

WNC Report Form Alison Eastwood Unitary Councillor -Monday 11th March 2024

Budget

On Thursday 22nd February, West Northamptonshire Council set the Council Tax budget for 2024/2025. This will protect frontline services and tackle significant financial challenges and I am very pleased to say that it is a balanced budget.

In common with local authorities across the country, the Council is facing severe financial pressures due to the current economic climate, high inflation rates driving up running costs and an increase in demand for services, particularly around supporting children in care and vulnerable adults. This area is the most challenging because we have to provide care come what may and that means budgeting as such is impossible because we just don't know what each year will bring.

Despite these pressures, the authority has set a balanced revenue budget for 2024/2025 of £889.5m (£414.5m excluding the Dedicated Schools Grant).

The budget includes a Council Tax increase of 4.99%, which is in line with the Government's threshold, generating extra funding of around £13.1m – with 2% of the increase going towards funding adult social care and representing an average increase on a Band D property of £84.52 a year, the equivalent of £1.63 a week.

The approved budget follows a strong commitment to making services as efficient as possible and reviewing income streams in order to maintain and protect services, with £24.1m of productivity proposals put forward.

The 2024/2025 budget will see WNC invest over £164m in its capital programme, to improve local infrastructure and assets such as land, buildings and equipment.

The Council is also set to spend an estimated £20m in public health support, which is funding from the Government in the year ahead to progress a range of schemes aimed at improving residents' wellbeing, reducing health inequalities and continuing to support communities.

Within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) WNC plans to invest £59m of capital funds in social housing during the next financial year. This investment forms part of a total five-year capital programme, which amounts to £287m. Also built into the plans is investment in decarbonisation, which is estimated to impact on 500 homes.

Your precept arrangements should have been agreed within your individual Parishes and increased accordingly

£162 million worth of Government funding

Announced on 26th February, £162 million worth of Government funding will be allocated to West Northamptonshire Council from 2025/26 to increase local transport connections over a 7 years.

The announcement from the Government's Local Transport Fund, means that £4.7 billion worth of investment, reallocated from HS2 funding, will, from April 2025, be invested in Midlands and the North to improve local transport connections particularly across smaller cities, towns, and rural areas

“It is fantastic news that from 2025 West Northamptonshire will benefit from over £162 million worth of funding which we can inject into the local transport network to make a tangible impact for our residents.

Over the coming months, WNC will work with the Department for Transport to consider how to best utilise this funding to ensure it makes a real difference for West Northamptonshire. The Government will provide guidance to enable investment in transformative and ambitious transport improvements focussing on better connectivity within our towns and villages and improve everyday local journeys.

WNC is currently in the process of developing the Local Transport Plan and bus strategy for West Northamptonshire which will play a key role in shaping how this funding can be best utilised. You can follow the progress of the Local Transport Plan via: www.westnorthants.gov.uk.

Local plan progress

First Rural Settlement Hierarchy – the WNC planning policy team has been in touch with you about a key part of the local plan – the Rural Settlement Hierarchy. To collect evidence via a questionnaire which you have already received.

Secondly, the next local plan is going out to consultation very soon and there will be a lot of information going around and it's important to keep track of this because it will affect the whole domestic and commercial development plans for several years to come. The new version will be one plan rather than the four that exist and the pages reduce from more than 900 to near 400.

Local Planning updates

Briefing received from senior planning officer Dan Callis very recently - The applicant for **Shacks Barn** on the Silverstone/Whittlebury border submitted updated traffic modelling information the about three weeks ago and this was forwarded to National Highways and WNC Highways the same week. The information is on the website. The earliest the application could come to committee is April.

Regarding the other main AL sites, **DHL** is still receiving objections from National Highways and WNC Highways has not completed its report following the latest traffic information submitted. **Bell Plantation** is still working on its traffic modelling.

HS2 continues to cause havoc in our lives and as you are aware the line has been curtailed and now runs between Birmingham, and Royal Oak (London). There is an on-going ruckus on the B 4525 between Helmdon and Crowfield with Highways investigating as we speak. There are further problems at Boddington-The Wormleighton Road will not be closed in the immediate future whilst Bridge issues are being resolved. The Greatworth T has finally re-opened with a speed limit of 40 MPH

Regeneration is going on in Northampton around Market Square, Abingdon Park, the Cultural Quarter, De La Pre Abbey and Fish Street

The National Museum has been re-arranged to include the Museum of Leather; and the exciting Vivienne Westwood exhibition has opened. I would encourage you to visit the Mackintosh house at Derngate 78, the wonderful new glass extension has been completed, and the Restaurant re-vamped serving delicious afternoon teas.

A Choir fest convenes this month, followed by a full programme of concerts including James Arthur who will be performing in June “A Perfect Day” arts and culture@news.eesthants.gov.uk

Sport; WNC will be one of eight hosts for the Women’s Rugby World Cup. Three weekend matches are to take place at Franklin Gardens. The Council continues to partnership with British Cycling - OFF road coaching will be delivered at Northants Bike Park. Don’t forget the marvellous bike facility for children at Lower Boddington. WNC are in the process of on-boarding volunteers for a new “well-being” walks programme.

On May 2nd we go to the polls to elect our new Commissioner of Police, fire and Ambulance Stephen Mold will not now be standing. You will shortly be received your election papers

A new school @ Tiffield near Towcester has opened, catering for children who are on the Autistic Spectrum.

Worldclass sports has announced that we will be hosting the GRAND PRIX until 2035. A feather in our cap. This now takes Silverstone Racetrack into its 9th decade.

Grants of up to £10,000 have been awarded to the voluntary and community sector for the project to alleviate youth and knife crime in our local communities

Here endeth the annual report; May I wish you all a productive and safe 2024-2025