

Ward councillor's report (Barby & Onley) February 2023

West Northants Council's Final Budget 2023/24

Details of the final Budget 2023/24 going for approval to Cabinet next week are in the link: [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 13/02/2023 18:00 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#) While the average council tax band D property is rising by 4.99% over the whole of West Northants area in the old Daventry area the increase is 6.12% (p.111 of the report). This will amount to on average £97.67 annual increase. The Band D figure does not include the parish council precept or the Council Tax set for fire and police. Green waste charges are also proposed to rise from £42 per year to £55, affecting the majority of rural residents.

Inflation, global economic pressures caused by the war in Ukraine and significant cost and demand increases in Adult Social care, the Children's Trust and Home to School transport continue to place exceptional pressure on council finances. In the Budget report a commitment is made to maximise service efficiencies (totalling £3.2m) "in order to maintain and protect services as much as we possibly can."

The review on proposed revised car parking charges at Daventry and Brixworth country parks was announced by WNC on 24th January following public backlash. The charges as originally proposed – increasing the Daventry country park charge from £2.20 per day to £12 – are now back in the Budget report (p.188) in the list of 2023/24 fees and charges. Hourly charges are proposed to be £3 for 2 hours (in contrast to £2.20 if parking in Northampton); £4 for 4 hours and £6 for 6 hours. Residents and Daventry Town Council will be understandably worried that visitors to the country park will seek to avoid the charges by using residential roads.

Planning Service

The Daventry Area Planning Committee will meet for the first time since November next month at the Forum in Towcester as Lodge Rd Daventry is being closed down. Councillors have not been informed why the last three meetings have been cancelled and the Service is still experiencing challenges with staff vacancies, a backlog of hundreds of applications, a computer system that does not yet align all 3 legacy authorities planning portals and the disruption of all planning officers being moved to Towcester.

A Planning Advisory Service (PAS) report will be brought to Cabinet next month with recommendations for improving the Service. PAS is a consultancy for local authorities, directly funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government. The Council has also finally in post a permanent Assistant Director for Planning (having had an interim officer since last May) so looking forward let's hope that this year the service significantly improves for applicants, consultees and communities and existing staff will be under less pressure.

Cost of Living and rural households – short survey

The Rural Services Network and the Rural Issues Group of Citizens Advice are jointly running a survey to understand more about rural household budgets at, what is, a very difficult time for many. Research has shown that those living in rural areas face some extra costs and they want to explore the impacts for households. The survey takes little time to

complete and is open until 31st March: [Rural Households Survey on the Cost of Living \(surveymonkey.co.uk\)](https://surveymonkey.co.uk)

New ward boundaries for West Northants

The consultation on the draft proposals was due to open this month, but has now been postponed to 7th March, running until 15th May.

WNC emissions report

Another report going to Cabinet next week (see link above p.405) is WNC's first published account of its CO2e emission levels. WNC has launched Sustainable West Northants and has committed to being net zero by 2030. In order to plan for, deliver and show evidence of progress towards this goal a robust set of baseline data is needed. The report has been shared with Climate Action West Northants, an independent group who have described the findings as a "significant achievement and a strong base for delivering actions to cut emissions. CA-WN looks forward to seeing how it influences the council's decision making and spending."

Cllr Rosie Humphreys

9th February 2023