

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

WEST NORTHANTS COUNCIL – Deanshanger Ward – Cllr William Barter

Sometimes I have felt that local government is like elephants mating – there is a lot of noise and stamping, and then no outcome for a very long time. But after West Northants was set up, this seems like the year in which it is starting to give birth to something.

I'm thinking mainly of the new Local Plan, which has now reached draft form, and is to be submitted to cabinet, with a view to starting consultation in April. It has 389 pages, so I can't in all honesty say I have read it all, but the key take for me was that housing development to 2035 is to be concentrated in Northampton, with towns such as Towcester and Brackley having taken their share over the last few years. With respect to employment areas, though, Furtho Pit and Shack's Barn still feature, with further potential development around junctions 15 and 15A.

The other important news is the council budget. As is a legal requirement, we have set a balanced budget. You normally, thank you very much, manage to time this meeting just after the council tax bills come out! But though I haven't seen mine yet, there will be no surprise that it features a 4.99% increase. Otherwise, the budget balances through strict control of costs, though some of the biggest expenditure is demand-led, such as the Children's Trust where we simply have to pay what they spend. This sounds, and is, a big risk, and we as the council are working closely with the Trust to try and minimise it.

As to the current year, the expectation is of a small overspend, £3.5 million at the last count, or rather less than 1%, but the odd little things that improve on this tend to kick in at the last moment, so the likelihood is that it will improve by the end of the financial year.

There was a little flap in the news last week when it was reported that WNC had been given several million pounds to stop it going bankrupt! Well I don't think we were 'given' any money at all, and we weren't going to go bankrupt anyway. As far as I can see, what we were given was permission to transfer some of (our) unused capital spending to (our) current account.

Meanwhile, since the launch of the council, it is reckoned that around £90 million has been saved through economies of scale.

As to what we three councillors for this Ward have been up to, committees are where the real work gets done! Amongst other things, on the South Planning Committee, Ken and I have done our best to see that local views are put as well as the big picture, and Ian works hard as chair of the Corporate Scrutiny committee with his characteristically independent approach, and a mass of detailed knowledge that is probably unparalleled with WNC.

Cllr William Barter
12 March 2024