

Potterspurty Annual Parish Assembly

13 April 2022

Report from West Northamptonshire councillor

The main thing to report is that West Northamptonshire Council has come into existence! And has completed its first year.

As you know, Potterspurty falls in the Deanshanger ward, and is represented by myself, Ken Pritchard and Ian McCord. As a newcomer to the council, I am very grateful to Ken and Ian for their support.

The council has set its budget for 2022/3. At the Council Meeting on 24 February, there were questions asked about the level of reserves, which are higher than would normally be regarded as necessary, and a number of suggestions made on things that reserves should be spent upon. However, as we enter probably the most uncertain years in most of our memories, a high level of reserves does not strike me as a bad thing.

One key point in the budget is that WNC has set a minimum wage of £10 per hour for its staff, which is slightly above the defined 'living wage'. Another is that provision has been made for restoring bus subsidies (£100,000 per annum ongoing, with a further £215,000 for this year only). Consultation will be undertaken on how this budget is to be spent.

WNC is gearing up to play its part in the Homes for Ukraine scheme, in which the council's role is vetting of homes and hosts, and providing immediate financial assistance. This is one of two schemes for accepting Ukraine refugees – the other is the Family Scheme, whereby refugees join family members already settled in the UK. The Afghan refugee scheme is ongoing, with between 350 and 400 individuals accommodated by WNC

Inevitably, the council tax bills have arrived! The key points are that the Band D increase has been kept to below £100 per year, and that harmonisation of council taxes across WNC will be undertaken in stages over three years.

Probably the issue concerning us most is the West Northants spatial strategy, which nominates Towcester and the Deanshanger Ward as potential locations for extensive new housing. I would like to thank everyone who responded to the consultation, and the parish councils who went out of their way to stimulate local engagement. The level of responses – about 1700 – was significant and probably more than was expected. A report on the consultation is expected to be available to the Cabinet in April.

We were disappointed that the proposal for green bin charging has become reality from April, despite being called in by Ian to the Place Scrutiny Committee.

Councillors had this year a small budget for giving grants to community organisations assisting recovery from the Covid period, and I am glad to say that it was possible to give a grant to support provision of breakfast boxes for children at John Hellins school. I have been told that this has contributed to an improvement in attendance by otherwise poorly-attending pupils.

We have tried to keep in touch by way of our 'Update' leaflets which set out to be factual and non-political, and are very grateful to local volunteers who have contributed to the distribution.

Outside Deanshanger ward, some activities worth special mention include:

- Colleagues in Silverstone and Brackley are working hard to mitigate the effects of construction of HS2;
- Funding has been secured for a major redevelopment of Northampton town centre and Market Square;
- Procurement of a new highways contract, expected to be let in June;
- Work in progress to unify the planning teams of the historic councils and fill vacancies.

As a new councillor, I must say that I have found the work very enjoyable and interesting, particularly planning issues, and the contact with parish councils. Can I conclude by saying how much I admire the dedication of your parish councillors and clerk in working to maintain the parish activities and environment, and all the other organisations contributing to the community from whom we are about to hear. I wish you all well after the difficult years from which we are just emerging and in the face of whatever events lie ahead of us.

William Barter

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