

# WNC Parish Meeting Briefing

By Cllr Jonathan Nunn, Leader of the Council

One year ago, today our new Council was launched and we embarked on a fresh start for local government in West Northamptonshire – and what a year it's been! It's hard to believe that Vesting Day was only 12 months ago, when you reflect on the significant achievements in this short space of time.

We have made strong progress bringing together everything from the four legacy councils which has been no mean feat in itself, whilst continuing to guide our communities and support our vulnerable residents through the Covid pandemic. We have also laid foundations for the future through our ambitious Corporate Plan and shaping a number of important strategies, including our anti-poverty strategy, and a bold new approach for quality of inward investment.

Other transformational plans taking shape include progressing work to join up health and social care services to help people live their best lives, and striving to make West Northants a more sustainable place to live and work, to protect and improve the local environment, economy and society for future generations. Born from the biggest restructure of local government in Northamptonshire in over 40 years, I'm pleased to say our Council now heads into its second year with a balanced budget and additional investment in services ahead. We're really proud of how everyone has risen to the challenge this year, with elected members having played a key role in the excellent progress we've made so far.

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- Children's services have been recognised as being on an improvement journey and is being recognised as such by OFSTED.
  - A cross party Anti-Poverty Strategy has been adopted that was developed with partner organisations and charities with a view to improving the life chances of individuals and families in the area.
  - Health and Social Care integration is being developed and will enable local neighbourhood areas to identify priorities and influence spending.
  - Brackley Library has seen considerable investment and improvement.
  - There has been a crackdown on fly tipping offences and successful prosecutions.
  - Northampton has applied for City Status and in addition has been granted considerable funds from central government to improve the town centre to create a county town we can be proud to visit.
  - The Highways Contract will be awarded in the next few weeks based on a 50/50 ration of quality versus price. In addition, a further £3.7 million has been allocated by cabinet to fund pot hole and other highways repairs in the next financial year.
  - The Council has delivered a balanced budget and will report a slight underspend on this concluding financial year. We have managed to prepare a balanced budget for the next financial year.
  - Work continues to join up local services across the West Northants area, to drive visible improvement and be more cost effective.
  - As of the 19th April there are 189 households who have offered refuge to 385 individuals in West Northamptonshire who will receive support from the council.
  - The WNC website has detailed advice for potential hosts of Ukrainian families.
  - West Northamptonshire is the site of two hotels housing Afghan families who are receiving support from council officers and two hotels accommodating single asylum-seeking men who are being supported by the home office.

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## Planning Update

Rebecca Breese Portfolio Holder for Planning

It has been a challenging year bringing together the four previous Local Planning Authorities into a new single planning unit – albeit with their own Local Plans to guide local policies. Each of the four previous planning authorities had their own processes and IT, ways of conducting planning committees, managing the call -in of applications, managing the public interface in terms of planning applications, and approach to enforcement.

In addition – policy work is ongoing with 2 adopted Part 2 Local Plans (Daventry and South) and one in its final stages (Northampton Borough) and the work required to deliver the updated West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan ramping up. Also, ongoing work on Conservation Areas and other Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's).

### Highlights:

- Northampton Local Plan Part 2 has been through Examination and subject to some modifications, should soon be adopted by the Council.
- The first public consultation response for the revision of the West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan brought in excess of 1600 responses, an exceptional number, and with useful observations to guide the next phase.
- There is now a single Enforcement Policy and team operating across the West with a single online access point. This has streamlined processes and responses and includes a useful Q & A page to inform the public.
- The whole Planning Department is undergoing a programme of transformation to unify the teams in terms of IT, culture, process and location in order to increase resilience, capacity and productivity.
- After a period of hiatus, redacted objections are again being published on the planning portal.
- Consistently high numbers of planning applications reflect ongoing resilience and confidence in the local economy.

Over the year we have learnt how important it is to develop effective communication with our Parish Councils and work is ongoing to develop and perfect how we do this, via the monthly Parish email newsletter, Parish Forums and direct communication.