

## Ward councillor's report (Barby & Onley) October 2023

### Interim bus policy consultation

West Northants Council is developing a short-term bus policy which will enable local bus services to be maintained while a new Local Transport Plan is produced and then adopted by early 2025. The new Plan is a statutory document which will set out proposals for transport networks and projects for investment.

There is a comparison of West Northants spending on bus services with other East Midlands local authorities in the reports included in the consultation information. It scores low by comparison to others and our Council should take heed of the consultants' comment: *"the recent low levels of financial support for local buses from Northamptonshire County Council is a legacy budget which WNC may need to address if it is to meet the core public transport needs of its communities."* Parish councils and residents are encouraged to give their views. [Give us your views on the interim bus policy priorities - West Northamptonshire Council - Citizen Space](#)

### Active Travel

There have been considerable delays in the Council completing an Active Travel Strategy and officers are now focussing on developing a Local Transport Plan. As the Plan will not be adopted until 2025 an Interim Active Travel Strategy is being developed which will outline the priorities for the next eighteen months. Making walking and cycling routes a priority will be key to the Council's commitments to be net zero in its operations by 2030 and those of its residents and businesses by 2045.

The draft Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy also commits to enhancing active travel opportunities through the development of new Local Transport Plan and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs). Consultation on the Daventry LCWIP continues to be delayed, but is likely to be by the end of this year.

At the meeting of full council last month a Labour motion to tackle air pollution was supported. Among the measures agreed to are the development of clean air policy as early as possible in 2024 and piloting a programme with local schools to promote active travel and reduce car idling. A Liberal Democrat motion to ensure that all council-decision making is compatible with the goal of a zero carbon council by 2030 also received cross-party support. [Agenda for Council on Thursday 28th September 2023, 5.00 pm - West Northamptonshire Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

### West Northants Sustainability Report

The first annual Sustainability report was brought to the cabinet meeting last month and highlights the progress made in the Council's sustainability commitments in the last financial year. [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 19/09/2023 18:00 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#) One of the proposals mentioned in the section on Energy is the Council's programme to assess the feasibility of installing large scale solar farms on its assets. This would enable the Council to secure its own energy demand from renewable energy by 2030.

## **Draft Local Plan**

The cabinet report mentioned above includes a section on the new Local Plan. It states that sustainable development “*will be a golden thread running through the plan and planning policy is currently working with other services and stakeholders to ensure that policies can achieve quality sustainable development across the authority*”. This ongoing work with other services and stakeholders is unfortunately delaying the publication of the draft local plan, which for many months WNC councillors understood to be opening for public consultation this month. The date has now been deferred to February 2024. In particular there has been a delay in completing the Housing Needs and Economic Assessment (HENA) which will underpin future housing and employment numbers and policies.

## **Northamptonshire Children’s Trust – budgetary pressures**

Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT) provides children’s social care services across both West and North Northamptonshire Councils. Both Councils are forecast a significant demand led pressure amounting to over £22m, for which West Northants’ share is £14m for this financial year. This is the result of spiralling demand led pressures – the increased cost of complex placements, higher staff costs and the reliance on agency staff and additional demand. The lack of suitable residential provision for some placements means that an individual placement can cost in excess of £500,000 per year.

Last month’s Cabinet report outlining these financial pressures referred to placement savings totalling £1.3m as undeliverable this year. However at this month the Cabinet is being asked to approve the purchase of a property in Northampton for use as a children’s home to be managed by NCT. This would result in a net annual saving of £919k, which would be some mitigation against the continuing financial risk presented by placement demand and complex placements.

## **Community Grant Funding**

A new round of funding opened at the beginning of this month for voluntary and community sector projects. Grants from £100-£1,500 are available for new or existing projects or services which create additional volunteering opportunities. These can be one-off events or regular fixtures. Registered charities, voluntary or community groups, constitutionalised clubs or not-for-profit organisations are invited to submit an expression of interest. More details on the link: [Community Funding Grants | West Northamptonshire Council](https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/community-funding-grants) ([westnorthants.gov.uk](https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk))

## **Consultation on Library Service Strategy**

An 8 week public consultation has opened seeking views on how to improve West Northants 18 existing libraries for all ages and backgrounds. The new Strategy will set the ambitions for the service for the next 4 years. [Have your say on the Library Service Strategy 2023-2027 - West Northamptonshire Council - Citizen Space](https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/citizen-space)

Cllr Rosie Humphreys

6<sup>th</sup> October 2023

