

## **Ward councillor's report (Barby & Onley) November 2024**

### **Barby Sporting Club planning applications 2023/5783/MAF WND/2021/0777**

The case officer gave me a brief update last week on the application for additional earth bunds, he is still awaiting information on ecology and highway matters. His report for committee could be ready after Christmas, however he was unable to give a specific month in the new year. He will not make his recommendation as to the application to extend the shooting hours until after the bund application has been determined at committee.

### **WNC Budget 2025-26**

WNC will publish its draft budget after next month's Cabinet meeting, when it will then go out for public consultation. The budget setting process is ongoing and the financial gap that needs to be bridged is £38.6m. For this year's budget there is an overspend of £3.8m after the use of £10.1m general budget contingencies.

With the rising operational costs and increase in demand for statutory services, experienced by local authorities nationally, WNC is engaging its workforce in a new "savings initiative." All 2,500 staff were recently briefed about potential opportunities for employees to take voluntary redundancy, flexible retirement and reduction in working hours, should they wish to do so. These options would be based on business needs to ensure that that WNC continues to deliver essential services. Over 130 staff have so far expressed their interest in the scheme.

Like other councils WNC is dealing with a huge rise in demand for SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) provision and adult and children's social care. There is not only an increase in numbers but an increase in the cost and complexity of the care packages. Not yet four years into becoming a unitary council WNC is feeling the financial strain of these increased demands as next year's budget shortfall shows.

### **New SEND school for West Northants**

This desperately needed new school will cater for up to 250 pupils aged 4 to 18 who have special educational needs and disabilities. There will be a range of specialist facilities at the site in Tiffield, near Towcester including a sensory room and large outdoor play areas. Construction should be completed by summer of next year.

Meanwhile WNC's poor performance in providing education and health care plans (EHCPs) for children requiring extra support within the prescribed timescales continues to be highlighted. Recently a payment of £11,000 was awarded to a family after their child missed three years of school owing to a 39 week delay in issuing her EHCP and then failing to provide a suitable school for her. Councils have a legal obligation to complete an EHCP within 20 weeks of a request. Last year just 67 of 645 plans issued by WNC were completed within six months. A further £1.35m has been invested in SEND provision and extra staff recruited.

## **Food waste recycling**

In last month's report I gave the figure of £6m as the saving to WNC if all residents used their food caddies (only a third do). The figure is in fact £2.6m (the larger figure was an error) but it could still of course be a considerable saving. I met with parish councillors from Kilsby, Braunston, Crick and Yelvertoft to share ideas as to how to encourage more residents both to use their caddies and to reduce their food waste. Around a quarter of the food purchased in the UK is wasted, costing the average family £700 per year.

Cllr Rosie Humphreys

11<sup>th</sup> November 2024