

Report to the Parish Councils 2021 – County Councillor Malcolm Longley.

This is my final report as an NCC councillor for as we all know the new Unitary council comes into being on the first of April 2021. The new Unitary council will combine Daventry District Council with South Northamptonshire District Council, Northampton Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council. Although NCC will no longer exist the district of Braunston and Crick will remain the same and on May 6th. (election day) you will have the choice of up to three councillors to represent you in this district.

As you will no doubt recall there was a financial crisis at NCC during the 2017/2018 financial year and the arrangements at County hall were changed with the appointment of a new Chief Executive officer, two commissioners and a plan to create the unitary arrangements we now face. Shortly after those events were put in place, I was asked to take over the financial portfolio for the county which at that time I saw as a daunting proposition, I can tell you. The budget was being overspent, the reserves were standing at zero and the borrowings were too high and rising.

Fortunately, we were able to form a strong and dedicated operational team and now three years later we will be handing over a very different organisation that has balanced the budgets consistently for three years, has reduced borrowings every year and has created a reserve fund of over ninety million pounds. This reserve fund will be split between the two new unitary councils. In addition, the loan maturity profile is now such that the repayment schedule is very low for the county as a whole for the next thirty to forty years which will give the two new unitary councils the best start in life possible.

During my time as a county councillor for the Braunston and Crick district, there have been two key highlights that I am proud to have been associated and which I hope will continue to be appreciated for many years to come. The first, now completed but not formally opened by the Parish council is the footbridge over the canal at Crick. This had been a bone of contention for many years and represented a serious danger to pedestrians and particularly people with mobility scooters and children's push chairs, prams etc. We all hope that the bridge can be formally opened when the current Covid restrictions are finally lifted.

The second which has not yet commenced construction but has secured the necessary funding and support is a cycle way from Braunston to Daventry utilising the canal towpath and other available features. This project will be completed over the next twelve months or so and will allow a safe passage either by cycle or on foot from Braunston into the town without risking travel on the very busy alternative highway.

Finally, I have enjoyed the last year as your representative at County hall and hope that I have made an adequate contribution to the district during that time.

Report from District Councillor for Annual Parish Meeting March 2021

Daventry District Council ceases to exist on 31 March 2021, amalgamated with Northampton Borough Council, South Northants Council and Northamptonshire County Council into a new unitary authority, West Northamptonshire.

This last year of its life has been dominated by working towards the new council and by responding to Covid19. Two departments have been deeply involved in responding to the pandemic, Environmental Health, whose business is public health, and Revenue and Benefits, which dispensed on behalf of the Government the various mandatory and discretionary grants made available to mitigate the damage caused to families and businesses. A large proportion of the council's staff worked from home, and the offices have been closed for most purposes since last March. Some staff from all departments spent time working with colleagues from the other West Northamptonshire authorities to bring together cohesively and comprehensively their different practices and policies, so that West Northamptonshire Council could start on 1 April this year. In the end much work remains to be done, but the newly appointed staff of West Northamptonshire believe that the Council will be "safe and legal" from day one. Its major priorities will be at first Adult Social Care and Children's Services. Most of the senior posts are now filled, and, for now, many existing staff will carry on in their posts.

DDC held no meetings for some weeks at the start of lockdown, since when all meetings have been held remotely on Zoom. Much routine work of the council has continued with little disruption, though more slowly sometimes because of working from home. Daventry Norse kept to its schedules for waste collection and took the opportunity to work on improvements to the country park, including café refurbishment, while it was closed.

DDC approved the Countryside and Settlements Local Plan, which sets out the four hierarchies for development. The council achieved a 6 ½ year land supply, and the target for house building in the rural areas was exceeded by some way, which reduces the potential for pressure from speculative developers in our area for the moment. Barby retains limited development status, and Onley Park has small village status. Existing conservation areas were reviewed and new ones approved, and around 35 villages, nearly half the total in the district now have a designated conservation area. Three extensions to the town are in development; the north east urban extension to the east of the country park and reservoir, the south west extension towards Staverton, and Micklewell, opposite Middlemore, together providing around 7000 new houses when completed.

DDC has long had plans to redevelop the town centre, many of which have had to be abandoned, but work has started on a new vision for the town. Hopes of retail redevelopment have faded, but a new cinema is almost complete behind High Street, where there will also be restaurants, and public open space. The large open space at Eastern Way was controversially sold at below value to the Department of Education for a secondary school, which would mean 3 secondary schools, and 5 schools in total, within half a mile of each other. Opposition to the plan centred on loss of valuable open space, and on the increase in traffic and pedestrian movements in an already busy area.

DDC, in conjunction with Northamptonshire ACRE, promoted a new community initiative, the Good Neighbour scheme, now established in 10 villages, which was timely and hugely important during the pandemic.

The district's rehabilitation gym, Reach for Health, was funded to help move to a site on Daventry Sports Park to enable its work to expand. DDC bought Moulton College's sports centre to provide a leisure centre in Moulton and for the east of the district. Other projects being taken forward include a new athletics track at Daventry Sports Park, and the purchase of housing for the homeless, of whom there has been a growing number during this last year.

Early last year DDC declared a Climate Emergency. A cross-party Task Panel then produced a series of recommendations to turn the Declaration into positive action. While it was decided to take forward some of these, most were recommended to be forwarded to the new council for consideration when it comes into being.

The parish still has ongoing and potential problems, which it has not been possible yet to solve, mainly relating to planning and highways issues. It remains to be seen whether we have any more success with West Northamptonshire Council.

This is just a snapshot of some of the activities at DDC in the last year. I have given more detailed reports at each monthly Parish Council meeting and these have been available on the website. I am happy to answer any specific questions.

Catherine Lomax

District Councillor, 28.3.21