

Highways and Transport Services

North West Relief Road

Works started on site in April 2022 and are programmed to last for 104 weeks. The project team continue to work 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.

Work is progressing well with the earthworks operations in particular benefitting from the recent dry weather. Other works since commencement include creation of haul roads, fencing, drainage and excavation of drainage ponds.

Archaeological investigations have progressed well, and recent finds have been managed and the risks of delay and associated cost increases mitigated.

Works to divert Rights of Way are ongoing and it is hoped that these will help to unlock commencement of development at Dallington Grange. The North West Relief Road team are working closely with the developers and their designers to ensure that both the new road and the development, which includes phase 1 of the relief road, are not delayed.

Tree and hedge clearance works are complete and have been kept to an absolute minimum with 8 mature oak trees saved by introducing minor design changes on the ground which is very positive news.

The team continue to assess the off-site mitigation works in Boughton village.

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.

Following the briefing held with Place and Overview Scrutiny committee, a draft ambition statement, the first phase of developing the strategy, has been prepared and this was presented at an oversight group on 18th October. Feedback will be used to steer the development of this new strategy. A draft strategy will be prepared by December 2022, with a further oversight group in January to consider it.

Work on the Daventry Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP) is well underway. Site audits were completed in August and draft proposals were presented in October 2022 to stakeholders for their feedback. A first draft of the LCWIP will be available by the end of October 2022, with public consultation planned for early in 2023.

Following submission of our Self-Assessment form to Active Travel England, we have received an indicative revenue funding allocation of £152,723 for the Capability and Ambition Fund 2022/23. We submitted our proforma on 30th September. Our submission was based around a number of elements, including developing a LCWIP for Towcester, feasibility design on emerging draft proposals from the Daventry LCWIP and behavioural change (interactive travel map, cycle training, loan e-bikes) centred on the Delapre cycle hub. If successful, the funding will be awarded in November 2022.

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. This funding was originally expected to end in October, but Government has now announced that funding will continue until March 2023. 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. Arrangements have been made to continue financial support for the 200 bus service between Banbury and Daventry at least until January 2023, and support will also be given jointly with Oxfordshire County Council to reintroduce the 500 bus between Brackley and Banbury on a Sunday.

With bus operators continuing to experience increased costs (particularly fuel) and shortage of drivers, while patronage continues to be significantly below pre-Covid levels, a number of operators have recently announced reductions in commercial services, including the withdrawal of service 89 (Potterspury – Deanshanger – Milton Keynes), removal of most journey to Northampton from service 41 to Bedford, and cutting back service 3 from West Hunsbury to Camp Hill. Discussions are ongoing to determine whether any of these services can be reinstated or replacements introduced.

Government have also announced their intention to fund a £2 maximum adult single bus fare from 1 January to 31 March 2023. Initial discussions with the Department for Transport indicate that this will be a voluntary scheme. More details are awaited.

Cabinet agreed a paper in July setting out our aspirations for improved rail services for West Northamptonshire once the opening of HS2 has released capacity on the existing rail network.

The second stage of East West Rail between Milton Keynes / Bletchley and Bicester is well under construction. It is on schedule to open in 2024. Capacity issues on the West Coast Mainline between Bletchley and Milton Keynes are being examined by Network Rail. Increased capacity on this stretch of line could provide opportunity for East West Rail services to and from Oxford and beyond to run to Northampton.

The new Segro Rail Freight Terminal at M1 Junction 15 is due to be connected to the Northampton Loop in 2023. To connect the facility will require a nine-day closure of the Northampton Loop and Network Rail are currently consulting Train Operators regarding this

closure that is likely to be in September 2023, with the terminal becoming operational in early 2024.

Waste Management Services

Waste Collections

The refuse and recycling collections continue to perform at good level with few complaints.

Removal of the unwanted bins in the South area is now complete. Garden waste tonnages are down this year across the whole of West Northants and indeed nationally. This is due to the long, hot summer with very little grass growth. The savings in gate fees due to the reduction in tonnage (which is paid per tonne of garden waste composted) have been offered up as in-year budget savings.

Household Waste Recycling Centres continue to operate with no issues. The WNC HWRCs received no complaints in September and received three compliments (two at Sixfields one at Brixworth).

A consultant has been appointed to assist officers with production of the new WNC Waste strategy. This will help align the future vision of the Council for waste services with our statutory duties, taking into account new and emerging legislation. Members and residents will be engaged with this work to ensure that the strategy reflects the Council's priorities.

Officers spent a very worthwhile day at the University of Northampton's Fresher's Fair, talking to the new students about how to reduce and recycle their waste in Northampton. We distributed a new leaflet aimed at students who are living in private rented accommodation in the town, telling them how to take part in the council's recycling services and what to do with waste and unwanted furniture items at the end of term. We gave out some food waste reduction freebies, including spaghetti measures, waste food bag clips, shopping lists and rice measurers.

Litter and Street Cleansing

Crews continue to cleanse the public spaces in around West Northants, fly-tipping is still an issue in hotspots and colleagues continue to liaise with the Environmental Protection Team to reduce this anti-social behaviour.

Grounds Maintenance

Summer grounds maintenance works (generally mowing operations) have been quiet over the summer months due to the extremely dry weather and crews have been utilised on other projects such as encroachment works and are also getting ahead with targeted winter maintenance works such as hedge trimming.

Plans are also afoot to replace the summer bedding in flower beds with winter plants & we continue to offer the 'old' bedding plants to community groups for reuse.

Environment, Countryside, and Parks

Bradlaugh Fields

The Park Ranger working with Community Payback have cleared an area within the park that was full of brambles and other debris in preparation for the creation of a community orchard. Working with the Friends of Bradlaugh Fields & Barn it is hoped that the trees can be purchased and planted during the next few months.

The Park Ranger has also accepted a Countryside Management Student from Moulton College to work alongside them one day a week until 150 hours of practical work has been completed.

The Friends have asked if any measures can be taken to preserve water bodies in the park. These have lost water over the years, probably as a result of the disruption of natural patterns of water absorption and transmission by development and artificial drainage system in the catchment. This is not something which can easily be addressed, but options will be explored.

Racecourse

The Park Ranger, working in conjunction with Bosworth College, will have 12 – 16 students one evening a week who are working towards their Duke of Edinburgh Award. The students will have to complete 100 hours of assessment work within the new community garden and the surrounding park to achieve the Award.

Abington Park

As noted in Cllr Longley's report, proposals are being brought forward to provide replacement public facilities – toilets and changing rooms – for Abington Park East.

Play areas

The rundown play area at Roundwood Way, Upton has been completely refurbished with the addition of extra play equipment being installed, such as a new inclusive roundabout, see-saw and a twister. Much of the safety surface has also been replaced.

Everdon Outdoor Learning Centre

Everdon had its first visit from Workbridge in September, which is the start of a new collaboration. Workbridge is a charity which provides development opportunities for people with mental illness, autism, learning disabilities or brain injuries. This trip from Workbridge was in exchange for two mud kitchens that they made for them during lockdown, which are to be use at our forest school site in Daventry. On this visit, Workbridge brought a small group of Learners, and they had a morning in the woods making Mandalas from natural materials, after which they went back to the Outdoor Learning Centre and had their lunch in the garden followed by some arts and crafts. The Learners had a great time and will return next year. Photos are available on Everdon's Facebook page (posted on 22nd Sep).

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. In the light of the Council's financial challenges, assessment of potential for photovoltaic (solar cell) production of electricity is being accelerated. This is likely to involve working with a commercial partner or partners.
- Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy: A wide range of material exists and is being assimilated.
- Fleet Climate Strategy: The free Fleet review from the Energy Saving Trust is underway. This will identify opportunities for WNC to decarbonise road transport fleets and transition (ideally) to zero emission vehicles, thereby contributing to our aim to be net zero carbon by 2030. Whole-life cost, and energy and carbon comparisons will underpin recommendations to change.

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.

Flood & Water Service

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.

Due to ongoing issues with external providers and the cost of existing agency staff, the Council is seeking to recruit a full in-house technical team, which should deliver a better service through efficiencies as well as securing local knowledge. Unfortunately, the first round of advertising was relatively unsuccessful, so further work is needed in reviewing these roles and readvertising. With a team in place, the Council would have better control over delivery of statutory duties, and work would 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 in the district. The additional resource would also then allow for delivery of these measures. In the meantime, the Council is making progress with a number of communities including Deanshanger, Collingtree and Yelvertoft.

The Resilience and Innovation Northamptonshire (RAIN) project, led by the Council, has received final approval from the Environment Agency of its business case, and is therefore now officially entering the delivery phase. The project will deliver catchment, community and property-level flood resilience measures to communities in the Wootton Brook and Harpers Brook catchments.

Parking and CCTV

The new parking equipment tender was won by Scheidt and Bachmann. A project implementation plan is being drafted to ensure work will be completed before the Christmas season. The new parking equipment provider has also provided quotes for introducing the new equipment into both Daventry and Brixworth country Parks and details of these will be provided for consideration shortly.

Work has started on producing tenders for a variety of contracts that are due to renew in April 2023. These include, CCTV monitoring, CCTV maintenance and parking cleaning contracts.

Parking and CCTV services supported Operation London Bridge following the death of Queen Elizabeth II, providing VIP parking over several key events throughout the mourning period.

Free parking was offered in support of the Sixties event on 24th September. Free parking will also be provided for the Northampton Christmas lights switch-on event.

A new staff parking scheme was set up and introduced to provide staff of WNC, and the Children's Trust, with a number of parking options to suit both budget and location. This became effective from 1st October.

Councillor Phil Larratt

Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste Services