

WNC Report to Silverstone Parish Council 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.

The capital investment in 2024-2025 includes:

£10m on external improvements

£11m on internal works improvements

£2.3m on disabled adaptations

£26m on new build programmes and major projects

£10m on buying back social housing and for spot purchases of suitable properties.

In addition to this the Council will spend approximately £65m on managing and maintaining the existing housing stock, which is funded primarily by Housing Rents received from current tenants.

As far as Silverstone's council tax is concerned and relating to a Band D property, the Precept increased by £4,718, which is 6.3% from £74,989 to £79,707, WNC's part increased by 4.99% from £1,689.06 to £1,773.33 with the parish part increasing from £63.69 to £66.87 that made the combined parish and WNC amount increase from £1,708.59 to £1,818.81 or 6.45%. The Police part went up by 5.10% to £306.04 and fire by 3.25% to £75.39. Making the total rise by 4.6% going from £2,118.99 to £2,221.63. In terms of weekly costs that is a rise from £40.75 to £42.72 of £1.97 a week calculated on 1/52nd.

£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.

A settlement hierarchy is when settlements (parishes) are put in an order and classified based on their size and/or the range of services that they provide for people. The higher up the hierarchy you go, there are fewer settlements but they increase in their size in terms of population and the number of services provided. This can also affect village confines to this must be looked at very carefully.

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.

Syresham Truck Stop. On 22nd January, the applicants submitted their response to outstanding matters, which is the first response since April last year. These cover highways and flood risk. You can see them on the WNC planning portal (under WNS/2022/2012/MAO). The responses are now being submitted to the highways authorities and flood authority for comment. It seems the earliest that the application could be brought to committee is March but more likely in April.

I mention these because, they go ahead some increase in traffic is probable on all local roads.

Dermot Bambridge