

2022 Annual Councillors Report

Cllrs Rupert Frost, David Smith and Jo Gilford

Dear Parish Councillors and Residents,

On May 6th last year we were honoured and privileged to be elected as your three ward councillors and have really enjoyed working with you since that time. Much of the past year has been spent dealing with the impact of the pandemic and WNC distributed over £1.5m to residents in our half of the county suffering hardship over the winter period. We also provided financial support to thousands of local businesses across West Northants to help get them through the pandemic, distributing grants totalling nearly £6m.

Daventry's new "ARC" cinema complex opened in March and we will deliver our first year on budget, setting a balanced budget for the year ahead and making robust plans to tackle financial challenges. The council answers 27,000 calls a month, with an additional 9,000 enquiries per month being handled via email. However we are of the problems some of you have had with contacting council officials and hope that the new phone system will facilitate a better service. We should be in a position to distribute a list of direct telephone numbers in the near future.

Work on HS2 continues to progress and a new HS2 warden had been appointed to ensure the construction work is controlled. A new highways contractor will start in September (to be announced in June) and we are acutely aware of the road problems that have built up in our part of the county over the past decade. Our road signs need cleaning urgently and we know many of our roads have been damaged by heavy goods vehicles and that remedial work over the past few years has not necessarily fixed the problems. We will keep discussing them in your meetings and do all we can to get them fixed as soon as the new contractor takes over.

WNC and Oxfordshire County Council have jointly made arrangements with Stagecoach West to fund the 200 service on its current timetable until 27th August. We are liaising with Cllr Phil Larratt, Cabinet Member for Transport, and council officers to ensure a permanent solution is in place after that time.

We are aware of the problems many of you have experienced with planning issues and expect service levels to improve in the next year as a new IT system is implemented. Before WNC was formed each of the four previous planning authorities had their own processes and IT, ways of conducting planning committees, managing any call-in of applications, managing the public interface in terms of planning applications, and enforcement procedures. West Northamptonshire Council is developing a new housing strategy and we want to make sure that it covers the housing issues important to residents and stakeholders so are encouraging everyone to complete the survey on the our website. We welcome your views and comments on the four draft themes, along with the suggested priorities that will help deliver them.

We try to respond promptly to your emails and always aim to have at least one of us present at your parish council meetings. We look forward to seeing you again soon and if there is anything we can help with in the meantime do let us know.

With best regards Cllr Rupert Frost, Cllr David Smith and Cllr Jo Gilford

24 April 2022