

21st March 2024

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Local Transport Fund.

Government has recently announced that the Council will receive an allocated £162,831,000 over 7 years from 2025/26-2031/32 as part of the £2.2bn funding identified for the Midlands resulting from the reallocation of HS2 funding. We are now awaiting further guidance as to how this funding can be applied and how the money will be allocated across the years. The information we have at present is that it will be mostly capital funding. It is expected that the largest sums will be available in the later years although there will be some revenue for resourcing delivery. It will seek to deliver against 3 priorities.

Funding is intended to deliver the 3 priorities of:

- drive better connectivity within our towns, suburbs and cities
- drive better connectivity between our towns and cities
- improve everyday local journeys for people

Including measures such as:

- building new roads and improving junctions
- installing or expanding mass transit systems
- improving roads by filling in potholes and better street lighting for personal safety
- improving journey times for car and bus users by tackling congestion
- increasing the number of EV chargepoints
- refurbishing bus and rail stations
- improving our streets so they are safer to walk children to school and increasing accessibility for all

Once we receive the guidance we will be developing a list of priorities, engaging with members and MPs in ensuring we have a programme that maximises the funding in delivering against the priorities of our residents and businesses.

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 in the summer. A second round of stakeholder engagement was completed in January to refine the emerging vision and objectives. In February a workshop was held with the Youth Forum to gain an insight into the

transport challenges facing young people. Further engagement activities are planned in advance of the public consultation taking place in the summer.

North West Relief Road

Work is now 80% complete and we remain on track to complete our section of the road this coming Summer, with the project team continuing to work hard to explore all opportunities to mitigate risks, delays and cost increases.

With much of the off-Highway work now well developed, the focus has turned to advanced communication of the planned works around Sandy Lane, Northampton Road and Welford Road. Starting 4th March at Sandy Lane, works will continue throughout Spring till June to complete the two new roundabouts and link between which replaces the existing parallel route on Northampton Road.

Further information is available on WNC's Major Highways Projects website page along with full details of the road closures and diversions on <https://one.network/uk/northamptonshire>.

Work continues to progress all aspects of the offsite junction mitigation measures, as required through the Planning process. All the WNC-led delivery moves forward in close partnership with the Dallington Grange developers; Persimmon, who will be delivering the new infrastructure to the south.

Northampton Growth Management Scheme

A proposal is currently being developed to finalise approvals for the delivery of both improvements at the Queen Eleanor and Brackmills junctions on the A45. Should all approvals be granted, work would start at Queen Eleanor mid-2024, with Brackmills following in early Spring 2026. It is proposed a Cabinet report will be presented to outline this delivery approach in April.

Communication with local Ward and Parish Councils, along with the Brackmills BID continues to clarify the delivery approach and provide opportunity for feedback, particularly with regard to the traffic management required for such complex schemes.

Upton Adoptions

Progress continues to complete all adoption work required of WNC as part of the agreement with Homes England. With substantial areas now complete, this enables the developers responsible for those adjacent areas to complete their responsibilities.

With two phases of work left, it is expected that WNC's works will be completed and adopted prior to the end of the 2024, with developers working hard to then complete the remaining works required for the local residents.

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 continues with between the Highways and Regeneration teams making full benefit of the Corporate Highways contract. This cross-council working has enabled Kier to support the design and progress to the delivery stage of this key investment in Northampton Town Centre, with work on the Abington Street / Fish Street public realm scheme having commenced Monday 26th February 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.

Consultation on the Draft Brackley, Daventry and Towcester Local Cycling and Walking Plans (LCWIPs) closed on 25 February. The feedback submitted will be analysed in detail and changes made to the documents before they are taken to Cabinet for final approval.

The first stakeholder workshop for the Northampton LCWIP was held in early February. This is the first of three workshops for people to feed in their thoughts and was attended by around 50 people. A draft document will be completed in the summer, with consultation planned for the autumn.

The Connecting the Active Quarter scheme in Delapre Park commenced construction on 26 February. The new paths will provide a traffic free route between Far Cotton and Brackmills for walkers, cyclists and those in wheelchairs, mobility scooters and with prams. The routes currently get extremely muddy in the wintertime so this will mean they are accessible by all, year round. The routes will be open in late June.

Transport – Buses & Rail

We adopted a new interim bus policy in January, informed by our Bus Network Review. We are now working to deliver a programme of bus service improvements which were agreed with our Enhanced Bus Partnership at their meeting on 17 January. This is funded from the Bus Service Improvement Plan grants we have been allocated this financial year and next financial year.

Following the announcement by UNO that they are withdrawing from our area, we have been working with other bus operators to fill the gaps in the network. From 10th March Stagecoach will be taking over the University of Northampton Services and we have also contracted them to provide the 59/60 service between Northampton, Guilsborough, Welford and Market Harborough.

We are about to start work on an update to our Bus Service Improvement Plan which we are required to submit to the Department for Transport in June. As well as detailing investments we are making in service improvements in 2024/25, this plan will also outline our ambitions for future improvements. A Bus Improvement Working Group of councillors will be engaged during the development of the updated plan.

Traffic Enforcement

Over the summer we were successful in our application to extend our existing powers to enable us to enforce Moving Traffic Offences. Three of the five sites originally identified are now live and work is ongoing to implement the remaining two. Other sites for enforcement are also being considered.

Highway Maintenance

The contract with Kier continues its journey of improvement overseen by the scrutiny Oversight Group. We are now starting to receive positive feedback from members and residents alike.

The annual work plan process for 24/25 continues and we expect to have our first draft of schemes in the next few weeks. We continue to look at ways to innovate on our network and improve our response times for all defect levels, which will hopefully reflect in more ambitious targets in our upcoming inspection manual and asset management policy update.

The newly formed Contract Investigation Team has undertaken investigations and held meetings with Kier to ensure that the contract is providing best practice and value. Resulting from these investigations the team's initial findings are that the Contractor is broadly compliant with the terms of the Highways Term Service Contract, its associated specifications and commitments, with certain caveats which require further investigation. Areas currently under review by the team are Quality Management, Reactive Maintenance, Inspection Regimes, Planning/Programming and Commitment Compliance. The contractor is generally meeting, and in some cases exceeding, response and clearance times but there is considerable opportunity to pre-emptively address potential re-visits and providing real first-time fixes.

The current reporting from the contractor shows satisfactory progressive performance of 68% against 138 commitments, although the validity of certain reporting metrics requires further verification. The Contract Investigation team will continue to work closely with the contractor to ensure the contract commitments are being met alongside improving processes and communication and undertake Root Cause Analysis as part of the continuous improvement of contract delivery.

WASTE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

The refuse and recycling collections continue to perform at a good level across West Northamptonshire with less than 0.05% of missed collections.

Garden Waste Subscriptions for 23/24 have now closed. More than 85,000 permits were sold in total. Paperless Direct Debits were introduced in 2023 and we saw over 13,500 residents pay this way which is more convenient for the resident as they will not need to resubscribe this year and less administration for the Council. The subscription price for 2024/25 will be £58 per bin.

Household Waste Recycling Centres have operated with no issues; however, the sites have continued to receive an unprecedented level of visitors between September and December 2023, seeing an additional 32,900 site users over the four months compared to the same period in 2022.

Various communications campaigns related to waste collections 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, with information delivered to residents in the Northampton area to encourage participation. New “tri” stickers which state “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.
- The ‘Never Bin Batteries’ campaign continues. The government’s announcement to ban disposable vapes was particularly welcome since many residents do not appreciate that there are batteries in these devices and any battery disposed of in waste has the potential to cause a fire.

A Resources and Waste Strategy for West Northamptonshire was approved by Cabinet in 2023 and the text of the document is being 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 2023. This has been widely promoted to all residents and will replace the Northampton app. However, other methods of reporting fly tipping remaining available. Since October 817 reports have been made via the App mainly for reporting fly-tipping and street cleansing issues.

Christmas waste and recycling collections over Christmas went well, with all residents receiving ‘catch up collections’ and enabling the crews to take some time off.

New contractual arrangements for processing the recycling collected from the Daventry and South areas have been procured. The new contract will commence on 4 March 2024 and will see the recycling go to the brand-new, state of the art Materials Recycling Facility in Coventry, which is run by a local authority owned company.

Work continues to procure new contracts for residual waste treatment and to run the six Household Waste Recycling Centres from 2025.

A Waste Compositional Analysis of residual waste has recently taken place, which will help us identify the common materials that are thrown away by residents, rather than recycled. Results will be received by the end of March, and these will help inform changes to waste services and targeted communication campaigns in the future.

Litter and Street Cleansing

Crews continue to cleanse the public spaces in and around West Northants. Communication between the different statutory bodies, such as WNC and National Highways, continue to improve and have seen increased coordination of services performed in the wider area. Works are planned with National Highways to organise the cleaning of the primary roads in 2024.

We continue to liaise with the Northants Litter Wombles to provide sacks and collect the waste from community litter picks. Work is progressing across several council teams on organising a Community Spring-clean campaign, which will run during March to coincide with the national spring clean promoted by Keep Britain Tidy. This campaign will bring together more than 20 spring clean events under the WNC 'Community Spring Clean' initiative.

Grounds Maintenance

Winter maintenance works are now drawing to a close, the teams having visited all relevant parks, cemeteries & open spaces and trimmed back bushes and hedges. Attention is now focused on scheduling operations for the grass cutting season, all equipment has been serviced over the winter period and is ready to go as soon as the weather allows the grass to dry out sufficiently, in the meantime, the Grounds Maintenance Teams continue to finish off the winter works and react to any service requests that may arise. Weed spraying operations will begin, weather dependant, in early March.

The Council, via Cllr Hallam and Northampton Town Councillor Birch, assisted with two street tree projects in Rowan and Clarence Avenues. Residents had been asking for replacement trees for some years as well as some help with project management and securing funding. This project came to fruition in October 2023.

ASSETS & ENVIRONMENT

Everdon Outdoor Learning Centre

The new timber outdoor classroom was completed just before Christmas when it was used for the first time to host Father Christmas. This was the Centre's fourth year holding this event and was attended by 24 families from the neighbouring villages.

January / February has seen the first of the schools arrive and they have been very complementary about some of the changes that have been made. They will start using the new outdoor classroom in March, as this space now enables the service to have more day groups who in the past would have been turned away. The Centre would like to thank all the Councillors and Officers that made this the outdoor classroom project possible.

The Centre is making plans to celebrate its 50th anniversary at Everdon during 2024.

Parks in general

Probation placements are doing extremely well, we now have 10 long term placements weekly, with a new placement in St Crispin's church grounds. We have also started to assist them in

offering an induction site for probation at one of our parks. Once they have finished their induction, these groups can either stay on site or be deployed to other areas where needed. This arrangement is working really well.

Based on four people attending seven sessions a week works out at 10,100 hours committed to our parks each year. Having Probation on our parks is a massive asset and helps us build relationships, sharing new skills and giving sense of achievement in the projects and work they are undertaking, which would help with rehabilitation. I, and the team really do appreciate the work they do.

Daventry Country Park

The rangers have been working on the winter maintenance programme, clearing overgrowth and managing hedgerows. They have been clearing overgrowth at the educational ponds to allow better access for pond dipping activities from the spring as well as helping towards flood prevention. The rangers will monitor the habitats in the area to help develop the management programme moving forward.

Our annual winter conservation grazing has begun with a flock of 20 sheep in the meadows to help manage the grass growth creating a short sward and removing unwanted species in the grassland such as ragwort, dock and nettle. Grazing also helps to encourage the growth of healthy grassland by recycling vital nutrients back into the soil.

Tern rafts are being repaired ready for spring nesting. The friends of the park donated the materials for the project, and we look forward to seeing the terns return again from April to nest on the reservoir.

Abington Park

The Friends of Abington Park have been continuing to maintain areas of the park and have been planting bulbs in the peace garden.

Links have been made with the local community centre and Abington library as well as a home education group from the community centre who will be meeting with the Friends of Abington Park to pass on knowledge between a variety of age groups. They will assist in any maintenance, planting and will potentially be growing vegetables to support the grow, cook, eat project led by the Hope Centre.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

As many will now be aware, DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) has formally appointed West Northamptonshire Council as the responsible authority to produce a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for West Northamptonshire.

We are pleased to announce that we now have a Nature Recovery Officer in post. Ruth Rolls started with the Council at the beginning of January and her primary role will be to get started on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. More details on the Strategy can be found on our website.

We had our first LNRS Oversight Group meeting on 12 March, which involves officers from Planning, Parks, Natural England, Local Nature Partnership and Finance. It is chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Highways, Transport & Waste Services.

Climate Strategies

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

- **Estate Climate Strategy:** The strategy has been adopted and is now being implemented.
- **Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy:** The strategy has been adopted and is now being implemented.
- **Fleet Climate Strategy:** We develop the strategy internally, with resource from the Transformations service providing vital input. The Council will 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.

Flood & Water Service

The Council has a vital role as lead local flood authority and land drainage authority. The service responds to many formal flood consultations and investigates flooding incidents. Strategically it works to identify and secure measures to reduce the risk of flooding to homes and businesses.

Recruitment of the in-house Flood and Water team has been partially successful, but some posts could not be filled. We will be exploring options to resolve this in a new round of recruitment. In the meantime, RSK Binnies continues to provide a range of services including LLFA (Lead Local Flood Authority) statutory consultee responses, strategy development, and support to develop Council land drainage byelaws.

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

Work on the Council's Flood Risks Management Strategy is underway, with a stakeholder event on Friday 8th March. We are also working with the Environment Agency and other partners to explore measures to mitigate flooding issues along the River Nene. Whilst the Environment Agency has lead responsibility as the Nene is a 'main river', the Council is concerned about the flooding issues at Billing Aquadrome and is working with interested parties and partners to explore options.

Car parking

The ANPR parking solution is now well established in public and staff car parks. A proposal for phase three of the rollout which includes an additional seven surface car parks currently operating with pay and display is likely to be submitted in the new financial year.

A year's trial of an option to pay by phone for both on and off-street parking is anticipated to go live during the spring. Cash will still be accepted, and we are also looking to introduce an option to pay by card at the earliest opportunity.

The ANPR parking solution at Brixworth Country Park is in the final commissioning stage and should be live by the end of March. Daventry CP has presented more challenges in introducing an ANPR parking solution in that the park itself has no power or internet connections, so we are working with Internet and power providers in obtaining quotes and support in bringing those services to the park and allowing the ANPR to be installed. Due to the timeframe of external providers it is not anticipated that this site will be live until summer.

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

Councillor Phil Larratt

Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste Services