



**Report of Councillor Phil Larratt
Cabinet Member for Environment,
Transport, Highways & Waste Services
23rd September, 2021**

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SERVICES

HS2

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. The possibility of HS2 Marshals, similar to a post recently recruited to in Buckinghamshire, are being investigated as an option for West Northamptonshire.

North West Relief Road

We are awaiting news on our Levelling Up Fund bid which was submitted in June, although we are aware that other bidders are also still waiting announcements on their bids and announcements are due "between September and November 2021". We have also been working with SEMLEP and Aecom to support the submission of a bid to the Central Area Growth Deal which we understand will be announced by December.

Acquisition of the land by agreement is progressing well in advance of a possible Public Inquiry into the Compulsory Purchase Order in March 2022.

The Contractor will be reviewing their programme and costs for a deferred start date in Q1 2022, and it is possible that some programme related savings may be realised by a later start date and any savings will support the Council's risk and contingency allowances to reduce risk to the Authority.

Farthinghoe Bypass

An update paper regarding the Farthinghoe bypass has been considered at September Cabinet. The paper provided the results of the latest consultation and the work proposed to progress this scheme including possible interim measures.

Cliftonville Corridor

Work on Phase 2 of the Cliftonville Corridor scheme will commence on the 20th September 2021, with traffic management being installed on the evening of Sunday 19th September 2021 and programmed to be completed prior to Christmas 2021.

The scheme will create the eastern end of the Northampton Inner Ring Road, a historic policy objective of NCC and will help reduce traffic, improve air quality and bring both the Train Station and Northampton General Hospital inside of this route.

Phase 2 will see a reallocation of road space between Bedford Road and Cliftonville Road, with a dedicated north-bound lane being introduced for Hospital traffic. Southbound, the left turn movement onto Bedford will be improved by providing additional

road space via land secured as part of the St Andrew's development. Westbound traffic on Bedford Road wanting to continue beyond the Cliftonville Road junction into town or the University, will now only have to stop for crossing pedestrians, removing the delays currently experienced from queuing vehicles turning into Cliftonville Road.

New Highways Contract

The procurement of a new contract for highways has now reached its second phase of Dialogue with bidders. At the end of this phase, in early October, bidders will submit their Detailed Solution which will be assessed, and one bidder will probably leave the process. The new contract is scheduled to begin in Summer 2022, slightly later than originally planned for and so discussions have commenced with KierWSP about extending their current contract to ensure there is no gap between the two contracts.

Active Travel

We have secured money from 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. We have had a positive meeting discussing how to use the extension of the trial to resolve some of the issues associated with the hire scooters. We have also had a positive meeting with Northamptonshire Police to discuss the enforcement of non-Voi (private) e-scooters which remain illegal for use in public places.

Bus Lane Review

A review of the St James / Westbridge Bus Lane is being conducted and the review has been extended to include consultation with stakeholders. When all data has been gathered, there will be a paper to inform a formal decision in due course.

Transport – Buses & Rail

Following agreement at our June Cabinet meeting to develop a Bus Service Improvement Plan, work has been on going and a draft will be considered by Cabinet in October 2021. This is one of the key steps in delivering the Government's National Bus Strategy "Bus Back Better" within West Northamptonshire and allowing us to access the associated funding.

I, and Chris Wragg have met with a very competent 14-year-old young man Harry Burr. Harry lives just outside Northampton and is a very able rail campaigner. He was recently a guest columnist in Rail magazine. Harry is campaigning for better connectivity in West Northamptonshire, in particular a new train station at Weedon – Daventry Parkway. I believe he has already met other Members, visited the Parish Council, met with the local MP and Rail Minister, and has engaged with organisations such as Network Rail and Train Operators. Harry's web site details his campaign - <https://daventryparkway.co.uk/>

Councillor William Barter and I have met with the Rail Minister, Chris Heaton-Harris MP to discuss rail issues relative to West Northamptonshire and our aspirations for improved connectivity post HS2 as well as direct links to East/West Rail and the development of the North/South route through Aylesbury to Old Oak Common. We will be pursuing these issues with DfT, EHH and East West Rail.

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 was held on 25th August 2021 at Brixworth Depot and was attended by approximately 40 members from both West and North Northamptonshire Councils. Future events will be scheduled, and they are a good opportunity to find out more about the work that the team does on a daily basis.

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 had subsided, but we have, of late experienced service disruption due to availability of HGV Drivers during the traditional holiday period. This is part of a national shortage of HGV drivers and has resulted in difficulty in recruiting new and agency drivers, in Daventry and Northampton in particular. Service disruption has been minimised wherever possible, and the majority of services have been caught up by the end of the week. There have been communications released each day via various means in order that members of the public are aware of the issues and are informed as to what to do with their bins.

The problem should ease with the end of the school summer holidays, but the national shortage of HGV drivers continues, and so contingency plans are being considered, including looking at rates of pay, flexibility in the workforce and encouraging loaders to train as drivers.

Household Waste Recycling Centres

The sites reverted to 5 day a week opening in July and have since eased the covid social distancing measures which has helped increase the flow of vehicles. These services have not (yet) been affected by the National driver shortages, which is good news.

Litter and Street Cleansing

Dialogue with and support for the Northamptonshire Litter Wombles is on-going. WNC officers and contractors also recently supported a Northampton BID, "Business Tidy Day" and "Operation Unite" a day of action in Daventry which covered community safety, fly-tipping, recycling and waste education.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental approach, including climate

With the WNC Environmental Framework and Environmental Principles for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc in place, and a climate emergency recognised, the Council is now rolling up its sleeves for the hard work of making real change.

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 (land and 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

The parks remain very well used, and so the amount of maintenance required on the parks, such as extra litter picking, play equipment maintenance and graffiti removal remains high. The Park Rangers continue with their regular patrols and offer assistance and advice as required.

In partnership with the Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust, we have applied for funding from Round 3 of the Government's Active Travel Fund to improve paths in and around Delapre Park. If we are successful, this will deliver benefits to a wide area of southern Northampton.

Discussions about integrating the Council's country parks are developing. It seems likely that – subject to joint committee approval – the former NCC country parks will be disaggregated for April 2022. Whilst this will involve some change for the staff involved, it offers real opportunities to build a WNC parks service, getting the best out of all our parks.

I have attended several positive meetings with local Members and officers concerning issues in parks in Northampton, namely anti-social behaviour around the lake in Delapre Park, and the toilet provision in Abington Park.

I can confirm that litter bins will be installed in Towcester Water Meadows before the facility is officially opened.

Tree policy

The Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered a presentation on the development of a WNC Tree Policy on Tuesday 31st August. This identified the importance of trees for beauty and biodiversity, the pressures both to add and remove them and the need to have 'the right tree in the right place'. A Task & Finish Group, led by Councillor Chauhan, will look to the development of a Corporate Tree Policy for West Northamptonshire. The new policy will draw on expert advice to provide clear guidance, taking into account West Northamptonshire's climate, soils and styles of development, about how to get the best out of trees for everyone's benefit.

Flood management

The Council has an important role as lead local flood authority and land drainage authority. The service responds to a 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.

There are a number of places, notably in Northampton and Yelverfoft, where flooding is a major concern to residents and businesses.

Cabinet is due to consider a report formally authorising the Council accepting a £6.2m grant for the Northamptonshire Innovative Flood Resilience Project, working with the Environment Agency, NNC, 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. In West Northamptonshire the Wootton Brook catchment is the area of focus.

Car parks

Although still below pre-Covid levels, car park usage has been recovering. Currently we are projecting a loss of income of around £1.7m, against the budget of nearly £5m. Just under £0.3m has been met from the Government's Covid fees and charges scheme; the remainder will be met from the Covid grant the Council is holding. Officers are considering if there are ways to make the payment process easier, encouraging use whilst restoring this important source of income.

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