

## Annual Report From Ward Councillor Ian McCord



The ward covers the parishes of Alderton, Ashton, Cosgrove, Deanshanger, Grafton Regis, Old Stratford, Paulerspury, Passenham, Potterspury, Wicken, Whittlebury and Yardley Gobion. There is a small part of the Towcester Parish with the race course and the Towcester Relief Road in the ward also.

With the exception of Wicken and Deanshanger I have been to at least one parish meeting in all the ward in the past year. I am the first point of contact for the those underlined, Ken Pritchard and William Barter are the first points of contact for the rest of the ward. In the next twelve months this will remain unchanged.

I wish to place in the record my thanks to all the parish clerks and parish councillors in all the parishes for their help and support, your work helps us immensely and I am grateful for what you do all year round.

Planning is the single item that takes up most of my time as ward member. Throughout the year the AL5 application at Cosgrove / Old Stratford has been very active. The residents are well organised and thanks to their work with reports lobbying the Environment Agency have shifted in their thinking, on the risk of contamination and ordered new conditions. The flood risk is still being worked on by the applicants to try to overcome the objection from the EA.

A new ecology report covering all four seasons is underway which started Aug/Sept 23 and will not report before Sept 24. Once this report is submitted it will be consulted upon. This application will not be determined before the late autumn and I would not be surprised if there is no decision this year.

It is disappointing that the highways authorities do not consider that the traffic generated by this proposal to be an issue.



There has been a trend of applications for developments outside the village confines in all parts of the ward. Developers are using (arguably abusing) the provisions within the Local Plan part 2 to allow for exception sites. In Old Stratford, The Meadows site was refused at Planning Committee in December, I attended to speak against for many reasons but I felt the officers over played their hand and presented committee with a confusing report.

Self build applications seem to be the developers current favourite way of trying to get a permission when the answer would otherwise be 'no'. Paulerspury and Potterspury both have applications for self build using permission in principle followed by outline applications. These are very frustrating as the officers seem unable or unwilling to follow the policy as set out and give a lot of leeway.

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It is also rather odd that the Planning in Principle applications do not need to consider access to the site. The Paulerspury application, when it comes for the detail, will have to prove site access is acceptable, the rules seem odd, you have a permission in principle, but could still be refused later on highways access grounds !!

I will continue to raise these issues with officers and the committee at the appropriate times and hope we can enforce our planning polices without the need to invent new policy or stretch the existing policy to cover areas it was never intended to do.



Enforcement is also frustrating. There are a number of areas where a breach of conditions has occurred and WNC Enforcement take no action. The most egregious of these is the Towcester Relief Road. The roundabout at Cowpastures and the A5 was opened in early December. This should have been open 14 months earlier when 800 houses were occupied as the conditions demanded. The road should have been open end to end from the A5 to the A43 by the occupation of the 1016<sup>th</sup> occupation,

this was achieved in January 24, the completion date is now projected to be Autumn 25. I have raised enforcement cases with WNC, more in hope than expectation of any action from WNC. As WNC have tolerated planning condition breaches at 1 house, 512 houses and 800 houses I cannot see action for the breach at 1016.

I continue to monitor highways issues reporting pot holes, blocked gullies and fly tips as I come across them. The highways budget will have £1.9m less than last year for the repair of pot holes because some one-off funding was not renewed. I did try to move a budget amendment at full council to rectify this but despite support from all parties there was not sufficient support to pass the amendment. Sadly the official position of the council is the orderly management of decline of the roads network. There is probably a need to spend £8m a year more just to halt decline and then more still if we want to improve the condition.

Speed of response can be slow from WNC. The larger council I feel struggles to connect to members and communities in the way its smaller predecessors managed. There is still a culture within that allows Northampton matters to dominate something that I challenge at every opportunity.



WNC money is always tight. I chair the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee which does scrutinise the budget. This year the budget is set at £420m for WNC. 65% of this goes to Adult Social Care and Children's Care. Both of these were overspent in the year, the Children's Care budget being £30m over on a budget of £150m. WNC have to pick up approx 56% of that overspend. Most of this is due to placement costs where the costs of looking after children in care is astronomical.

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WNC has started building a new school at Tiffield for children with Special Educational Needs which I trust will help with the pressure in this area and the quality.

The later part of the year WNC has had a lot of negative publicity surround alleged domestic abuse by the leader, Jonathan Nunn. Earlier in the year members were sent some documents making allegations of domestic violence by Nunn on former wives and partners. During the March council meeting my colleague Paul Clark attempted to ask questions at full council and was silenced by the Chair. All 93 members and the press were sent the same documents just as that meeting started. Shortly after a stories appeared in Private Eye and the Daily Mail and then a special BBC report on radio and TV which claimed Nunn was responsible for more violence toward FIVE women. He has a conviction for assaulting his then wife in 2003 which he claimed was a one off, this reporting claimed otherwise.

Jonathan Nunn continues to deny all these allegations, however he resigned as Council Leader and recently has resigned he whip as a Conservative. The new leader will be Adam Brown who is currently the deputy leader.

Separately to this there has been a call for all councillors to be subject to an Enhanced DBS check especially those who sit on committees with oversight of social care for adults or children. I fully support such a call and have asked that these are done voluntarily by WNC in the absence of a change in the law to mandate it.

Looking forward to the next year, in May 25 WNC will have its second election on the new boundaries which will see Whittlebury and Ashton move into other seats. For the next year I plan to continue as this doing my bit to represent residents across the area.

Thank you.

Cllr Ian McCord  
Independent - Deanshanger Ward  
West Northants Council

May 2024

