to flooding, with interventions ranging from water storage to helping householders prepare for flooding.

Car parks

The Council's car parks remain at low levels of use compared to the pre-Covid situation. Despite this, they remain important to the life of West Northamptonshire's town centres and parks.

The loss of income against the budgeted figure of nearly £5m pa will need to be addressed. In part the Government's Covid-19 fees and charges scheme and grant will assist with this.

The installation of four pairs of charging points for the use of taxis has been completed in town centre car parks in Northampton. The installation was funded by a grant from the Office for Low Emissions Vehicles together with section 106 contributions. It is planned to hold press launch in late July or early August.

Councillor Phil Larratt

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