

2nd December 2021

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SERVICES

HS2

Pre-app meetings involving local Members are now being 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. This positive engagement with HS2 Ltd will, we hope, help to minimise as far as possible the impacts of the project on local residents as construction starts to accelerate. The majority of the HS2 Road Safety Fund schemes have now been completed with only the installation of Vehicle Activated Signs and a scheme in Aston le Walls outstanding. Both schemes are on schedule to be completed by Christmas. The possibility of an HS2 Marshal, similar to posts recently recruited to in Buckinghamshire, is being investigated as an option for West Northamptonshire as part of budget setting proposals.

North West Relief Road

The Authority's bid for Levelling Up Funding to cover the budget gap was not amongst the successful bids announced on 27th October. We are therefore considering our options in line with the cabinet paper in June and will report very soon on a way forward.

Cliftonville Corridor

Work on Phase 2 of the Cliftonville Corridor scheme commenced on the 20th September 2021 as planned and after an initial busy first week, traffic in the area has stabilised and is far lower than prior to the works starting. A key contributing factor is the close working relationship the team has established with local businesses, Northampton General Hospital and St Andrew's Healthcare to refine the traffic management arrangements in the area.

Whilst there have been complex challenges on site to resolve the arrangements with a variety of utilities present, the team have shown great flexibility to overcome these challenges and are currently on track to complete the scheme prior to Christmas 2021 as planned.

Resurfacing works, that will require the complete overnight closure of Cliftonville Road and Bedford Road, are due to begin during week commencing 29/11/21. This work is highly weather dependent. While the completion of the scheme is on schedule, unfortunately the weather forecast indicates that we may be in for a cold snap that could impact on the final completion date.

New Highways Contract

The second phase of dialogue with bidders which will result in the procurement of a new contract for highways continues. Bidders have recently been invited to consider if there are any economies of scale or efficiencies if the two separate contracts for West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire are awarded to the same bidder and the councils allow a limited

degree of co-operation. This would not impact on our ability to deliver to the priorities of West Northamptonshire in any way. The new contract is scheduled to begin in Summer 2022, slightly later than originally planned 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 ensure that we can prioritise key routes across our area, creating a network that will encourage more walking and cycling thereby reducing congestion and contribute to the Council's carbon reduction targets.

Bus Lane Review

The consultation on the St James / Westbridge Bus Lane has recently closed. The result is clear with 56% of the respondents wanting the lane to revert to its original hours of operation – 7.30 am to 9.30 am. Only 6% of respondents wish the lane to continue to be operational 24 hours a day, and 9% favored it being operational from 7.00 am to 7.00 pm. This will be reflected in a report to December Cabinet when a final decision will be taken.

Transport – Buses & Rail

Following agreement at our June Cabinet meeting to develop a Bus Service Improvement Plan, the plan was submitted to Government at the end of October. I thank Members for their input in finalising the plan. 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. Work is now under way on establishing the Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators by March 2022.

A meeting has been held with East West Rail to discuss better ways of integrating West Northamptonshire rail stations into their plans for a new / re-opened rail line between Oxford and Cambridge.

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 'members evening' was held on 21st October 2021 and was attended by approximately 40 members from West Northamptonshire Council. 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. The next 'members evening' will be about Capital funding and works prioritisation.

Winter Service

We have now entered the Winter Service period and have been out on our first gritting runs, these will continue until April 2022 on the basis of the forecast for road temperatures and weather. We operate route-based forecasting, which means that on occasions we will grit some routes but not all.

WASTE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Waste Collections

Following some disruption to waste collection services in recent months due to the national HGV driver shortage, the services have recently stabilised with only a small number of service disruption issues.

Preparations are being made to harmonise the charges for garden waste across West Northamptonshire from 1st April 2022, following agreement by Cabinet in November. The service will be managed and administered by West Northamptonshire Officers in order to ensure the best possible customer service for our residents. All residents across West Northamptonshire will have the option to choose whether or not to receive garden waste collections for 2022/23 by subscribing to the service for an annual charge.

We have successfully bid for £20,000 of funding to introduce the kerbside collection of WEEE (Waste Electric and Electronic Equipment) from residents in the Daventry area. Residents in the Northampton and South areas already have this service. This money will be spent on fitting cages to the Refuse Collection Vehicles in which to collect the material, advertising banners for the vehicles and other publicity activities. The new scheme will be launched in the new year.

New Contracts are being procured for the maintenance of the waste fleet in the South area and also for the Farthinghoe Recycling Centre. More information regarding these will be available towards the end of this calendar year.

Litter and Street Cleansing

Dialogue with and support for the Northamptonshire Litter Wombles is on-going and very positive.

We hope to secure some external funding to enhance town centre cleansing and to buy additional equipment for community groups who undertaken litter picking.

With the changing of the seasons, street cleansing crews are gearing themselves up to deal with leaf fall, additional resources have been planned and a schedule created taking into account the most heavily affected areas though whilst also providing a responsive service.

ENVIRONMENT

Climate Change

The Council brought together 6 working groups to look at how we could ensure that West Northants played its part in reducing carbon and meeting our targets as set out in our climate emergency commitment.

The six themes included the Environment and Agriculture, transport business and housing the main contributors to climate change as well as a group representing the many environmental groups and partners that operate in West Northamptonshire as well as a group of young people.

The outcomes of all of the groups have been fantastic, developing a wide range of opportunities that we will very soon share and consult with everyone. It is clear from the discussion at COP 26 that climate is not seen in isolation and that the wider sustainability aspects are also considered. We are therefore looking at how we can ensure that as a Council and as a place, bringing everyone together, we can develop a more rounded approach to ensuring we are truly making a difference.

We will therefore be looking at announcing our next steps, working with members, on how we will deliver this important work.

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.

A project working on an estate climate strategy has now commenced. This will work on the basis of 'true' carbon impacts of gas and electricity and include the authority's entire estate, including the 'shadow estate' operated on WNC's behalf by contractors but excluding (as being outside of WNC's area of control) industrial operations of commercial tenants. It also excludes defined areas, such as the new highways contract, which will have their own carbon neutrality plans.

Parks and Open Spaces

The parks continue to be very well used, as we move into the autumn and winter months. After the mini tornado that hit some areas of Northampton on Sunday 31st October, there were many trees in our parks that had lost some major limbs. The Park Rangers worked very hard to ensure the parks remained safe by taping off hazardous areas and helped the Idverde tree teams identify and prioritise the removal of the highest risk trees.

As part of our continued commitment to the enhancement of our Parks & Open Spaces, the footpath at Granary Road has been completely refurbished and a new footpath has been installed at Bradlaugh Fields.

Weekly, all the play equipment within our parks is inspected and repairs are carried out as and when necessary. On top of this, plans are in place for the refurbishment and for additional play equipment at Exeter Place, Rillwood Court, Milverton Park, Nursery Lane Open Space and Brixworth Country Park. Other parks are also being investigated and considered year on year.

The new Watermeadows Park in Towcester is nearing completion. It has a new footpath that loops around the park and it will shortly have installed new benches, picnic tables, litter bins and a play area.

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.

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'. 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.

Development and delivery of the tree policy and strategy will have a significant resource requirement, which the Council will need to consider as part of budget-setting.

The Woodland Trust invited the Council to submit a bid to the Emergency Tree Fund to develop a high quality and comprehensive tree policy and strategy. The Trust's local staff are working with the Council to prepare the bid, which will have been submitted by the deadline of 29th November 2021. Bids can range from £50K - £300K; it is proposed to request £160k, to balance the maximum chance of success with maximum investment.

In line with the Trust's expectations, the bid includes support for a professional tree officer to work on the tree strategy and delivery plan. The bid also includes resources for tree surveys, including assessment of tree canopy cover (the Trust's preferred measure), working with parishes and community groups, and actual tree planting. Strategy development in the first year would be followed by delivery in the later years.

The Council would be required to provide some match funding; this is proposed to be £45k over two years, reflecting 50% of the costs of the staff post."

FLOOD MANAGEMENT

Flood & Water Team

In 2020, the Government announced a £200 million fund for innovative projects to help communities be more resilient to flooding and coastal change. The former NCC Flood & Water Team put in a bid and were successful in being awarded £6.2 million, which will be spent over the next five and a half years.

This meant that an Innovative Flood Resilience Project Team would need to be appointed, which is currently on going. However, the team has so far successfully appointed the Innovative Flood Resilience Programme Manager, Alan Ryan, who is now in place. The interviews are continuing for the posts of Project Manager and Support Officer.

The Council has an important role as lead local flood authority and 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.

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

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.

In the run up to Christmas free parking will be provided in Northampton on Saturdays and after 3.00pm in all council car parks from Saturday 20th November to Monday 3rd January 2022. The additional loss of income will be met from Covid grant funds.

It is also proposed to use Covid grant monies to install a new parking payment system in the council's multi-storey car parks and the larger surface car parks. The new system will allow

payment by direct debit and app or mobile-friendly website, greatly reducing the need to pay at machines in the car parks and removing the fear of overstaying in surface car park. This should increase ease of use, improve personal safety and reduce the chances of Covid infection from proximity and use of the same payment machine. However, at least one payment machine would still be provided for each car park to cater for those who prefer not to use the other means.

This initiative should encourage people to use Northampton town centre, which is directly beneficial but also would improve car park income.

Councillor Phil Larratt

Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste Services