



Report of Councillor Phil Larratt Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste Services

Thursday 30th June 2022

Highways and Transport Services

HS2

Pre-application meetings involving local Members are 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 directly raise issues. This positive engagement with HS2 Ltd will 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.

Following the securing of funding for a HS2 Marshal for West Northamptonshire as part of the budget setting process, the successful candidate started during May. A ward member briefing involving planning, highways and regulatory services was held in May and increased coordination between the officers working on the different elements of HS2 on behalf of WNC is helping ensure a robust 'one council' approach to responses.

North West Relief Road

Following Cabinet's approval in December 2021 to borrow against the funding shortfall created by the unsuccessful Levelling Up Fund bid, works have now commenced on site. Initial works including setting up the site compound, creating access routes to the site and preparing for the detailed archaeological investigations are complete and the archaeological surveys are now substantially complete with no significant finds. The main earthworks operation will commence imminently.

Land acquisition has now successfully concluded with all landowners with WNC now having the full rights to all land required for the permanent scheme reducing this element of WNC's risk of the project.

The Growth Deal funding was fully approved by SEMLEP and this important contribution to the project was received by the Authority in March 2022.

Construction work is scheduled to last until February 2024 and the project team will be working hard to ensure that affected landowners, residents and the travelling public are all kept up to date with progress and any potential impact of the works.

Off-site mitigation works are required in Boughton village and these have been agreed in principle with Boughton Parish Council following a series of very constructive meetings. KierWSP have now commenced feasibility work to assess the viability of the proposals agreed with the Parish Council and we hope to implement these as soon as practicable to help mitigate

the existing traffic problems experienced in the village which are predicted to be exacerbated by the North West Relief Road without intervention.

Road Bypass

Work has now commenced on the Road Bypass. I have recently visited and toured the site with the contractor. Compounds have been established. Roundabouts on the A508 at either end of the village are under construction and earthworks are underway. While providing a much-needed bypass to Roade, the construction includes significant improvements to the Ashton / Stoke Bruerne junctions with the A508.

New Highways Contract

Kier have been selected as preferred bidder and there is now a standstill period prior to the signing of the contract. Mobilisation is expected to commence in earnest in late June early July. During this period there will be a number of member briefing sessions to inform members of how the new contract will differ from the current arrangement and to allow members to meet with Kier's management team. The new contract is scheduled to begin in September 2022, slightly later than originally planned and agreement has been reached 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.

A briefing has been held with Place and Overview Scrutiny committee and an oversight group is in the process of being set up to help steer the development of this new strategy for West Northamptonshire.

Transport – Buses & Rail

Cabinet agreed to form an Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators in April 2022. This is one of the key steps in delivering the Government's National Bus Strategy - Bus Back Better - within West Northamptonshire. Unfortunately, along with many other authorities, we were unsuccessful in securing any Government funding to take forward improvements to our bus network.

We are currently progressing two key elements of work to progress our work on buses. The first is to work with commercial bus operators to co-design a sustainable network of services following the end of Government financial support for the loss of passengers due to Covid in October. The second linked piece of work is looking at how we improve the provision of bus services for rural areas. A cross party steering group will continue to meet quarterly to help review and shape the work related to the implementation of the strategy.

A cabinet paper is being prepared for July to agree our aspirations for improved rail services for West Northamptonshire once the opening of HS2 has released capacity on the existing rail network.

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.

Waste Management Services

Waste Collections

The chargeable garden waste service is now well established across WNC since it began on 1 April. At the time of writing, there have been over 79,000 subscriptions. 1,683 residents have taken advantage of the home composting offer. Plans to collect in the unwanted bins in the South area that have not been subscribed to are currently being finalised. This will be done in phases, starting in June, and residents will be informed by letter about the arrangements. Ward Councillors will be briefed when bins are being collected in their area.

The kerbside collection of small electrical items in the Daventry area is up and running and performing well. So far, we have collected 2 tonnes of small electrical items and 1 tonne of household batteries. This means that a kerbside collection of small electrical items and batteries is now offered across the whole of West Northamptonshire.

Litter and Street Cleansing

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

The additional litter picking equipment purchased with the Welcome Back funding has been received and has been in use across West Northamptonshire for both Spring Clean activities and "Clean for the Queen" in the run up to the Platinum Jubilee.

Grounds Maintenance

Spring / summer grounds maintenance works are well underway with grass cutting well into the second cut as well as weed treatment across Northampton. Seasonal sports pitches such as bowls and tennis are being prepared and maintained and plans are now in place to complete out of season works to football, rugby pitches etc.

Spring bedding plants have also been removed from flower beds, ready for replacing; we continue to donate the 'old' bedding plants to community groups for reuse.

Environment

Management

Interview for the Head of Public Realm & Heritage will take place shortly.

Parks and Open Spaces

Over the last month, three major parks, Daventry Country Park, Abington Park and Bradlaugh Fields have been visited by the Green Flag Judges. They will reveal their results in July or August. It is at this time, we would like to thank all the Park Rangers, Idverde, Veolia and the friends' groups for all their hard work to prepare the parks for the judging.

Disaggregation of the former NCC Country Park service occurred on 1st April 2022. As a result, the integrated WNC Park Service now includes Daventry and Brixworth Country Park, Brampton Valley Way, Watermeadows, and the Everdon Outdoor Learning Centre. Eleven members of staff were welcomed by the teams in Environment, Countryside & Parks. Extensive work including staff meetings had taken place prior to this.

Since the disaggregation, WNC has installed additional play equipment at Brixworth Country Park to cater for the growing number of visitors to the park.

A new archway at the entrance to the much-loved Abington Park Aviary was unveiled recently. The new structure was first discussed a few years ago but was put on hold when the Covid-19 pandemic arrived. The arch acts as the gateway to a fabulous array of domestic birds that are much loved and cared for by the park staff.

Watermeadows Park in Towcester was purchased by the former South Northamptonshire Council (SNC) from the neighbouring Easton Neston Estate in 2009. The park, which has been used by local residents for a number of years, was not accessible by all. Therefore, work took place over the last couple of years to install new footpaths, benches, a picnic area, a viewing platform and a play area. The construction of this new park was carefully planned so not to disturb this rich historic biodiverse grassland.

At Delapre Abbey, WNC completed the new footpath that runs adjacent to the Walled Garden. Regular users of this walkway will say, in the winter months this footpath became very boggy and was difficult to manoeuvre across.

Climate Strategies

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

- Estate Climate Strategy: Work is well underway; with an understanding of emissions the Council is responsible for being established and a range of measures to address these being explored.
- Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy: Work is briefed, and initial work has commenced. It is not meaningful to establish a baseline as such, as the construction programme varies on a year by year basis.
- Fleet Climate Strategy: Work has commenced, exploring the best options for the Council to transition to a zero or low carbon fleet.

All three Strategies seek to address scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions relevant to their functional scope. The Estate Climate Strategy will be expected to resolve any emissions which cannot be mitigated within the other Strategies.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

While I remain to be briefed on these strategies, the Council has been allocated a small 'new burdens' grant to commence work on a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Further funding of perhaps £120-170k is expected. A report will be considered by July Cabinet.

Flood Management

The Council has a vital 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.

The Council has experienced problems with the provision of services by its outsourced service providers. It has therefore taken interim steps of engaging a number of agency workers. With the posts now graded, the Council will soon be seeking a full in-house technical team, which

should deliver a better service through efficiencies and secure local knowledge. Work will then also be able to commence on updating the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, which will define how we plan to manage local sources of flood risk (surface water, ordinary watercourses, and ground water) in the district.

The Innovative Flood Resilience Project is being rebranded Project RAIN – Resilience and Innovation Northamptonshire. The business case for this Defra-funded project is nearing completion and will be submitted to the Environment Agency at the end of June for approval. The project is expected to deliver catchment, community and property-level flood resilience measures to communities in the Wootton Brook (West Northamptonshire) and Harpers Brook (North Northamptonshire) catchments. It is anticipated that engagement of the benefitting communities will commence in anger in the summer, once the business case has been approved.

Car Parks

Parking demand is gradually increasing but remains significantly below pre-Covid levels. This is reflected in lower levels of income in 2021/22 and projected in 2022/23. During 2022/23 we will assess how demand is evolving. This may require changes of approach.

Work on the new parking control systems, which are designed to ease use, encouraging people to visit central Northampton and thereby also increase income, is well underway. The market appears to have a range of solutions, although there is still a need to ensure the desired user focus is delivered. The most challenging part will probably be integrating modern systems with the legislation governing Council car parks, which was written in a previous era.

Short term actions relating to the service include:

- Renewing outdated lifts in St Michaels (All other MSCP lifts were all renewed, replaced, or refurbished in recent years).
- Supporting the new cinema in Daventry – After meeting the cinema manager it has been agreed that no further steps are required at this time. The cinema is more than happy with the parking provision nearby that supports their business.
- Closing around half of Commercial Street car park to accommodate the market whilst works are undertaken on the Market Square.

During 2022/23 and into 2023/24 it is planned to develop a car parking strategy for central Northampton. This will provide a framework to take decisions such as on replacement or major refurbishment of the Mayorhold MSCP, pricing strategy, etc.

With the disaggregation of Brixworth Country Park from NNC we are having to set up a new contract with the card payment provider on the machines. This has proved particularly challenging and is interrupting the ability to take card transactions until resolved. We are working with the Communications team to ensure customers remain informed. We are also aiming to improve the payment arrangement for country park parking in the medium term.

Councillor Phil Larratt

Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste Services