



Report of Councillor David Smith Cabinet Member for Planning and Community Safety & Engagement

18th July 2024

PLANNING

Restructure and Recruitment

The Planning Service restructure has been completed and the internal recruitment process closed on Friday 15 September, this phase of the restructure has successfully resulted in several posts being filled internally across the different planning service teams.

The Head of Service – Development Management post has been filled and the successful candidate (Simon Ellis) took up the post on the 12th February 2024.

The dedicated external recruitment campaign, which went live on 18th September 2023 has resulted in the majority of vacancies being filled within the Service, with two more officers starting in June. Recruitment has been completed in the technical support team, which in turn has enabled an improvement in validation timeframes.

We still have remaining vacancies in the Major Projects Team, where we have three vacant posts (in a team of 8) These positions have recently gone live via advert and hopefully we will attract the right candidates in what is clearly a very hard to fill area.

Consultation with the legacy Northampton team has been completed and as of May 2024 the permanent base of the whole planning team is the Forum in Towcester.

West Northamptonshire Local Plan

Consultation on the local plan has now closed. The policy team has undertaken a significant amount of activity to promote the consultation and to provide opportunities for our communities to engage with the process. Staffed exhibitions were held at Northampton Grosvenor Centre, Wooton, Moulton, Brackley, Towcester and Daventry. Online meetings were held with parish and town councils through the auspices of NCALC, and an online meeting open to the general public has been held. In person meetings have been held with the Youth Forum and Northampton Forward.

The representations are now being considered, and further evidence base work is underway.

Later this year further workshops will be held with members to help shape the next version of the plan.

Neighbourhood Plans

The Parish of Grange Park was designated for neighbourhood planning purposes on 2nd April. The submission version of the Great Oxenden Neighbourhood Plan was published for consultation between 29th April and 23rd June.

Planning Enforcement, S106 and CIL

The planning enforcement team is continuing to serve a number of planning enforcement notices related to unauthorised developments. The team is actively working with the Councils Communications team to publicise that the Council is taking robust action against breaches of planning control (A July time-frame for press releases).

The enforcement team have visited a number of Parish Councils to provide updates on cases.

A Councillor engagement session was held in May 2024 and more are planned for later in the year.

Work is progressing on the improvement of the collection of CIL and S106.

Development Management

Planning application caseloads continue to be high, however planning performance across West Northamptonshire has remained high with data since the start of the year indicating over 80% of major applications and 80% of non-major applications being determined within agreed timescales during 1st January 2024 to 31st May 2024 against a target of 70%.

A recent meeting with DLUHC led to positive feedback regarding how the Development Management service has significantly improved performance over the past 12 months.

Officers are also working hard on concluding stalled applications to clear some old cases as DLUHC are beginning to measure the use of Extensions of Time in the determination of planning applications.

A number of Major scale development planning appeals being determined by a Public Inquiry or Informal Hearings are listed below.

Public Inquires awaiting a decision or subject to a recent decision:

- 1) Land South of Halse Road, Greatworth, Northamptonshire, Solar farm, Public Inquiry which took place Tuesday 6 June to Friday 9 June.

Decision by the Planning Inspectorate was to allow the application. This decision has been challenged by a private individual in the form of a Judicial Review (JR). The outcome of the JR is awaited.

- 2) Land at Milton Road, Gayton, Northampton, Northamptonshire, Solar farm, Public Inquiry Public Inquiry took place Tuesday 23rd May to Friday 26th May 2023.

Called in by the Secretary of State for the final decision. Appeal allowed.

- 3) Land North of Bedford Road, Great Houghton. Outline application for upto 24,000 sq.m of employment floorspace. Public Inquiry took place 21-30 November 2023.

The appeal was dismissed.

- 4) Development of up to 24 First Homes (amended plans), land east of Northampton Road, Roade, Northamptonshire.

The appeal was dismissed.

Recent appeal hearing:

- 1) Outline Planning with all matters reserved to provide Later Living Accommodation (Class 2) as three integrated types of accommodation on a site off the main entrance to Whittlebury Park.

The Informal Hearing took place on the 8th May 2024 and we await the outcome.

Building Control

Building Control is currently working on the introduction of new procedures and processes required by the new, Building Safety Act and associated regulations.

The Building Controls Technical Support Team are working with DEF on changes required to the data base system due to the introduction of the Building Safety Act. These changes are required so that Key Performance Indicators required by the Building Safety Regulator can be reported.

Application and notice forms are being assessed and where required amended to allow for changes required under the Building Safety Act.

The Building Control team is in the process of re-structuring. The service has had success in recruiting two Assistant Building Control Surveyors and three Technical Support Officers. Also, the service has appointed a new Technical Support Team Lead Officer. Building Control has advertised for additional Senior Building Control and Building Control Surveyors but has not been able to recruit any suitable candidates. These posts will need re-advertising.

COMMUNITY SAFETY & ENGAGEMENT

Safer Communities

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

Our Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) team are aligned to the Local Area Partnership areas for West Northants.

We are currently supporting Northants Police with a Criminal Behaviour Order on an individual causing considerable disruption in the Northampton town centre.

Since March 2024 the team have served 12 Community Protection Warnings, 5 Community Protection Notices & 1 Criminal Behaviour Order, and are in the process of amending a partial

closure order on a property to a full closure Order due to the ongoing issues and breaches which have resulted in arrests at the property.

Op Fragment continues a huge success on Southbrook, a partnership response to local crime and ASB issues and has been extended into late summer 2024. The operating model of clear, hold, build, is the basis of Op Fragment and is proving to be a good example of that working practice.

Domestic Abuse (DA) and Sexual Violence

Formal commissioning of Domestic Abuse services in West Northamptonshire has now commenced and is progressing at pace, with the aim to have services commissioned and in place for 1st April 2025. In the meantime, the existing grant agreements with Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse Service (NDAS) and Eve have been extended until March 2025 to ensure there are no gaps in service provision.

We have started the process of refreshing the local needs assessment which will support in the commissioning process and will run alongside the review of the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy. We are working with partners to include relevant aspects of the Serious Violence Duty to ensure work is not duplicated and that findings can be shared.

The Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Board has approved a fund to support those victims who have No Recourse to Public Funds in accessing safe accommodation and additional support to help them move forward which will include legal services. This has involved partnership working and we continue to work closely to ensure delivery is appropriate and monitored.

Training has continued with the housing teams receiving a half day of specialist training on domestic abuse, the Domestic Abuse Act and risk assessment. Training has also been provided for Elected Members around domestic abuse, spotting the signs of domestic abuse, signposting to services, as well as the Domestic Abuse Act and what this means in terms of duties for the Local Authority and Partners. We are exploring plans to ensure this is delivered to the Parish Councils.

Serious Violence and Knife Crime

Serious Violence Strategy Launch held on 6 March, which included a video featuring Cheri Curran, mother of fatally stabbed teenager Lois-Ryan Menezes sharing the impact of knife crime. The video is being launched on Tik Toc in bite sized pieces.

Video: [Knife Crime. The murder of Louis-Ryan Menezes - YouTube](#)



Working groups set up to deliver the Serious Violence Strategy action plan including looking at the educational offer across the county and youth engagement to ensure we capture the voice of those most likely to be affected by serious violence. Three very different projects were selected to be funded through the Serious Violence Duty national funding. These include Family Support Link who will be working with those affected by substance misuse with a particular focus those affected by wither their own substance misuse or have grown up in such an environment who are now becoming parents themselves. The second is a diversionary and mentoring project with Athletic Elite and the third, a youth provision project in the Far Cotton, Delapre area for Year 6's and their progression to secondary school.

Work continues with the County Lines Team on child exploitation education and awareness raising. A session in March targetted shops in Northampton Town Centre and St James resulting in over 40% of the intelligence on child exploitation coming from the general public which is a notable increase. Plans ongoing to target service stations and Northampton's night-time economy during the summer and training for retail businesses in the autumn.

During Op Sceptre Week we engaged with a basketball tournament on the Racecourse organised by Northamptonshire Sport and engaged with approximately 60 young people raising awareness about Fearless including anonymous reporting, the dangers of carrying a knife and how to help keep yourself safe from robbery.

Working with Trading Standards and Northants Police around knives and other weapons being sold on the second-hand market in second-hand shops and car boot sales.

Public Spaces Protection Orders

Jeyes Jetty and Dunster Street PSPOs renewals came into force in March 2024. New notice signs for all PSPOs have been installed in the location of the closures.

Neighbourhood Working

St Georges Partnership - Meetings have restarted after a brief reset. The working group now will focus on a thematic approach rather than a location based one. The key themes will link with the wider work in the area including-

- Youth intervention and prevention work
- Health and wellbeing
- ASB reduction
- Community engagement

Engagement days relating to local and national events e.g. the Great British spring clean litter pick are underway. Work with the schools to link a new safer route campaign, to the wellbeing hubs, which will highlight safe spaces for young people on their way home or of an evening continues.

Kings Heath - The partnership has been working towards supporting the delivery of multiple wellbeing projects; both with the NHS, School and the Well Northants programme. A "whats on" newsletter is being created to highlight all of the current work and projects that are ongoing in the area, plus highlighting what services are running and when. This includes-

- Financial advice and support drop ins (NPH with HSBC)
- Strong start food bank (School)
- Wellbeing walks and coffee mornings (GP and Well Northants)
- New resident's meetings (Monthly from March at the school)
- Parents support group (School)
- Free2talk youth support sessions

Northampton Town Centre Task Group – The Nighttime economy Strategy continues to be delivered with a several actions discharged in the first half of this year. A refresh of the 'Ask for Angela' scheme has been completed, with posters shared with evening and nighttime economy venues with support from Pubwatch and Northampton BID.

The Task group has three active task and finish groups dealing with issues that require a partnership approach, and two that have been discharged within the reporting period that responded to ASB and cycling/scooter issues in areas of the town. A new task and finish group was agreed in May to develop a Town Centre Management document as a guide for partners, businesses and other users in preparation for the completion of regeneration works in the town.

Following additional funding from the OPFCC the taxi marshal scheme has been extended to cover some key events taking place over Summer, starting 31 May.

Filming took place in March 2024 for the Nighttime Economy video project funded through Safer Streets 5. West Northants Community Safety and Communications team worked with drama students from the University of Northampton to film shots of a typical night out in Northampton, alongside footage of key services such as Street Pastors, Guardians with the Safer Nights Out van and Taxi Marshals. The first short video promoting the services of the taxi marshals has been finalised and shared on YouTube and via our social media with the updated taxi marshal schedule. Further videos to be produced and shared over the Summer period.

A webpage has also been created to share information to the public relating to the groups work, including an overview of the strategy, action plans and achievements.

Castle Community First – Meetings continue to be held every 8 weeks pulling together key partners across the Castle Ward to discuss neighbourhood level issues. Flytipping and waste remains a theme for the group as well as the regeneration of Spring Boroughs.

The group were previously successful in a funding bid for removing a planter with a long history of ASB and nuisance and are in the process of agreeing the works.

Kingsthorpe / St. David's - Meetings continue to be held on a six-weekly basis. Key areas of focus include -

- Youth intervention and prevention work
- Street scene – reduction in fly-tipping and litter
- Community engagement

Recent meetings have focused on holiday activity provision and the recognition that some lower income families fall outside of the criteria to access places funded under the Holiday Activities and Food Programme. As a result, a number of partners are working together to develop a weekly activity session in Kingsthorpe where families can access craft, sports, physical activities followed by an opportunity to prepare and share some food afterwards.

Northampton East – meetings are roughly every 6 weeks and act as a conduit between community partners and the LAP meetings. Current issues are concerning conversations between young people in Thorplands but a reticence from them to liaise with statutory partners – currently adopting a softly/softly approach in order to build relationships and trust.

School Engagement

Young Citizen Event - delivered on 6 & 7 February, at the Deco theatre, 700 year 6 students from 12 schools in our priority areas attended. The students engaged in workshops, watched drama performances and watched a series of presentations covering a number of community safety topics, including;

- Online Safety and Child Exploitation
- Substance Misuse
- Road and Rail Safety
- Hate Crime
- Serious Organised Crime and Knife Crime
- Fire and Water
- Crime Prevention/Personal Safety

Feedback was gained from students at the end of each topic, more than 80% of the students suggested a positive response across all the topics. Feedback was also gathered from the teachers, all of which suggested that they would like to attend the event again next year.

Hate crime workshops- Working with the new Police Hate Crime officer, we have been working to improve and update our combined hate crime workshops delivery in schools. We will be trailing our new format with both NIA and Castle academy in June. We will deliver this further next year

Young Peoples Animation - <https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/community-safety-young-peoples-animation-programme>

Two new episodes are currently being developed in partnership with local agencies and internal partners. The two new subjects include Waste and fly tipping, and Substance misuse. These are the general themes, with names subject to change. The new episodes are due to be

completed in July and will be added to the existing programme. Review of our existing reach will be completed post July before launching the new themes in September to schools. We will use this launch to further push into new schools

Stronger Communities

Welcoming Spaces

The Welcoming Spaces network continues to grow with 107 registered across West Northamptonshire representing a partnership approach with community and voluntary organisations, faith communities and town and parish councils.

The Welcoming Spaces aim to tackle loneliness and social isolation by providing residents with a local place to go where they can meet new people, socialise, and access support services whilst being in the warm, and all within reach of where they live. Each of the spaces will choose what they wish to offer, from cups of tea to knit and natters or board game activities for example.

Since its launch in December 2022, we have had 106,357 attendees at the Warm/Welcoming Spaces, and 5,136 total referrals to organisations including Money & Debt, Housing & Homelessness, Welfare Rights, Immigrations Issues, Education, Employment & Support, Mental and Physical Health.

Demographics continues to be younger people under 25, and older people 66+ and main issues are Mental Health and Money & Debt advice.

We are currently looking at where the gaps are to develop further Welcoming Spaces across the West.

52 Grant Funding applications approved (between £500 - £1500) (87 in total since project started in December 2022).

Promotions continue for Support Services at Welcoming Space Towcester Library - Employment Advice @ Support, Adult Social Care Team and NHFT Talking Therapies Health, all face to face drop-in monthly sessions.

The Community Training Partnership continues to provide online courses for frontline workers and volunteers to be upskilled to help vulnerable residents.

Rebecca Gill from VR Therapies went along to the Welcoming Space at St Benedict's Church in West Hunsbury in March facilitated by DTI, this is part of an ongoing partnership with local digital and tech businesses from the Digital Northants project, now being able to connect to some of our Welcoming Spaces to bring new opportunities to local communities.

One of our other Welcoming Spaces at Northampton Town Football Club (Official) was visited by DTI in March and heard valuable feedback about some of the digital issues faced by people attending their Community Trust's weekly meet-up.

The Welcoming Spaces initiative was promoted at WNC's Youth Forum in April and Northamptonshire Sport's Healthy Active Ageing Event on 16 April, 1-5pm at the University of Northampton.

Adult Social Care Team started drop-in sessions at Brackley Library in June, with conversations ongoing for ASC to hold these at Daventry Volunteer Centre.

Extension of Chatty Cafe Scheme to reduce isolation and loneliness - 22 out of 50 have been registered so far, in partnership with Action for Happiness.

Corporate and Customer Services have updated the WNC app to include the Welcoming Spaces information in the 'find my nearest' category.

Digital Inclusion Project with DTI & UoN's Changemaker programme including producing marketing materials e.g., videos and leaflets around basic digital skills for use in Welcoming

Spaces, Navigation of Adult Social Care website, NNHS App and the Libraries Borrowbox eBook service. Also looking at Gigiclear community hubs and social value opportunities with Project Gigabit Lot 12 (Northants, Beds & MK).

Well Northants

Community Development workers are working in a targeted way with communities in a Kings Heath, St David's (Kingsthorpe), Blackthorn, Briar Hill, Semilong. and Southbrook in Daventry, And with inclusion groups (sex workers and Gypsy Romany Travellers).

Community development workers have hosted world cafes within Briar Hill and Semilong where we invited local people to come together to talk about their local areas and what would make their community healthier. we collated information from the events as well as insights gathered through conversations with people, on the street, via door knocking and when visiting local groups and activities.

In Semilong the community told us that their priorities are: being healthy and active, Community safety & cohesion, having a clean and healthy Environment, Whole life Activity and Support for children and families/

The Briar Hill the community identified the following priorities: access and travel, improving community safety and the environment, accessing great, health spaces and access to support for children and families.

We are in the process of developing action plans for each of these areas to take forward priorities. Delivery of action plans in other communities continues.

Community grants were delivered in Blackthorn at the Community voting day on the 10th March, £8,500 was granted to the following projects:

- nursery lunches
- women's wellbeing
- forest school
- Hope food larder
- environmental project
- Summer fun days
- Knives aside football tournament
- Fish

Community Forums

Women's Business Network continues to grow and the quarterly meetings have been extremely well received. January's meeting dealt with goals and April's will move onto values.

Diverse Forum – May's meeting was held in Daventry, the meeting was well-attended, mainly by partners and new and valuable connections were made. The meetings will continue to be face-to-face and alternate between Northampton and other locations. There will always be the option to join virtually to ensure that the forum is accessible to all. Chairs and support officers will review the delivery throughout to ensure the forum is maximising its reach and engagement and develop this accordingly. The next meeting will be held in Northampton before heading to Towcester for the following meeting.

Youth Forum – The Youth Forum have recently partnered with Northants Police to host the Youth Independent Advisory Group (Youth IAG) as a standing agenda item at their meetings. Topics covered so far have been Knife crime and County Lines, with Hate Crime and

Discrimination planned as the topic for the June meeting. This discussion will inform a campaign for International Youth Day in August.

LGBTQ Forum – In May members took part in discussions with Planning officers regarding the Local Plan and sharing their views. The forum also adopted an action to produce a local LGBTQ inclusivity guide.

Planning continues for Northampton Pride through the forum subgroup, the Pride Committee, with £12,500 secured in sponsorship and contributions for the event and main stage performers secured.

Community Events

International Women's Day – Held on Saturday 9 March at the Guildhall. Community member stalls in the Great Hall and Women's Business Network stalls in the Court Room. Performances on the stage, 3 workshops and a book launch held throughout the day. reception for the shortlisted Inspirational Women with the presentation of awards made on the stage.

Stephen Lawrence Day

We marked Stephen Lawrence Day on Monday, 22nd April to commemorate the life of the 18-year-old who was killed in an unprovoked racist attack 31 years ago. There were speeches from Deputy Lord Lieutenant, Hassan Shah, WNC's Chairman, Cllr John Shephard, WNC's Diverse Forum Co-Chair Councillor James Hill, Local Policing Commander Superintendent Rachael Handford, and Co-Chair for the Global Ethnic Majority (GEM) Network - Marcella Daye. A candle was lit to mark the occasion and there was an opportunity for guests to network and talk over a cup of tea following the speeches.

Plans are also underway for a Windrush Day commemoration event, including a flag-raising ceremony on the 22nd of June.

Kingsheath Day of Action

On the 2nd of August (12pm until 4pm), the Kings Heath partnership will be delivering a community fun day on the green in the centre of Kings Heath. This event will have fun family activities to draw families in for engagement. We will be offering support and advice relating to community safety themes through the fire, police and the WNC community safety team. We will also have other services relating to financial support and advice, career support and advice, Housing support from NPH and much much more. This public event is open for partners to attend and support.

For our events please take a look at the [WNC YouTube channel](#).

Knife Angel Service

Knife Angel legacy service held at All Saints Church on Friday 17 May to mark the second anniversary of the Knife Angel visit to the county. Speakers included Cheri Curran, mother of fatally stabbed teenager Louis-Ryan Menezes and Force Lead for Serious Violence Andy Glenn. In all there were 6 families of people lost to violence represented at the service. This was followed by a candle light vigil and a reading of Where Angel's Walk by local poet and anti-knife campaigner Quinton Green.

IDAHOBIT

An event to mark International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia took place at the Guildhall on Friday 17 March. Speeches were given from the Chair of the LGBTQ Forum alongside local services Lowdown and Q Space before a minute of noise and refreshments and information stand in the Great Hall.

Resettlement Schemes

Homes for Ukraine - Approx 230 people are still living in hosted accommodation across West Northamptonshire, but the total number is around 445. New arrivals are continuing at a rate of about 5 each month. The team supports with moves to independent living and rematching where possible when the hosting relationship comes to an end. Six-monthly visits are undertaken to all hosted accommodation arrangements; partly for welfare checking and also for fraud prevention. There is still no further update on the future of the scheme at the end of the 3-year visa.

Afghan Resettlement – We have now moved all households into settled accommodation. We are currently supporting 26 households (94 individuals) but expect this number to slightly increase during June as we work with the Home Office and MoD to welcome and support some new arrivals to Northampton. The resettlement team continues to support these families during the next step of their lives in the UK and West Northants and this support is ongoing for a three-year period. We will be setting up tailored information sessions at Central Library over the coming weeks and months to support and coach on various UK integration areas.

Asylum – The last remaining contingency hotel closed in April. We have a very small number of asylum seekers in dispersal accommodation in West Northamptonshire as the Home Office continue to roll out UK-wide dispersal. We continue to engage with them and other partners regionally, to understand and collaborate on the delivery of this work.

Voluntary and Community Sector and Grants

Three community funding grant schemes are open:

- **Discretionary Community Funding Grants:** This grant will provide funding of up to £15,000 to local registered charities, not-for-profit and VCSE organisations to address an identified local need, and support, enable or facilitate the achievement of one or more of the Council's strategic aims, objectives or priorities.
- **Skills for Communities Grant Scheme:** Funded via UKSPF, we aim to award grants between £10,000 and £300,000 to VCSE organisations to support local people to develop their learning and skills and help them get into work.
- **Arts and Culture Grant:** This grant provides funding of up to £5,000 for VCSE organisations that provide arts or culture activities to our local communities. To be eligible to apply for this grant scheme VCSE organisations must meet two or more of the following requirements:
 - provide ongoing arts or culture activities for the local community
 - improve the well-being of vulnerable people
 - increase the number of people accessing arts and culture
 - increase the number of visitors to West Northamptonshire
 - increase levels of physical activity through the use of arts and culture activities.

In addition, three Household Support Funds, with a total budget of £583K, will shortly open to enable eligible VCSE organisations to support vulnerable households, vulnerable cohorts

(disabled people, care leavers, pensioners and those with caring responsibilities) and the Food Aid Network (Food Banks and Food Larders).

Community funding grant schemes brought to the Community Funding Panels in March 2024 resulted in funding being awarded as follows:

- **Community Transport Grant:** Seven community transport operators have been awarded funding totalling £951k to provide safe and cost-efficient community transport options across West Northants which aim to increase accessibility and inclusion and reduce social isolation. The successful organisations are:
 - Ability CIC
 - Brackley Volunteer Car Scheme
 - Cogenhoe & Whiston Parish Council (Village Hopper)
 - Comm Mini-Bus
 - Daventry Area Community Transport
 - Northampton Door to Door
 - Towcester Area Door to Door
- **Debt, Money Advice and Immigration Support Fund:** A joint bid for £620k funding over two years was approved for Citizens Advice West Northamptonshire and Cherwell (CAWNAC) and Community Law Service (CLS) to provide debt and money advice services and early intervention support to help prevent people from experiencing financial crisis and issues such as bankruptcy and eviction. Funding of £116,164 was awarded to CLS in partnership with Northamptonshire Rights and Equality Council to provide immigration support, including providing individuals with legal guidance to understand their rights, options, and obligations under immigration law and protecting the Human Rights of individuals fleeing persecution, violence, or other forms of harm.
- **Local Infrastructure Organisation Support Fund:** Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire, in partnership with Daventry Volunteer Centre and South Northants Volunteer Bureau, were successful in securing £260k of funding which will be used to bring together and strengthen diverse groups and marginalised communities and support the local voluntary and community sector. Over the next two years, they will develop the local capacity of the VCSE sector to deliver against the local priorities set out in the “Live Your Best Life” strategy (2023-2033), and the other strategic priorities of WNC; and
- **Creation Of New Volunteering Opportunities Through Social Action Projects (Rounds 2 & 3):** Funded via UKSPF, we aim to award over £37K in these two rounds to increase the number of volunteers in VCSE organisations within West Northants.

Councillor David Smith

Cabinet Member for Planning and Community Safety & Engagement