

Report for Barby & Onley Annual Parish Meeting 12th May 2022
From WNC Ward Councillor Rosie Humphreys

The first 12 months of our unitary West Northants Council and being elected as one of your ward councillors seem to have flown by! It has been a pleasure to get to know some of your residents, organisations and Parish Council during the last year. Certainly it has been an eventful one for everyone getting familiarised with a new council, councillors and the world slowly opening up for us all post lockdown.

As to the wider world, it is sobering to reflect that two areas of international conflict – in Afghanistan and Ukraine – have brought global issues closer to home. Around 200 Afghan nationals have been living in hotels in West Northants since last September and are still awaiting permanent rehousing. The Council is now mobilising its support for the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Six resettlement officers are being recruited and around 100 Ukrainian guests have arrived so far. 400 further guests are expected in the coming weeks and I have been working in our villages to support households and to coordinate community support.

As regards your villages, residents have been proactive in contacting me about several issues, the planning application to expand the shooting days at Barby Sporting Club being the most notable. I received a total of 45 emails from both Barby and Kilsby residents, all but a handful objecting to the proposal. Unfortunately, at present there is no indication when the application will be coming to the Daventry Planning Committee – it seems that there is additional work for the case officer and the applicants to do before the case officer will be ready to complete his report to bring to the Committee.

Presumably the delay is not related to the difficulties within the Planning Department which has just lost its Assistant Director and is advertising for a number of other senior posts. While shortage of planning officers is a national problem, West Northants seems particularly hard hit and the whole service is undergoing an internal improvement plan. Officers are so hard pressed that the pre application service has been temporarily suspended, which is very far from ideal.

Clearly West Northants Planning has internal issues to tackle. I am sure that every resident is hoping (as I certainly am) that the new Highways contracts will make a significant difference to the state of our roads. The successful bidder of the £30m contract will be announced in June. Given the value of the contract and its length – 7 years and extendable up to 14 years it is concerning that the details have not been put before any of West Northants' Scrutiny committees. I and a number of colleagues are seeking to ensure that this is rectified.

Beyond Barby and Onley I have enjoyed making good working relationships with the other villages in the ward and have attended the majority of the monthly PC meetings in all 7 villages, providing a report prior to each meeting. It has been very rewarding to learn more about their organisations (which in many ways are the life blood of our communities) and to offer some a financial contribution from the £2,500 Councillor covid support fund allocated to each ward councillor during the last financial year. Barby Beavers and the village Pre-School have both received support

from my individual fund. There are some 30 or so ward councillors who have not made use of their allocation and their funds are being made available for this financial year.

One issue that I have been pursuing which I hope will benefit many of our villages is broadening the Household Support Fund Scheme to enable residents who rely on oil for heating and hot water to receive funds towards their fuel costs. The 2022 Scheme is going live next month and I have been assured that residents who meet the criteria, whether on mains gas or off grid will receive funds towards their heating costs.

In addition to varied casework I sit on the Daventry Area Planning Committee and the Audit and Governance Committee and am a councillor representative for Northamptonshire ACRE. I am also a member of a cross party working group set up to ensure that West Northants Council delivers on its sustainability goals. These are ambitious plans and I shall be reporting on their progress in my monthly parish council reports.

Finally, if you think that it would be useful to offer a councillor surgery every 2 to 3 months then I would be pleased to arrange this. This could be in person or by zoom. In the meantime, a reminder of my contact details are below.

Cllr Rosie Humphreys

11th May 2022

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