

MONTHLY NEWS REPORT APRIL 2025



E-Newsletter Issue 4/2025
Councillor Steve Clarke with Charley Oldham, Headteacher
At Cogenhoe Primary School
York Avenue, Cogenhoe,
26 March 2025

Contents

NEWS REPORT APRIL 2025.....	5
Monthly Highlights	5
PARISH MEETINGS, VISITS AND CASEWORK	8
Leys Lane Great Houghton.....	8
Great Houghton Street Lamps	8
Cogenhoe Community Lunch 3 March 2025.....	8
Shrove Tuesday Supper, Yardley Hastings 4 March 2025.....	9
Cogenhoe Community Help Desk 6 March 2025.....	9
Fly Tipping in Castle Ashby 10 March 2025	9
Out & About in Great Houghton 10, 11 & 12 March 2025.....	10
Winter Warmers Little Houghton 12 March 2025	10
Farming Motion Approved by Council 13 March 2025	10
Great Houghton Coffee Morning 14 March 2025.....	12
Cogenhoe Community Lunch 17 March 2025	12
Little Houghton Parish Lunch 20 March 2025	12
Climate Action West Northamptonshire, 20 March 2024	13
CA-WN Climate Cafe	13
Regular CA-WN events	13
Denton Coffee Morning 21 March 2025	13
Spring Flower Show 22 March 2025	14
Great Houghton Overgrown Cycle Path and Broken Steps 25 March 2025	14
Cogenhoe Primary School Choir & Coffee Morning 26 March 2025	14
Grange Park Footpath Completed 26 March 2025.....	15
Cogenhoe Community Afternoon Tea with the Primary School Choir on 31 March 2025	16
Cogenhoe Mill	16
Grange Park Neighbourhood Development Plan (GPNDP).....	17
Main Street & Whiston Road, Denton.....	17
Fix My Street Cogenhoe 3585915	18
Carriageway Repairs Northampton Road, Denton.....	18
Fix My Street 6624260/7289767 Denton	18
Fix My Street Denton 7185760, 7217765, 7048081 & 7168199	18
Fix My Street 7304127/6958077 Brafield on the Green.....	19
Fix My Street 6881801 Crow Lane	19
CONSULTATIONS.....	20
Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment.....	20
FINANCE ADMINISTRATION AND TRANSFORMATION	20
Cost of living	20
The Household Support Fund.....	20
WNC Four Years On	20
Thriving Place	21
Thriving People	21
An Efficient and Enabling Council.....	22
REGULATORY SERVICES	22
Local Elections to be Held Next Month	22
New Public Mortuary	23

Young People to Represent West Northants in Parliament.....	24
RURAL SERVICES NETWORK (RSN)	24
Update on the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF)	24
PLANNING MATTERS	25
Planning Appeals.....	25
Determined or Cancelled:.....	25
Pending.....	26
WNC Approved Local Development Scheme 2025	26
West Northamptonshire Council Housing Targets	27
Land Use Consultation.....	27
Planning & Infrastructure Bill-CPO Guidance	28
Three Statutory Consultees Stripped of their Role	29
Predisposition, predetermination or bias.....	29
HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS	30
WNC Tackles Antisocial Behaviour & Tenancy Fraud	30
Residents with Greatest Housing Need Continue to be Prioritised	30
ENVIRONMENT	31
More Changes to Impact Farmers.....	31
The Resilience and Innovation Northants (RAIN) Project	32
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	33
Family Support in West Northamptonshire	33
Age UK Northants Open Day.....	33
Community Responders Age UK Northants.....	34
Wellbeing West Northants.....	34
DSPG Volunteer Drivers Scheme.....	34
EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES	35
Term Dates for West Northamptonshire Schools.....	35
Spring term 2025.....	35
Summer term 2025.....	35
Academic year 2025 to 2026	36
Autumn term 2025.....	36
Spring term 2026.....	36
Summer term 2026.....	36
Potential Financial Crisis Over Send Funding.....	36
Northamptonshire Schools Recognised in National Poetry Competition	37
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & GRANT FUNDING.....	37
Third Party Grant Funding Opportunities.....	37
Well Northants Programme shortlisted for LGC Award	37
TRANSPORT & HIGHWAYS.....	38
Local Transport Plan.....	38
The three themes and six objectives.....	39
Improved access to Rural Bus Services.....	39
Queen Eleanor Interchange Improvements.....	40
POLICE FIRE & CRIME COMMISSIONER	40
What's Happening in Your Area	40
Emergency Service Fun Day 6 August 2025	40

CULTURE, HERITAGE & SPORT	41
Pop In Wednesdays	41
Help Honour West Northamptonshire’s Historical Icons.....	41
West Northants to Honour 80 th Anniversary of VE Day.....	41
Women’s Touch Rugby Series from 22 April 2025	42
Hit N Mix Free Tennis Sessions for Kids	42
Girls Water Polo	43
Games World is Coming to Royal & Derngate	43
Women’s Rugby World Cup	43
Calling All Performers, Artists & Vendors	43
Fan Zone Themes:	43

NEWS REPORT APRIL 2025

Monthly Highlights

Sam Simons, Service Manager Commissioning & Contract Management, WNC Highways and Transport met Great Houghton Parish Council on site in Leys Lane to review the new extended footpath and longstanding problems. We have asked the WNC design team to create an option to complete the outstanding actions as discussed. I will chase the outcome, but I am hopeful that we will have an adequate way forward. Once I have further news, I shall be in touch.

Following my recent enquiries on behalf of Great Houghton Parish Council, I have investigated whether their street lights have been modified by WNC to increase the level of brightness. See my Monthly Report.

On 25 March 2025, I was informed about the problem with the overgrown cycle path and broken steps used by local residents of Great Houghton to cycle to work along the old disused railway line. I asked Simon Bowers, WNC Assistant Director, Assets & Environment to make contact with Mike Billingham, Clerk to Great Houghton Parish Council and Sarah Williams, Chairman of Great Houghton Parish Council with a copy to me to explain how WNC intends to resolve this outstanding matter. I have since been advised that there are two strands of work required. The broken steps will be completely repaired by the end of April 2025. The regular maintenance of the overgrown cycle path is now included in the ongoing landscape maintenance by adding this area to regular maintenance under the Environmental Services Contract with Veolia/Idverde. On the landscaping, it has been added to the contract as tree belt or spinney, which calls for fairly light maintenance, essentially cutting back a couple of times a year. In a semi-natural environment like that this seems appropriate.

On 13 March 2025, in support of West Northamptonshire farmers, I proposed a motion to Council about the tax change affecting farmers which will be effective from April 2026. This was seconded by Councillor Daniel Lister and approved by Council. Please read the text of my proposal in my Monthly Report.

On 20 March 2025, I attended the Climate Action West Northamptonshire CA-WN, on line forum. CA-WN is a volunteer-run residents' group aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve biodiversity, and build community resilience to the effects of a changing climate. The guest speaker was Alan Ryan, Programme Manager Flood and Water Team, WNC. He was supported by Sarah Parr, Project Manager, Environment & Planning, WNC. We heard a lot about what WNC is doing in relation to Flood and Water Management including the RAIN project which I have covered in a separate entry in my Monthly Report.

The work on the Grange Park Footpath commenced on 11 March 2025. I am delighted to advise you that the work was completed on 26 March 2025.

In response to my recent enquiries, I have heard from Geoffrey Smith, the Chief Executive of Meadow Bay Villages regarding Cogenhoe Mill, wherein he says: "Please rest assured that we remain fully committed to managing the site responsibly and respectfully. The Billing team continues to retain ownership and responsibility for the site, including the small marina, chalet, and the Millhouse (former pub), ensuring it remains secure, safe, and maintained. We understand the uncertainty the notification has created for our current residents. Although we have given Cogenhoe Mill residents approximately six months' notice to vacate, we've proactively offered to relocate their units at our expense, provided they confirm their intention within two months. Once relocations are confirmed, we will promptly provide a clear and definitive management plan. Separately, we also plan to consult with the Environment Agency at a suitable stage to

discuss mutual considerations for managing these assets and future arrangements.” Allan Clark, Billing General Manager has agreed to keep me informed.

The Grange Park Neighbourhood Development Plan (GPNDP) is now available for public consultation under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. See my Monthly Report

This month there are a number of Fix My Street escalations and new road closures in my Monthly Report.

On 4 March 2025, following public consultation, Cabinet approved the amendments made to the Local Transport Plan, which was subsequently adopted at Full Council.

I have received a great deal of interest in my Third-Party Grant Funding document, which I publish quarterly and the April 2025 version will be available next week. Please contact me if you wish to receive this document on a regular basis.

West Northamptonshire Health and Wellbeing Board have produced a draft Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PHA) report. We are now seeking feedback before we finalise it. The Council and its public health and wellbeing boards have a legal requirement to look at local needs and identify gaps in pharmaceutical services and produce an evidence base and statement of need a PNA. The Consultation closes on 1 May 2025.

West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) will be four years old next month, and plans to continue to improve outcomes for communities over the next four years.

The unitary authority, which replaced the previous district, borough and county councils on 1 April 2021, has been making solid progress against its priorities since it was formed as “a fresh start for delivering better public services across West Northamptonshire.” See my Monthly Report.

On Thursday, 1 May 2025 voters across West Northamptonshire will go to the polls to elect their local representatives. On 3 April 2025, the Council published a Statement of Persons Nominated, listing all individuals who will be standing for the West Northamptonshire Council and the Parish or Town Council seats. Voters will go to the polls to elect West Northamptonshire Council’s councillors in the unitary authority’s second election since its creation in 2021. This year’s Polling Day on Thursday 1 May will see changes to voter arrangements after a recent electoral review reduced the number of West Northants councillors to be elected from 93 to 76 and with new ward boundaries across the area. Town and parish council elections are also set to be held in some areas of West Northamptonshire on 1 May 2025.

On 4 March 2025 work officially began on a new state-of-the-art public mortuary in Northampton. It is due to be completed in autumn 2025.

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs is consulting on changes to Land Use. The consultation states that: “England has limited land with growing demands being made of it. This consultation explores the land use changes implied by commitments to restore nature, support food production, improve climate resilience and deliver new housing and infrastructure.” See my Monthly Report.

According to the Government's CPO guidance it will now be easier to bring forward schemes using a CPO. Read about the impact of these changes in my Monthly Report.

Three Statutory Consultees have been stripped of their role in the new Planning & Infrastructure Bill. See my Monthly Report.

West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) has approved a new policy strengthening its commitment to tackling anti-social tenants and preventing tenancy fraud. The policy also promotes lease sustainment and supporting tenants to maintain their homes to avoid unnecessary evictions.

A full review of the Housing Allocations Scheme will take place this year following its first year of operation. See my Monthly Report.

From April 2025, the west-based Strong Start team will transition from WNC Libraries to join and enhance the development of Family Hubs. This will ensure that families receive comprehensive support, from pregnancy through to young adulthood, in a single, accessible location.

More volunteers are needed to ensure that the Denton Surgery Patients Group (DSPG) can grow its Volunteer Patient Transport Service. Driving and using public transport can be challenging for people with health conditions or restricted mobility. It's more than just transportation. It's offering them a lifeline. If you are interested in finding out more then you can e-mail the coordinator@dspg.me or telephone 07506866298.

We have a new Local Transport Plan (LTP), which sets out West Northamptonshire Council's priorities for the next five years and beyond for improving how people and goods travel, both within and through the area.

On 31 March 2025, work started on the long-awaited scheme to improve the Queen Eleanor Interchange in Northampton and it will continue until December 2025.

Do let me know about your plans for the Commemoration of the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day, marking the end of World War II in Europe on 8 May 1945. This significant milestone provides an opportunity to reflect on the bravery and sacrifice of those who fought for freedom, as well as the resilience of communities during the war. I have already been invited to a number of events and I intend to attend as many as I can across Cogenhoe and the Houghtons.

There are lots of interesting activities/events in my section on Culture, Heritage and Sport that you or your families can join over the next few months.

As one of your prospective candidates for election I shall be out and about in Cogenhoe & the Houghtons over the next few weeks. If you see me on my travels do chat to me so that I can catch up with you. You can contact me at any time, and I will listen and provide support when needed.

Many of you will know me from the 3,000+ community events I have attended over the last few years, or my presence on Facebook. For those that don't, then I look forward to meeting you on the doorstep.

As this is my last report of this administration, I would like to thank you for your support and to say that it has been a privilege and a pleasure to serve you and tackle the many challenges you face. I have worked tirelessly to address your needs and concerns, and if elected on 1 May 2025, I will continue to fight for the issues that matter whether it is protecting what is special about our rural area or improving local services.

I look forward to meeting you all again soon.

All the Best, Steve

www.facebook.com/stephen.clarke.31924.

PARISH MEETINGS, VISITS AND CASEWORK

Leys Lane Great Houghton

Sam Simons, Service Manager Commissioning & Contract Management, WNC Highways and Transport met Great Houghton Parish Council on site in Leys Lane to review the new extended footpath and longstanding problems.

It was regrettable, that I was not able to join them due to a family emergency. However, they were able to express their concerns about the need for a safe footway for pedestrians seeking to access their village hall and playing field avoiding the risk from traffic turning left into Leys Lane.



The concern was that the proposed new footpath (in red) was to continue into the mouth of Leys Lane thereby providing appropriate pedestrian safety at this junction. Regrettably the current work being carried out is short of the junction and therefore likely that pedestrians will continue to be exposed to risk. The parish council intends to undertake the further resurfacing of the remaining Leys Lane (in green) up to the entrance to the car park and the Anglian Water Compound. This to also include some form of pedestrian safe footway (in Blue). Sam Simons has asked the design team to create an option to complete the outstanding actions as discussed. I will chase the outcome, but I am hopeful that we will have an adequate way forward. Once I have further news, I shall be in touch.

Great Houghton Street Lamps

I have been asked by Great Houghton Parish Council to investigate whether their street lights have been modified by WNC to increase the level of brightness. They are of the opinion that the settings may have been changed without consulting with the Parish Council. The clerk advises me that the street lights were changed to LED in 2015. I have passed this enquiry on to WNC to investigate and advise me accordingly. Once I have further news, I shall be in touch.

Cogenhoe Community Lunch 3 March 2025

On 3 March 2025, we had an unexpected surprise of fish and chips for the Cogenhoe Community Lunch. It was delicious and more than just a meal. Fish and Chips embodies the British Spirit of pragmatism and ingenuity, making the most of readily available ingredients to create a delicious and satisfying meal. So when it became clear that the Café would be unable to deliver the expected meal at short notice, Deborah & Jon organised a great alternative.



The dish reminded some of us of family outings and seaside holidays. Indeed, Gunter and I talked about our individual memories of Fish and Chips whilst on holiday in Whitby. A special thank you to all who made the lunch possible and especially to Deborah, Jon and Julie without whom the event would not have been such a success. It is a very good event which runs every 2 weeks and is the perfect opportunity to chat with others whilst having something to eat. The Community Lunch runs from 12.30 -2.30 pm and costs £7 but you do need to let Deborah (07512 045418) know beforehand.

Shrove Tuesday Supper, Yardley Hastings 4 March 2025

On Tuesday 4 March 2025, I attended the Yardley Hastings Shrove Tuesday Supper at the Yardley Hastings Memorial Hall. All proceeds were to go towards the upkeep of St Andrews Church in the village. We had a delightful 2-course Supper. The food was excellent with beef pie or a vegetarian option, fresh vegetables, mashed potatoes and gravy, followed by a wonderful choice of puddings, including pancakes, which were delicious. Once inside we knew that it was going to be a well-attended evening as we were so warmly welcomed by lots of people upon arrival. Holding a Shrove Tuesday Supper has long been a part of the Yardley Hastings calendar of social events.



It was great to catch up with folks including Charlotte, who had saved our tickets. A special thank you to Debbie for the quiz, Simon, Emma, and others who were such great company and provided lots of help with the answers for the quiz using the letters in “Shrove Tuesday”. However, the answer to “A chocolate bar” kept us all guessing, but we got there in the end. Thank you to everyone who came together to make the Shrove Tuesday Supper so successful.

Cogenhoe Community Help Desk 6 March 2025

On 6 March 2025, I met with Deborah Rush, Clerk to Cogenhoe Parish Council at the Tea Room, Cogenhoe where she was delivering the weekly Denton Surgery prescriptions and providing support from the Parish Help Desk. Whilst there, I enjoyed catching up with Pat and I wished her all the best for her surgery, which was pending. We also heard that Svitlana, our Ukrainian guest will be leaving the village shortly. We wish her all the best too as she settles elsewhere in West Northamptonshire.



It's the last day for the Tea Room on 7 March 2025 and they will have a farewell to thank everyone who had supported them. Deborah clarified that the Community Lunch would continue as usual and that the next Lunch was on Monday 17 March 2025 at 12.30pm in the York Room. Despite the Tea Room closure all events in the York Room will continue. Bring a Packed Lunch for your lunch on a Wednesday if you intend to stay for all activities-Games and Crafters sessions in the morning and Singing for Fun on the 1st, 3rd and 5th weeks in the afternoon. The Community Lunch Group on 31 March 2025 will meet at 1.30pm in the York Room for Afternoon Tea and a Performance by Cogenhoe School Choir. If you are interested in any of the events then please register your interest with Deborah on 07512 045418, or e-mail clerk@cogenhoeandwhiston-pc.gov.uk.

Fly Tipping in Castle Ashby 10 March 2025

On 10 March 2025, I was alerted to some fly tipping including asbestos along the road to the Castle Ashby Fishing Lake. The hazardous waste was dumped on the road weeks ago and reported to the police who partially closed off the road. In order to get past the closure a lot of cars drove over parts of the asbestos loosening some of it from the sheets. It was then moved to the verge.

On 10 March 2025, I escalated the matter to the WNC, Waste and Cleansing Manager highlighting the fact that asbestos was present, as I understood that we needed to notify the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). On 11 March 2025, I received confirmation that WNC had received the report of the fly-tipping and that a specialist contractor would complete the job by the end of this week and that we did not have to inform the HSE.



WNC takes environmental crime seriously and is committed to holding offenders accountable for their actions. It is interesting to note that if a council can trace dumped asbestos to the home or building owner, then it is the owner and not the person/contractor dumping the asbestos that is liable for prosecution. Owners should verify any person about to undertake any modernisation of property. This includes checking that the person/company have a waste transfer licence for completing the works.



As the rubbish was blocking the road the Police initially closed the road as there was a danger to road users. Fly-tipping is unsightly, poses a risk to wildlife and can pollute our waterways - it's also expensive to clear. It's not just the number of fly-tips we are seeing which is of concern but the scale. Some of the most recent incidents

have needed the hire of a grab truck to remove the waste, or in the case of asbestos, a specialist contractor will be brought in to ensure the material is collected and disposed of safely. All of this is at additional expense to the Council and our taxpayers.

Anyone witnessing fly-tipping or who finds dumped rubbish should not touch the items. Instead, incidents can be reported to the council online at <https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/fly-tipping> Or by using our WNC App, which has also been updated with the Report It feature. Now you can easily let us know when you've spotted fly-tipping using your phone. You can download the app for free through Google Play or the Apple Store.

Out & About in Great Houghton 10, 11 & 12 March 2025

I was out and about in Great Houghton from 10-12 March 2025. I received a warm welcome and met many residents. Great Houghton is a picturesque village with a rich history and a strong sense of community.



Winter Warmers Little Houghton 12 March 2025



On 12 March 2025, I joined residents at Little Houghton 'Winter Warmers' at the Village Hall. I enjoyed meeting everyone over a cup of coffee and some wonderful home baked cakes. A special thank you to Gill and Vicky who served us with coffee and cake throughout and to everyone who made the delicious cakes.

Little Houghton Village Hall, 50, Bedford Road, Little Houghton, NN7 1AB in the centre of the village is open from 2.00pm to 4.00pm every 2nd Wednesday during the winter months, and there is a warm welcoming space for a chat or quiet time with refreshments available. If you require any further information, then contact Gill on 01604 89100 or 07787 530646. In the meantime, save the date for a special VE Day Celebratory Afternoon on 7 May 2025.

Farming Motion Approved by Council 13 March 2025

On 13 March, I proposed a motion to Council about the tax change affecting farmers which will be effective from April 2026. This was seconded by Councillor Daniel Lister and approved by Council. The motion reads: "At a time when many farmers in West Northamptonshire are struggling with soaring costs and energy prices, this sudden tax rise will damage the future of their farms and destroy confidence in the agricultural community."

Council resolved:

- That Councillor Adam Brown, Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the 4 MPs, to outline the Council's dismay at the decision in the Budget to restrict Agricultural Property Relief (APR) and calls on the Government to stop the Family Farm

Tax;

- That WNC should agree to a series of reasonable and practical measures which will support West Northamptonshire farming communities; and
- That Councillor Rebecca Breese, Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs meets with local farmers and community representatives to consider ways the Council can provide support to them.

Owing to the length of time taken to reach this item (17) of Council business the Motion was taken as proposed and then voted on. If there had been a debate, here is the text of my Proposal:



“Thank you, Madam Chairman and fellow Councillors. I would invite you to support this motion. Under plans announced in the Budget, inherited agricultural properties worth more than £1m will be subject to inheritance tax at 20% from April 2026 - having previously been exempt. There is a higher threshold of £3m for couples passing on their farms.

The plans have sparked a wave of protests from farmers, but this Government argues the change is needed to discourage people such as foreign investors and hedge fund managers avoiding tax by buying up agricultural land. They are of the view that this has become the most effective way for the super-rich

to avoid paying their inheritance tax.

For years, the APR tax relief has enabled small family farms – including land used for crops or rearing animals, as well as farm buildings, cottages and houses - to be handed down through the generations. But one should beware of unintended consequences as this change adversely affects working farms. In this case perhaps there is a need for a working farm qualification exemption, which would target the policy directly at tax-avoiders.

There have been different claims about how many farms will be affected. These vary from as many as 70,000 overall to as few as 500 per year. The Country Land and Business Association (CLA) estimate that capping agricultural property relief at £1m could harm 70,000 UK farms, damaging family businesses and destabilising food security. Yet the Treasury says around 500 estates a year are expected to pay inheritance tax under the changes.

People look at the value of farms and think the farmers must be wealthy. But if the farm passes down to the next generation to continue to produce food, they never get to realise that capital. Indeed, farm profits are too low to meet the additional cost of inheritance tax. The Government’s own research suggests that an average farm last year made a profit of about £45,300, although that may be overstated as it is based on a survey that excluded farms that bring in the least money.

The shameless breaking of clear promises on agricultural property relief will snatch away the next generation’s ability to carry on producing British food, plan for the future and shepherd the environment. Farmers are struggling, often with their mental health. The isolation you feel when you are farming, and your family have farmed the same farm for generations and you might be the one who ends up losing the family farm, is utterly, utterly devastating.

Allowing non active farmers to be targeted instead would be far preferable to what we have got now. The new rules on inheritance tax are a complex financial issue and they're a complex emotional issue too; a farm is also a home and the 'inheritance' for many farmers' children, which isn't sitting in a bank account, it's folded into the fields, the livestock, the crops, and the years put into managing the land. Indeed, if farmers in West Northamptonshire are forced out of the industry "that's the next generation of farmers gone, and the food that supplies our residents gone."

Family-run farms and businesses are the backbone of our local economy. Our local farmers are food producers, employers, custodians of the land, and play a vital role in nature restoration and flood alleviation. Farming businesses in our region find themselves in a precarious financial position, as the costs of production have risen over recent years, whilst farm gate prices have stayed the same or gone down

We must strongly object to the changes to Agricultural Property Relief and Business Property Relief announced by the Labour government in the autumn Budget and join with North Northamptonshire Council in condemning them. I would urge Councillors to support this motion."

Great Houghton Coffee Morning 14 March 2025

On 14 March 2025, I attended the Community Coffee Morning run by the WI at the Great Houghton Village Hall. It is held on 2nd Friday of each month and a cup of tea or coffee with cake will cost you just £2.50.

I received a very warm welcome and spent an interesting time hearing about a number of local issues. Ability Bus representatives and James Earl, PCSO for this area were both present.

The next meeting of this friendly and welcoming group will be 11 April 2025, when I look forward to catching up with everyone again. Whilst it is organised by the WI it is open to all villagers, family and friends so please come along.



Cogenhoe Community Lunch 17 March 2025

On 17 March 2025, I attended the Community Lunch at the Village Hall, Cogenhoe. It is a very good event which runs every 2 weeks and is the perfect opportunity to chat with others whilst having something to eat. The next Community Lunch will be held on Monday 31 March 2025 at 1.30pm in the York Room for Afternoon Tea and a Performance by Cogenhoe School Choir. A special thank you to all who made the lunch possible this week and especially to Deborah and Julie without whom the event would not have been such a success.



Little Houghton Parish Lunch 20 March 2025

On 20 March 2025, I attended the Little Houghton Parish Lunch that takes place at St Mary's Church from 12-2pm on the third Thursday each month. The lunch was marvellous, and all the helpers were so kind and helpful. There was a choice of chicken with noodles or beef and dumplings with potatoes and vegetables followed by a selection of home-made puddings. The Little Houghton Community Lunch caters to the needs of the village, helping you stay connected and social. If you would like to come along and make new friends, share your stories, and have a good time with other people in your local community then contact Joy Mayhew on 01604 890498. A special thank you to all those who make the lunch and the short



service possible. There was a Community Litter Pick on 22 March 2025, 10.00 am-12.30 pm. We don't have a Parish Lunch in April because of Easter. The next Parish Lunch is on 15 May 2025.

Climate Action West Northamptonshire, 20 March 2024

On 20 March 2025, the online forum for action on climate in West Northamptonshire CA-WN took place. CA-WN is a volunteer-run residents' group aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve biodiversity, and build community resilience to the effects of a changing climate. If you would like to find out more then please contact them on: <https://exchange.ca-wn.org/> or Jane Wood who is the Chair and Secretary of CA-WN at jane@ca-wn.org The guest speaker was Alan Ryan, Programme Manager Flood and Water Team, WNC. He was supported by Sarah Parr, Project Manager, Environment & Planning, WNC. We heard a lot about what WNC is doing in relation to Flood and Water Management including the RAIN project which I have covered in a separate entry.



CA-WN Climate Cafe

Wednesday 9 April 8:00pm - 9:00pm (online)

Climate Cafes offer a safe space to share how you are feeling about climate change. There is no pressure to join in, no commitment to attend subsequent events, just conversation with like-minded people.

These monthly events are open to anyone, and we are often joined by people from other parts of the UK and even other parts of the world.

Register here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/1069829020399...>

Regular CA-WN events

2nd Wednesday of every month online Climate Café 8:00 - 9:00 pm

3rd Thursday of every month General Meeting (online) 7:45 - 9:00 pm

All Climate Cafes and general meetings are free and open to all. Find out more and register for free on Eventbrite <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/.../climate-action-west...>

Denton Coffee Morning 21 March 2025

On 21 March 2025, I joined over 30 residents at the regular Coffee Morning, which is held at St Margaret's Church, Denton, one of West Northants Warm Welcoming Spaces. The church is in the centre of the village, and it is open every day and provides a community space for everyone. Today, I couldn't fail to notice the display of spring flowers in the borders which brightened the entrance to the church.



St Margaret's Church holds coffee mornings, weekly craft sessions, quizzes, and many other general community events. Opening times: Thursday afternoons and Friday mornings. I enjoyed the croissant, coffee and of course the friendly chatter. It was good to catch up with Sheila, Pat, Diane and others. Today we had a Geography quiz where all the answers were countries. We struggled with question 4: Which three countries does the Namib desert span? And question 8: Which is the largest island in the world?

Spring Flower Show 22 March 2025

On Saturday 22 March 2025, I attended the Denton & District Gardening Club Spring Flower Show at Denton Village Hall from 2.30-4.30pm. It was exceptionally busy, and decisions had



already been made regarding the winning entries and we were able to walk around the hall spotting the 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes. There was a delightful display of daffodils, primroses, tulips and other plants.



It was great to catch up with Mark, Kay and Ralph from Little Houghton as well as Caroline, Muriel, Phillipa, Sheila and Pat from Denton. Elaine and many other friends were there from Hackleton Brafield, Denton and other villages. Today was a regular, popular date and venue for experienced gardeners. Well done to all who made the event such a success.

Great Houghton Overgrown Cycle Path and Broken Steps 25 March 2025

On 25 March 2025, when I was informed about it, I escalated the problem with the overgrown cycle path and broken steps used by local residents of Great Houghton to cycle to work along the old disused railway line. I



asked Simon Bowers, WNC Assistant Director, Assets & Environment to make contact with Mike Billingham, Clerk to Great Houghton Parish Council and Sarah Williams, Chairman of Great Houghton Parish Council with a copy to me to explain how WNC intends to resolve this outstanding matter. I have since been advised that there are two strands of work required. The broken steps will be completely repaired by the end of April 2025. The regular maintenance of the overgrown cycle path is now included in the ongoing landscape maintenance by adding this area to regular maintenance under the Environmental Services Contract with Veolia/Idverde. On

the landscaping, it has been added to the contract as tree belt or spinney, which calls for fairly light maintenance, essentially cutting back a couple of times a year. In a semi-natural environment like that this, it seems appropriate.

Cogenhoe Primary School Choir & Coffee Morning 26 March 2025

On 26 March 2025, together with other members of the community, I received a very warm welcome from Cogenhoe Primary School. We had been invited to a Coffee Morning with teachers and other members of the community and to listen to a performance by the Choir. Mrs Charley Oldham, Headteacher welcomed us and explained that the school was very much a part of the local village community. She then told us a little bit about the school.

They have 300 pupils on the roll with 70% from outside the village. Their school motto is 'Inspire, Aspire, Achieve', and they seek to achieve the highest standard in education. They have a Pre School and are above average in their SEND Support. Years 5 and 6 are members of the choir and they have already performed at various community events at Cogenhoe Bowls Club, St Peter's Church and the Cogenhoe Social Club. She thanked Lawrence for his help with Road Safety Heroes and told us about how to get involved with the school as volunteer mystery readers, helpers with the gardening club and other initiatives. We were introduced to James Birkett, CEO Nene Valley Partnership (NVP). NVP is a small multi-academy trust comprising three primary schools and one secondary school, including Cogenhoe Primary School.



Charley then handed us over to the Choir. This was the same choir that had attended their first ever Young Voices concert in Birmingham at the end of February 2025. A huge thank you to Mrs Prescott, Choir Leader, for preparing the children for today's event. They sang beautifully and with great skill and confidence.

The lyrics to one of the songs included:

"I messed up tonight, I lost another fight, I still mess up but I just start again...I won't give in..

Sometimes we come last, but we did our best..." Many parents have said to their children "You have done your best".



Charley invited us to think about what else Cogenhoe Primary School can do to support the local community and asked us to consider whether a monthly coffee morning might be something the community would support. A special thank you to Charley and her team for organising the event and for working tirelessly to stimulate young minds and to support their development in today's complex world.

Grange Park Footpath Completed 26 March 2025

I have been working on obtaining a resolution for the residents of Richmond Villages, Grange Park to the problem with the footpath which runs from the roundabout at Saxon Avenue / Williams Way northwards to Bridge Meadow Way. Prior to Grange Park being built, a Public Footpath ran north – south in this general area, crossing privately owned land. As part of the redevelopment of the area that footpath (known as LF3) was legally diverted onto the footpath



in question. The surface of a public right of way should be safe to use, however, it is not



unusual for multiple surfaces and conditions to be present. The Right of Way (ROW) in question, that Highways maintains is LF3. This is a metaled ROW (tarmac), which is inspected to the intervention level of a normal footway. This stipulates a 20mm trip defect criteria intervention level. In this case, the area has been inspected, and there were no safety defects present that met this criteria for repair.

Dennis Stanbridge a resident of Richmond Villages first asked me to look into this on 28 July 2023. The users of this footpath who live at Richmond Villages, Grange Park and who are lacking in mobility were seeking improvements on safety grounds. It took me over a year to get the attention of Highways to this problem as it was not included in any plans.

On 16 May 2024, I arranged to meet Highways on site with Dennis Stanbridge, one of Richmond Villages residents to look at this issue in more detail. Since then, I have worked with Highways tirelessly to try to get their needs met. Finally, the project to improve this footpath and to meet the needs of disabled users with walking aids – walking sticks, wheelchairs, scooters, rollators which are sensitive to uneven ground was included in this year’s work programme. Although the current program was delayed due to inclement weather, work on the Grange Park Footpath commenced on 11 March 2025. I am delighted to advise you that Dennis has just walked the length of their wonderful new smooth path. This morning, I did likewise, and my thanks go to Highways and all who were involved on behalf of the Residents of Richmond Village and others who will now enjoy using this footpath to reach Grange Park shopping centre.

Cogenhoe Community Afternoon Tea with the Primary School Choir on 31 March 2025



Imagine listening to angelic voices twice in one week. I was privileged to hear the Cogenhoe Primary School Choir again on 31 March 2025 when they sang for the Community at the Afternoon Tea held at Cogenhoe & Whiston Village Hall at 1.30pm. The school choir had put together a short programme to entertain us and this was the same choir that had attended their first ever Young Voices concert in Birmingham at the end of February 2025. A huge thank you to Mrs Prescott, Choir Leader, for preparing the children again for today’s event. They sang beautifully and I remembered the lyrics to the songs from earlier in the week. The event provided a wonderful showcase of the musical talents of our local pupils.

It was a joyous occasion, filled with laughter, music, and heartwarming moments. Thank you to everyone who made this event possible, from the choir, Mrs Prescott and teachers and for Deborah, Julie and others for organising the Afternoon Tea. What a treat and a very special afternoon! The next Community Lunch is on Monday 7 May 2025 at 12.30 pm.

P.S. Don’t forget to come along on 8 May for your COVID Booster injection.

Cogenhoe Mill

On 14 March 2025, Meadow Bay Villages who have owned Cogenhoe Mill since 2024, said it will close. The company said the decision had been taken following a specialist report, with residents given the option to move to the larger site at Billing Aquadrome. The company are offering free relocation costs to residents to another site in a 50-mile radius, with 60 days to make a choice. In response to my recent enquiries, I have received a copy of the following response from Geoffrey Smith, the Chief Executive of Meadow Bay Villages regarding Cogenhoe Mill, which includes the following:



“Please rest assured that we remain fully committed to managing the site responsibly and respectfully. The Billing team continues to retain ownership and responsibility for the site, including the small marina, chalet,

and the Millhouse (former pub), ensuring it remains secure, safe, and maintained. We understand the uncertainty the notification has created for our current residents. Although we have given Cogenhoe Mill residents approximately six months' notice to vacate, we've proactively offered to relocate their units at our expense, provided they confirm their intention within two months. Once relocations are confirmed, we will promptly provide a clear and definitive management plan. Separately, we also plan to consult with the Environment Agency at a suitable stage to discuss mutual considerations for managing these assets and future arrangements."

Additionally, I have heard from the local General Manager, Allan Clark and I have asked him to keep me informed of everything I need to know that will impact the community I represent.

Grange Park Neighbourhood Development Plan (GPNDP)

The Grange Park Neighbourhood Development Plan (GPNDP) is now available for public consultation under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. A Neighbourhood Development Plan is a community-led initiative that allows local residents to have a direct influence on the future development of their area. It can be a comprehensive document addressing various aspects of community life, such as housing needs, building design standards, traffic management, community facilities, the environment, and more. Alternatively, it can be a focused plan that targets a specific issue.



Grange Park Parish Council is taking the next steps in preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan for Grange Park. As part of this process, the Neighbourhood Development Plan is available for public consultation (Regulation 14 Consultation Draft, March 2025). There are three ways you can have your say on the Grange Park Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Grange Park Neighbourhood Development Plan (GPNDP) Regulation 14 Public Consultation runs from Monday 10th March 2025 until 3pm on Friday 25th April 2025		
How do I access the Comment Form?	How do I access the GPNDP?	How do I return my comments to Grange Park Parish Council?
Paper Based Comments Hand copies of the Comment Form will be available from Foxfield Bar and the Parish Office in the Community Centre.	Visit the parish council's website: www.grangeparkpc.org.uk Grange Park Parish Council SCAN ME	By Hand: Community Centre post box Foxfield Bar Email: grangepark@westnorthants.gov.uk By Post: Special Projects (NHS), Grange Park Parish Council, Community Centre, School Lane, Grange Park, Northampton, NN4 5PZ
Comments Made Online Access the online Comment Form from the parish council's website - available week commencing 10th March 2025.	The GPNDP will be available to access in the week commencing 10th March 2025.	Online Responses are automatically emailed to Grange Park Parish Council.
Drop in Event	Hand copies of the GPNDP and Comment Form will be available at the drop in event: Friday 14th March 2025, 9pm - 3pm Foxfield Bar, Foxfield Pavilion, Grange Park.	Hand your completed Comment Form to the parish council representatives at the Drop in Event.

Grange Park Community Centre, School Lane, Grange Park, Northampton, NN4 5PZ
www.grangeparkpc.org.uk

In December 2024, local residents had the opportunity to participate in the Grange Park Neighbourhood Development Plan (GPNDP) Residents Survey. With over 90 responses received, the Grange Park Neighbourhood Development Plan steering group has now prepared a draft Neighbourhood Plan, incorporating the views and feedback of the community. This draft is now ready for public consultation.

The consultation period runs from Monday 10th March until Friday 25th April (3pm) during which time Grange Park Parish Council is seeking comments and feedback from residents, businesses, and statutory consultees. The draft plan and relevant documents are available to view on the Grange Park Parish Council's website (www.grangeparkpc.org/neighbourhood-plan).

Main Street & Whiston Road, Denton



Kier Transportation, working together with West Northamptonshire Council, will be carrying out micro surfacing work in Main Street and Whiston Road, Denton in the next two weeks.

See the enclosed factsheet attached for more information.

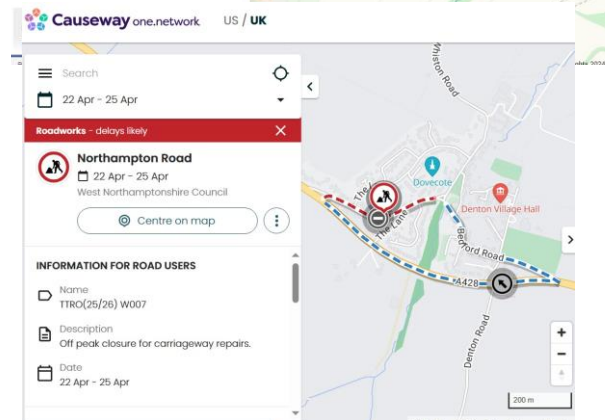
Fix My Street Cogenhoe 3585915

This matter has been ongoing for quite some time and despite repeated escalation on my part, WNC have not taken action to get this matter resolved. I have raised the matter yet again requesting that it be treated with some urgency. I have escalated this matter six times since December 2023. It requires enforcement, yet I am not receiving a response or an update. I have referred the matter directly to highways for resolution on 2 January 2025. I have stressed that it requires enforcement, yet I am not receiving a response or an update and I have chased the matter again on 31 January 2025.



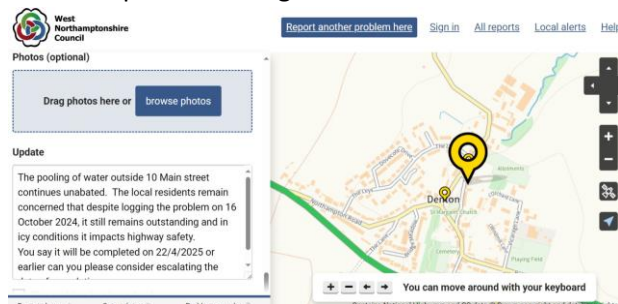
Carriageway Repairs Northampton Road, Denton

West Northamptonshire are intending on carrying out carriageway repairs on the above road. To undertake this work safely they will require that the road will be closed for 4 days at off peak times, and it is expected that the works will commence on the 22nd April 2025. The closure and diversion can be viewed here <https://one.network/?tm=142861759>



Fix My Street 6624260/7289767 Denton

I have been persistently chasing Highways to fix this problem. Despite informing me that the work had been completed, I needed to escalate the problem again on 17 March 2025. On 25 March 2025, I was advised that WNC are currently waiting for a trial hole and investigation to begin. Once I have further news, I shall be in touch.

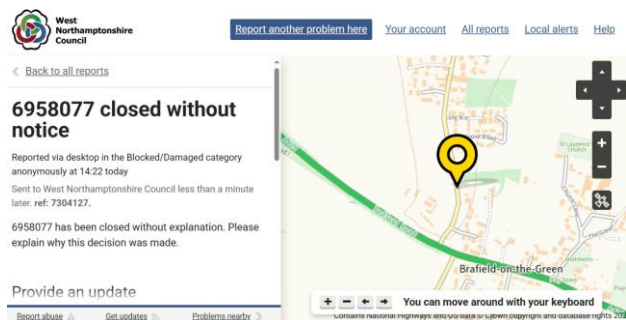


Fix My Street Denton 7185760, 7217765, 7048081 & 7168199



I have received several complaints about the partially repaired footpaths around St Margaret's Church, Denton. There is one particular spot which is unsafe, and it requires further attention. It has been recorded and escalated on a number of occasions via Fix My Street (See reference numbers above)

The Church is a registered WNC Warm Space and now caters for lots of local residents for coffee and croissants on a Friday morning. Most of the attendees walk to the church and are reliant on a safe path to reach their destination. I have escalated the need to repair the entrance identified which was missed when the work was completed recently. Once I have further news I shall be in touch.

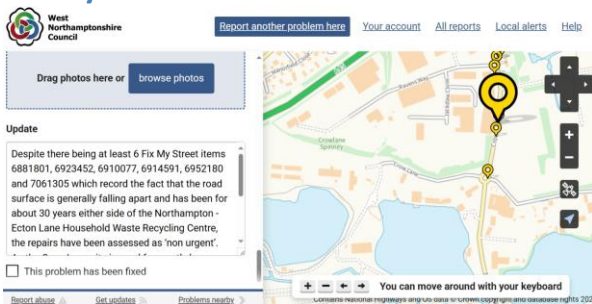


Fix My Street 7304127/6958077 Brafield on the Green

I have referred this matter to Anglian Water, Customer Services earlier today. I had tried to log the problem with West Northamptonshire Council Fix My Street (reference number is now 7304127) regarding a drainage issue at Billing Road, Brafield on the Green. It was logged on West Northamptonshire Council (WNC), Fix My Street, Ref: 6958077.

As I have been informed that this is an Anglian Water issue, I have asked them to provide me with a job reference number and to arrange for a member of their Water Networks team to carry out a check as to the source of the water and undertake the necessary repairs. I am asking them to communicate with me directly at stephen.clarke@westnorthants.gov.uk to assure me that they will now take action. I want to be in a position to advise residents that we now understand the source of the water so that we can gain commitment to a resolution of a problem that has been outstanding for some time. Once I have further news, I shall be in touch.

Fix My Street 6881801 Crow Lane



Despite there being at least 6 Fix My Street items 6881801, 6923452, 6910077, 6914591, 6952180 and 7061305 which record the fact that the road surface is generally falling apart and has been for about 30 years either side of the Northampton - Ecton Lane Household Waste Recycling Centre, the repairs have been assessed as 'non urgent'. As the Crow Lane site is used frequently by many residents, I have asked WNC Highways to consider how best to fix this problem once and for all.

CONSULTATIONS

A range of consultation and engagement activities take place across West Northants from time to time. I summarise the main consultations in this section of the report, but please remember you can check new consultations, have your say, and sign up to receive alerts and updates via our Consultation Hub.

Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment

West Northamptonshire Health and Wellbeing Board have produced a draft Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) report. We are now seeking feedback before we finalise it. The Council and its public health and wellbeing boards have a legal requirement to look at local needs and identify gaps in pharmaceutical services and produce an evidence base and PNA. The Consultation closes on 1 May 2025.

<https://westnorthants.citizenspace.com/.../have-your-say.../>



FINANCE ADMINISTRATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Cost of living

Further information and support can be found on:

<https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/cost-living-support>

<https://www.gov.uk/cost-of-living>

The Household Support Fund

The Household Support Fund will continue in West Northamptonshire over the next financial year, providing crucial financial assistance to vulnerable households.

<https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/.../household-support...>

The seventh tranche of this funding is set to start on 1 April 2025, continuing through to 31 March 2026, with West Northamptonshire expected to receive around £3.66 million for the 12-month period. The funding will provide essential support to families and individuals struggling with the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, with a specific focus on helping with the cost of food, utility bills, and other vital household expenses.

Further details on how to access the funds and eligibility criteria will be provided once the full guidance from the Department for Work and Pensions is released.



WNC Four Years On

West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) will be four years old next month, with plans to improve outcomes for communities in the next four years.

The unitary authority, which replaced the previous district, borough and county councils on 1 April 2021, has been making solid progress against its priorities since it was formed as a fresh start for delivering better



public services across West Northamptonshire. The Council enters its fifth year building upon its 'strong, positive start' highlighted by the LGA's recent independent review and with a new compelling long-term plan to work together more strategically with partners as One West Northamptonshire to help communities flourish and businesses prosper. A full summary featuring highlights of the Council's work so far is available to view in full on the Council's website and includes the following:

<https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/news/council-turning-four-focus-future>

Thriving Place

- Driving forward economic growth, turning £45m of grants for regeneration in Northampton into £350million of private investment and making progress on major regeneration schemes including the landmark Greyfriars redevelopment and completion of Market Square transformation.
- Building the area's profile as a centre of sporting excellence through our successful bids for major sporting events including the men's tour of Britain and the women's rugby world cup.
- Investing additional millions of pounds into improving the road networks, joining with partners to offer new and improved bus services, particularly in rural areas and opening up new Active Travel routes to encourage walking, wheeling, and cycling.
- Shaping a new climate change strategy and securing millions of pounds in grant funding and investment to progress a range of net zero initiatives with households and businesses.
- Developing and establishing new Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) across West Northants, listening to and engaging with residents at grassroots level to understand health and care needs to help them live their best lives.
- Involving and engaging communities across West Northamptonshire to help shape our new Local Plan, which will guide how our area is developed over the next 15 years.

Thriving People

- Providing essential support to families and individuals struggling with ongoing cost of living crisis, <https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/cost-living-support> with a specific focus on helping with the cost of food, free school meals, utility bills, and other vital household expenses. West Northamptonshire is expected to distribute £3.66 million in Household Support funding for the 12-month period and has committed to ensuring the funds help as many people as possible.
- Plans to invest over £9.5million on building new homes to tackle pressures on the local housing market and allocating more than £12.3million to provide relocatable temporary accommodation for those experiencing homelessness.
- Encouraging progress on our improvement journey for children's services, with our adoption, fostering and youth justice services recently rated good by Ofsted, and our overall rating rising from 'inadequate' in 2019, to 'requires improvement to be good' in the most recent inspection in 2022.
- Supporting our communities with the emergency response to flooding and committing to working with partners to review flood defences and improve community resilience.
- Making positive progress against our action plan to address ongoing challenge of increasing SEND placements to help ensure better outcomes for families.

- Launching new Family Hubs initiative to provide a one-stop-shop for families in need of support, with the first hub open in Towcester on 31 March 2025 followed by further hubs in Daventry and Northampton town centre.
- Distributing around £5.6m in community grants funding for hundreds of projects, from helping local clubs and groups to improve their facilities to initiatives tackling young violence and knife crime.
- Working with our residents who opened their homes to nearly 1,000 people fleeing the war in Ukraine, while assisting more than 500 Afghan nationals escaping conflict and persecution through providing emergency accommodation as well as support to help them settle in the UK.

An Efficient and Enabling Council

- Delivering over £115 million of savings to date and transforming the services we inherited – this has involved bringing together over 3,000 staff and hundreds of services from the four former councils, over 800 systems, four main office buildings and thousands of inherited contracts.
- We have kept our budgets balanced, enhanced productivity and protected essential frontline services in the face of continuous financial challenges, rising service demands and inflationary pressures affecting all councils nationally.
- Investing in innovation, using artificial intelligence to drive improvements in services from homelessness to special educational needs.

<https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/news/council-turning-four-focus-future>

Further information about the Council's performance during 2024/25 will be available in the Council's annual report, to be published in June 2025. You can view previous annual reports on the WNC website.

<https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/reports-and-documents/annual-report>

REGULATORY SERVICES

Local Elections to be Held Next Month

On Thursday, 1 May 2025 voters across West Northamptonshire will go to the polls to elect their local representatives. On 3 April 2025, the Council published a Statement of Persons Nominated, listing all individuals who will be standing for the West Northamptonshire Council and the Parish or Town Council seats.

<https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/elections-2025>



Voters will go to the polls to elect West Northamptonshire Council's councillors in the unitary authority's second election since its creation in 2021. This year's Polling Day on Thursday 1 May will see changes to voter arrangements after a recent electoral review reduced the number of West Northants councillors to be elected from 93 to 76 and revised the ward boundaries across the area.

Town and parish council elections are also set to be held in some areas of West Northamptonshire on 1 May.

To see a list of contested areas and candidates, please visit the council website.

<https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/elections-2025>

Whether voting in person at a polling station, by post or by proxy (on someone's behalf), there are some key deadlines to be aware of. If you have not registered to vote yet, the deadline to do so is Friday 11 April. It is a quick and easy process that takes just five minutes online. Register online to vote.

<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

Don't forget too, if you have recently moved home or changed your name, you may need to update your details to ensure you can take part. For those who prefer to vote by post, applications need to be submitted by 5pm on Monday, 14 April. Voting by post is a great option if you will be away on election day or if you would rather not visit a polling station in person. Your postal vote will be sent to you in advance, so you can fill it in and return it at your convenience. This is also the deadline to make amendments or cancel your postal vote.

If you would like someone to vote on your behalf, known as a proxy vote, the deadline to apply is 5pm on Wednesday, 23 April. If your proxy would like to vote by post, both the proxy and postal application must be received by 5pm on Monday, 14 April.

One of the biggest changes recently introduced is the requirement for photo ID when voting in person. If you do not have an accepted form of ID, such as a passport or driving licence, you can apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate. The deadline to apply for this is 5pm on Wednesday, 23 April. Without the correct ID, you will not be able to vote at your polling station, so make sure you are prepared. For more information and to view the timetable of the election visit our website.

Timetable

Application	Deadline for receipt
Delivery of Nomination Papers	Monday 17 March to 4pm on Wednesday 2 April 2025
Deadline for withdrawal of nomination paper	4pm on Wednesday 2 April 2025
Publication of Statement of Persons Nominated	No later than 4pm on Thursday 3 April 2025
Last date for registration	Friday 11 April 2025
Deadline for receiving new postal vote and postal proxy applications, and for changes to existing postal or proxy votes	5pm on Monday 14 April 2025
Proxy vote application deadline	5pm on Wednesday 23 April 2025
Last day for Voter Authority Certificates and Anonymous Elector Documents	5pm on Wednesday 23 April 2025
Receipt of emergency proxy vote applications	5pm on Thursday 1 May 2025

New Public Mortuary

On 4 March 2025, work began on the new state-of-the-art public mortuary in Northampton. A ground breaking ceremony took place, marking the beginning of construction on this important facility, which will provide better support for families and improve post-mortem services across Northamptonshire and the wider region. It is due to be completed in autumn 2025 and the new mortuary will be a purpose-built facility designed to deliver the highest standards of care and compassion during some of life's most difficult moments. It will provide modern, dignified spaces for families, including private viewing and identification areas, ensuring a respectful and supportive experience for those dealing with the loss of a loved one.



The facility will also bring key services under one roof, simplifying processes and reducing the need for travel between different sites. This will not only make it easier for families by reducing delays but will also improve efficiency for funeral directors, healthcare professionals, and other essential services.

The mortuary will also help emergency services if there is ever a major incident, such as a disaster with multiple casualties. It will ensure that Northamptonshire is well-prepared to handle such situations while continuing to provide vital services for the community.

The project is being delivered by Stepnell Ltd, a contractor with extensive experience in managing large-scale construction projects.

Young People to Represent West Northants in Parliament

Young people in West Northamptonshire are invited to apply to become a member of a new Youth Parliament coordinated by West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) in partnership with Clubs for Young



People Northamptonshire. This initiative provides a unique opportunity for two young people to represent their peers both locally and nationally and attend Westminster when the Youth Parliament is in session, influencing policies that affect young people across the UK.

This significant milestone marks the first time since 2006 that Northamptonshire will have a voice in the Youth Parliament. The elected representatives (MYPs) will serve a one-year term during this cycle of the rolling programme, with future

terms lasting for two years.

Young people who are interested in applying are asked to complete a Manifesto detailing three key issues they are passionate about changing.

- one that relates specifically to West Northamptonshire
- a second that has national interest, and
- a third which has global interest

Manifestos must be submitted to communityforums@westnorthants.gov.uk by Wednesday 19 March 2025. To be eligible, candidates must be aged 11–18 years and reside primarily in West Northamptonshire. All submitted Manifestos will be published anonymously on the Youth Forum webpage and young voters will then have the chance to read each candidate's document and select the Manifesto which appeals most to them. Once voting is complete, the two individuals with the most votes across West Northamptonshire will be taken on as the MYP's for the West Northants Youth Parliament. For more information about the MYP elections and how to apply, please email: communityforums@westnorthants.gov.uk or visit the Community Forums webpage.

<https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/community-forums>

RURAL SERVICES NETWORK (RSN)

Update on the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF)

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) <https://www.gov.uk/.../department-for-environment-food...>

has recently announced an important update regarding the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). <https://www.gov.uk/.../rural-england-prosperity-fund...>



This fund, a critical component of the government's strategy to enhance economic growth in rural areas, will continue into the next fiscal year with substantial financial support.

Earlier last month, it was announced that the REPF will receive up to £33 million in funding for another year. This funding is aimed at eligible local authorities throughout England, enabling them to invest in initiatives that foster local growth and address specific rural challenges.

DEFRA has published the funding allocations for local authorities eligible for the 2025-26 cycle, along with updates to the REPF prospectus. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/.../Rural...>

<https://www.gov.uk/.../rural-england-prosperity-fund...>

These materials outline how the funds should be utilised to maximise impact in rural communities. West Northamptonshire Council will receive an allocation of £410,315 for 2025-26.

Additionally, DEFRA plans to release a revised table of expected outputs and outcomes from the fund shortly, which will provide further guidance on measuring the success of funded projects.

To ensure that all stakeholders are well-informed about the updates and changes to the REPF, DEFRA will soon host a webinar for all eligible local authorities. This session will offer detailed insights into the adjustments planned for the 2025-26 period. Details and instructions for joining the webinar will be announced shortly.

The REPF is designed to augment the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

<https://www.gov.uk/.../uk-shared-prosperity-fund-2025-26...>

by focusing specifically on the unique needs of rural areas. It supports a range of initiatives, including:

Development of new products and facilities by rural and farm businesses, aiming to diversify income streams and bolster the local economy.

Enhancement of community infrastructure, which is vital for providing essential services and supporting local economies.

The continuation of the REPF aligns with the government's broader Missions agenda, particularly its goals for sustainable economic growth. By funding capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure, the REPF not only boosts productivity but also strengthens the overall fabric of rural communities.

This additional funding comes ahead of broader local funding reforms set to be introduced following the Autumn Statement, ensuring stability and continued support for rural areas.

PLANNING MATTERS

Planning Appeals

Since my appointment, I have kept you informed as to the progress of the major Appeals in South Northamptonshire. The update for this month is as follows:

Determined or Cancelled:

- Hartwell, land North of Ashton Road-**Dismissed**
- Blisworth, land South of Station Road-**Dismissed**
- Blakesley Hill, Greens Norton-**Dismissed**
- Greens Norton, land off Mill Lane-**Withdrawn**
- Milton Malsor, land East of Lower Lane-**Dismissed**
- Blisworth, land off Northampton Road -**Dismissed**.
- Yardley Gobion, land at Asana Lodge Appeal-Inquiry 8 February 2022 for 3 days-**Cancelled**
- Yardley Gobion, land East of Northampton Road-**Allowed**.
- WNS/2022/0904/MAO Manor Oak Homes, Outline application for sixty-seven homes, Land at Stratford Road Deanshanger-**Withdrawn**
- WNS/2021/0450/MAF Barwood Homes, fifty-two new dwellings with associated open spaces, roads, and drainage infrastructure. Land South of The Wharf, Bugbrooke, Northamptonshire-Hearing-**Dismissed**
- WNS/2022/0071/MAO Outline for thirty-two dwellings on Land off Blenheim Rise, Kings Sutton Hearing -**Dismissed**
- WNN/2021/0466 Land North Of, Bedford Road, Great Houghton - **Dismissed**
- WNS/2022/1525/FUL Land North of Whiston Road, Cogenhoe, Northamptonshire – **Allowed subject to conditions.**

- WNS/2021/1858/EIA Solar Farm Milton Road Gayton-**Dismissed**
- N/2020/1474 a 6-storey building providing up to 112no. one, two & three bed flats and apartments (Use Class C3), commercial development (Use Class E (a,b,c,d,e,f,g(i))) and associated ancillary infrastructure', 123 - 135 Bridge Street, Northampton-Appeal **Allowed**
- N/2020/1497 6 storey building providing up to 66no. one, two & three bed flats and apartments (Use Class C3), commercial development (Use Class E (a, b, c,d,e,f,g(i))) and associated ancillary infrastructure', 153 - 165 Bridge Street, Northampton- Appeal **Allowed**
- APP/W2845/W/23/3327830 Hall Farm, Main Street, East Haddon, West Northamptonshire NN6 8BU. Appeal **Allowed**
- WNS/2022/2060/MAO. Outline Application - with all matters reserved to provide later living accommodation (Class 2) as three integrated types of accommodation on a site off the main entrance to Whittlebury Park. Appeal **Dismissed**.
- 2024/0734/FUL. Application for the increase of occupancy from a six person HiMO (Use Class C4) to a seven person HiMO (Sui Generis). Appeal **Allowed**.
- 2023/6537/OUT. Whittlebury Park Creation of an indoor/outdoor Wedding Ceremony facility, in conjunction with returning the Greenkeepers Compound to formerly approved location. Appeal **Dismissed**.
- WNS/2023/0011/MAF. Land east of The Meadows, Old Stratford (Grid Ref Easting: 477964, Grid Ref Northing: 240789. Appeal **Allowed**.
- WNS/2023/7948/FULL. The erection of boundary fencing on land south of Horton Road, Hackleton, West Northamptonshire NN7 2AW. Appeal **Allowed** and planning permission is granted in accordance with the terms of the application.
- 2023/6117/MAO Outline planning application for 11 serviced plots for self-builders and public open space Forest Road Piddington Appeal **Allowed**

Pending

- 2023/5711/PIP Permission in principle for development of 8-9 custom/self-build Land Poundfield Road Potterspurty Towcester NN12 7QB Appeal **Pending**
- WNS/2021/1819/EIA Land North Of The Bell Plantation Watling Street Towcester Hybrid planning application comprising of Part A: Full planning permission for a new roundabout access from the A5; internal spine road, creation of development plots with associated earthworks and plateauing; delivery of plateaus and access for Towcester Town Football Club (TTFC); site-wide structural landscaping and infrastructure; and a single warehouse (Use Class B8) and ancillary office, with associated access, hardstanding, landscaping, parking and supporting infrastructure. Part B: Outline planning permission with all matters reserved for the development of TTFC and employment floorspace falling within Use Classes B2 and B8, with ancillary office space on the development plots; as established through Part A of this application Appeal **Pending**
- WND/2021/0960 Overstone Park Golf Club Overstone NN6 0AS Appeal **Pending**

WNC Approved Local Development Scheme 2025

On 26 February 2025 the Planning Policy Committee, approved the updated West Northamptonshire Local Development Scheme (Appendix A) which sets out a timetable for local plan preparation.

<https://westnorthants.moderngov.co.uk/mgCommitteeDetails..>

Local Planning Authorities are required to produce, and keep up to date, a Local Development Scheme (LDS) which sets out and timetables the local plans they will prepare to plan for development in their area. The West Northamptonshire LDS was last updated in January 2024. Members were asked to consider a revision to the LDS to ensure that it is up to date in respect of amendments to the timetable for the production of the emerging West Northamptonshire Local Plan and the time period covered by the plan. Adoption will take place in November 2027. The content of the LDS has not changed in any other aspect.

Status: Development Plan Document (Local Plan)

Geographical Area: The whole of West Northamptonshire

Timetable for Production and Conformity with Appropriate Regulations

Stage	Date
Formal Commencement of Preparation/ Consultation on the Scope of the Local Plan / Call for Sites (Regulation 18)	October 2018 – June 2019
Issues Consultation (Regulation 18)	August – October '19
Options Consultation (Regulation 18)	October – December '21
Draft Plan Consultation (Regulation 18)	April '24
Draft Plan Consultation (Regulation 18)	October '25
Publication of Draft Plan and Consultation (Regulation 19)	July '26
Submission (Regulation 22)	October '26
Examination (Regulation 24)	April '27

West Northamptonshire Local Development Scheme – February 2025

Adoption (Regulation 26)	November '27
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West Northamptonshire Council Housing Targets

The Government published tables identifying what the changes would be for each local authority. For West Northamptonshire, this would see the annual requirement increase from 2,124 to 2,515. For the current plan period (to 2041) this would increase numbers by 6,647 (17 x 391), assuming the base date of the Local Plan was moved from 1st April 2023 to 1st April 2024. Then the additional work required to meet this need will extend the period required to produce the plan and therefore, the plan period will need to be extended. For every years extension there will be a requirement of a further 2,515 dwellings. For illustrative purposes an extension of two years would see an overall total additional requirement of approximately 12,000 (11,677) dwellings.

Land Use Consultation

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs is consulting on changes to Land Use. The consultation



Land Use Consultation

states that:

“England has limited land with growing demands being made of it. This consultation explores the land use changes implied by commitments to restore nature, support food production, improve climate resilience and deliver new housing and infrastructure.”

“It seeks views on the type and scale of land use changes that might be needed, as well as the actions government could take to support this. This will help to foster a public discussion about how land can better support government’s plan for change.”

<https://www.gov.uk/gove.../consultations/land-use-in-england>

This consultation closes on 25 April 2025.

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/land.../land-use-consultation/>

Planning & Infrastructure Bill-CPO Guidance

I have received an enquiry from a local farmer concerned about the new CPO reforms. He is one of the local farmers concerned about the changes to Agricultural Property Relief and Business Property Relief announced by the Labour government in the autumn Budget.



He is now seeking assurance that West Northamptonshire Council will not use the new CPO reforms as an excuse to acquire land in order to raise funds for housing development. The Government has said that planning reform – particularly house building – is going to drive the economy, and compulsory purchase is stated to form a crucial part of that reform. Until now, obstacles have usually arisen in a compulsory purchase when considering whether the powers should be used at all, and, if they are, what the level of compensation for the landowner should be. According to the Government's CPO guidance it will now be easier to bring forward schemes using a CPO.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-planning-and-infrastructure-bill/guide-to-the-planning-and-infrastructure-bill#part-5-compulsory-purchase>

The changes that will have alarmed farmers are likely to be:

- Acquiring authorities do not need to wait for negotiations with the landowner to break down, or even for them to respond, before commencing the formal CPO procedure.
- Acquiring authorities may make the CPO provided that it has a masterplan of the site showing the general site layout. Indeed it is possible that aspects of the use of the site – for example, the location and mix of affordable housing – could be undecided at that stage without compromising the confirmation of the CPO.
- The updated guidance says that it will not be expected that all impediments to the delivery of a scheme will have been removed or overcome at the point when the CPO is confirmed (or not).
- The updated guidance also includes amendments to the compensation regime. The most interesting for acquiring authorities and developers is the removal of "hope value" in some circumstances. This provides for an acquiring authority to seek a direction to remove hope value (at the point when the CPO is confirmed) for developments where the provision of affordable or social housing is being facilitated which could be part of a mixed tenure scheme), education or health development. The government considers public sector acquiring authorities, in taking forward these schemes, are most likely to be able to justify the payment of compensation below market value is **in the public interest**. This will often significantly reduce the sum that can be sought by landowners and consequently the funding required by the acquiring authority for the delivery of the scheme.

In preparing our new Local Plan I have asked WNC to include a clear statement as to how we intend to use our CPO powers when bringing forward schemes so that the new compulsory purchase land compensation rules do not deny landowners their fair share of compensation.

Three Statutory Consultees Stripped of their Role

The Planning Infrastructure Bill was published on 11 March 2025 and the housing secretary Angela Rayner announced that three statutory consultees including Sport England, Theatres Trust and The Gardens Trust will be stripped of their role in a bid to speed up planning application timescales, while the government will review the scope of all such bodies with a view to limiting the "number and type" of proposals that they provide input on.

<https://www.gov.uk/.../bureaucratic-burden-lifted-to...>



Predisposition, predetermination or bias

As Chairman of the South Planning Committee, West Northamptonshire Council, I may be involved in the decision making for any subsequent planning application. Section 25 of the Localism Act 2011 provides that a decision maker is not to be taken to have had, or appeared to have had, a closed mind when making the decision just because:

- (a) the decision maker had previously done anything that directly or indirectly indicated what view the decision maker took, or would or might take, in relation to a matter; and
- (b) the matter was relevant to the decision.

This provision does not change the law on bias and pre-determination which means that Committee Members must still take planning decisions with an open mind and having considered all relevant material planning considerations. The safest course is for Committee Members to avoid making public statements (including expressing views in emails) as to their support for or opposition to any application which would indicate they had made up their minds before the formal consideration of the application at the meeting. If a Committee Member has made such a statement, they must be satisfied that they can still consider the application with an open mind and are prepared to consider any new matters or any new arguments in favour of or against the proposed development until the decision is made otherwise, they should not take part in any decision on the application in question.

On the grounds of the above, it would not be appropriate for me to attend Parish Council or Community events which seek to take a decision regarding the outcome of a planning application as I must keep an open mind on this matter so as not to preclude me from participating in any future planning decisions.

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

WNC Tackles Antisocial Behaviour & Tenancy Fraud

West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) has approved a new policy strengthening its commitment to tackling anti-social tenants and preventing tenancy fraud. The policy also promotes lease sustainment and supporting tenants to maintain their homes to avoid unnecessary evictions.

The Tenancy Policy, which replaces the previous policy from Northampton Borough Council, aligns with national regulatory standards and supports the council's broader housing strategies including the Tenancy Strategy, Housing Strategy, and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

Developed in partnership with Northamptonshire Partnership Homes (NPH), which manages WNC's housing stock, the policy ensures greater tenancy security, improved sustainment, and effective management of council homes. It sets out clear guidelines on the types of tenancies offered, arrangements for fixed-term tenancies, and WNC's approach to tackling tenancy fraud and unlawful subletting.

- Following a five-week public consultation, the policy has been updated to reflect key changes, including:
- The use of introductory tenancies for all new tenants, ensuring they successfully integrate into their homes and communities before being granted a secure tenancy.
- Reintroducing flexible fixed-term tenancies, which will only be used in exceptional circumstances such as for residents with limited leave to remain in the UK.
- Stronger provisions to tackle tenancy fraud, ensuring social housing is allocated fairly and to those most in need.



The policy also supports WNC's compliance with new consumer standards for social housing, introduced by the Regulator of Social Housing in April 2024, which require councils to clearly outline their approach to tenancy management. View the full policy on the West Northamptonshire Council website.

<https://westnorthants.moderngov.co.uk/.../West...>

Residents with Greatest Housing Need Continue to be Prioritised

Residents with the greatest need for social housing in West Northamptonshire continue to be prioritised following a rise of almost double in the number of applications for council houses. Like many councils, West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) is facing significant demand for social housing due to national factors including a rise in homelessness and no-fault evictions and as a result of more family break-ups because of an increased pressure from things like the cost of living and rising rents. The Council introduced



its new Housing Allocations Scheme in April last year, replacing three separate ones in Daventry, South Northants and Northampton areas in order to harmonise the differences and make it fairer, clearer and more consistent for all residents. It was a legal requirement for the Council to also have a new single Housing Allocations policy across West Northamptonshire within three years of becoming a new unitary authority in April 2021. As part of that process and in line with good practice all those previously on the housing register and hoping to bid for a Council property were asked to reapply under the new policy and because of the new criteria.

The new scheme recognises people in greatest need for help including those experiencing homelessness, with complex health and welfare needs, victims of domestic abuse, Care Leavers, Armed Forces veterans, and those subject to exploitation. While the Council expected some of the previous applicants to drop off the register due to a change in circumstances, it did expect an initial surge in applications as some people reapplied. However, the Council has also seen a rise in applications generally and is now receiving an average of 700 applications a month, compared with an average of around 335 the previous year, highlighting the significant scale of demand. On average, approximately 5,000 people are on the social housing system at any given time, with numbers constantly fluctuating as individuals secure alternative housing or leave the system for other reasons. The register covers West Northants' population of around 430,000, and with only around 1,500 homes on average becoming available over a 12-month period, only those in the greatest need and highest priority bands are likely to be housed by West Northamptonshire Council.

The application process also requires many supporting documents to evidence each resident's needs and checking and validating these is a significant task with both a rise in applications and the re-registering of previous applicants. In many cases the Council may not receive what is required and will then need to chase residents for these before an assessment can be completed.

The increase in applications and the workload to screen, assess and verify each application including all those for residents reapplying to the register has resulted in a backlog and a significantly longer wait for people to see if they are eligible for the housing allocations scheme. WNC has therefore put in place a number of measures to help people pre-assess their eligibility to get an early indication of whether they are likely to be successful and identify people in immediate priority need of housing and ensure they are prioritised whilst staff work through completing all the outstanding assessments. The Council is also working to improve its systems and processes to speed up some steps in the process.

A full review of the Housing Allocations Scheme will also take place this year following its first year of operation. In November 2024, the Council launched its Affordable Housing Delivery Plan underscoring its commitment to addressing the urgent need for more and better-quality homes. The plan outlines ideas for accelerating the delivery of affordable housing with a goal to deliver a minimum of 650 affordable homes per year by 2029/30, and a potential increase to 750 homes annually if market conditions and funding improve. More information about the Housing Allocations Scheme and applications process is available on <https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/.../join-housing-register>

Further information, help and advice for residents is available on <https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/cost-living-support>

ENVIRONMENT

More Changes to Impact Farmers

The Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) announced late on Tuesday 11 March 2025 that the sustainable farming incentive SFI, which pays farmers in England for "public goods" such as insecticide-free farming, wildflower strips and managing ponds and hedgerows, was fully allocated for this year. The unexpected announcement to suspend the SFI sparked fury among farmers in England and the wider industry and left many with unexpected cashflow concerns.

As a result, the Government has stopped accepting new applications for the incentive – the largest part of the new environmental land management (Elms) programme which has replaced EU-era farming subsidies – with immediate effect.

An emergency roundtable meeting with farming organisations was scheduled for Monday 17 March to discuss Defra's decision to pull the plug on new Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) applications.

- A new scheme will be developed over the coming months.
- It will not be available for application until 2026.
- Its funding level depends on June 2025 Spending Review.
- This means that those farms not already in SFI will likely have a minimum 12 month wait from now to access any funding.



This decision is yet another change which will adversely impact farmers across West Northamptonshire.

The Resilience and Innovation Northants (RAIN) Project

At the CA WN monthly general meeting on 20 March 2025, we heard from Alan Ryan and Sarah Parr from the WNC Flood and Water Management team. They gave us an update on the RAIN Project.



The Resilience and Innovation Northants (RAIN) project, led by unitary authorities West Northamptonshire Council in partnership with North Northamptonshire Council, has launched an exciting new initiative to help residents in the Wootton Brook and Harpers Brook catchments create their very own rain gardens at home.

Residents can apply for a free pack of RAIN Garden plants and compost to create a small but powerful area that will soak up rainwater, reducing the risk of surface water flooding and making outdoor spaces greener and more resilient.

A rain garden is a simple yet effective way to capture rainfall that would normally run off rooftops and into drains. Instead, it diverts water into planted areas, helping to nourish plants while reducing strain on the



drainage system during heavy rainfall. By creating rain gardens, residents can play a direct role in managing water flow within their community and mitigating local flood risks.

The initiative is available on a first-come, first-served basis, with at least 100 free RAIN Garden packs ready to be given away to Harpers Brook and Wootton Brook's residents.

Participants will be able to access a pack containing a selection of marginal plants to capture and retain rainwater, along with compost provided by Kettering's Bosworth's Garden Centre. Each participating garden will also receive a numbered plaque to display, recognising its contribution to this community-led flood

resilience effort. The plaques feature the campaign's motto: "Just a small plot, but it's doing a lot" - a reminder that even small green spaces can make a meaningful difference. In return, participants are encouraged to share a photo of their completed RAIN Garden with the RAIN project team. The team will then calculate the total area of all RAIN Gardens planted to estimate the volume of rainwater diverted from drainage systems, showcasing the collective impact of the initiative.

Maps outlining each catchment can be seen here:

- Harpers Brook Map:
- Wootton Brook Map:

If you live within Wootton Brook or Harpers Brook catchment boundary and would like to take part, you can apply now by registering your details here: <https://rainnorthants.co.uk/rain-gardens/> or emailing rain@westnorthants.gov.uk.

The free RAIN Garden plant packs are only available to those living in the Wootton Brook & Harpers Brook catchments, which includes:

- Harpers Brook catchment: South Corby/Oakley Vale, Newton and Little Oakley, Rushton, Stanion, Brigstock, Sudborough and Lowick.
- Wootton Brook catchment: East Hunsbury, Collingtree, Wootton, Hunsbury, Hardingstone, Grange Park, Blisworth, Milton Malsor, Rothersthorpe, Gayton, Quinton, Courteenhall and Hackleton.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Family Support in West Northamptonshire

Families across Northamptonshire are set to benefit from enhanced family support as the countywide Early Years Universal Service, Strong Start move across to join Family Hubs from April 2025. In a move to better serve families, West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) and North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) have decided to deliver two separate contracts to provide the service at a local level.

This aligns with other jointly commissioned arrangements across the 0-19 service, aiming to ensure collaborative working across the area. From April 2025, the west-based Strong Start team will transition from WNC Libraries to join and enhance the development of Family Hubs. This will ensure that families receive comprehensive support, from pregnancy through to young adulthood, in a single, accessible location. The Strong Start service will continue to be funded and overseen by WNC Public Health, maintaining its commitment to delivering key public health early years priorities. The knowledgeable and skilled Strong Start team will be a valuable addition to the Family Hub workforce, enhancing the overall service offer.



The service will retain the Strong Start name and branding to preserve the trust and reputation it has built with families and professionals over the years. Some Strong Start sessions will be bookable in advance via <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/westnorthantscouncil>

For more information and to access the Family Hubs, please visit the West Northamptonshire Council Family Hubs website

<https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/family-hubs-west...>

Age UK Northants Open Day

Age UK Northamptonshire is holding an Open Day on Friday 25th April at The William and Patricia Venton Centre, York Road, Northampton NN1 5QJ from 11am to 1pm with complimentary refreshments. No need to book - all welcome. All enquiries 01604 611200

- Information & Advice Team will be on hand to give free advice
- We can answer your questions about benefits entitlements and explain how we help you make a claim for Attendance Allowance
- We give information on accessing services from Adult Social Care
- We can help you identify your housing options

A flyer for Age UK Northants Open Day. It features the Age UK logo at the top left. The main text says "Come and join us at our Open Day!". Below this, there are several sections with icons and text: "Our Information & Advice Team will be on hand to give you FREE advice on: Benefit entitlements, How we can help with benefit claim submissions, How to access services from Adult Social Care, Help identifying your housing options."; "Learn about our Day Centres in Northampton Towneater and Kettering. Safe, supportive environments where older people can meet up with friends and take part in enjoyable, stimulating activities. Transport available subject to availability."; "Find out more information about our other services that can help you to stay living happily and independently in your own home. Telephone Befriending Service, Small Cutting Service, Money Management Support Service, Appointment, Home Care Cleaning Service, Gardening Service and Handyperson Service, Care Support at Home Service, Products and Services."; "Learn about all the volunteering opportunities we have available." At the bottom, it lists the date "Friday 25th April 2025", venue "The William and Patricia Venton Centre, York Road, Northampton NN1 5QJ", and time "11am - 1pm". It also mentions "Complimentary refreshments available." and provides the phone number "01604 611200" and website "www.ageuknorthants.org.uk". There are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn at the bottom right.

- Meet the managers from our day centres in Northampton, Towcester and Kettering
- Find out more about our many services that can help you live independently in your own home
- Have a chat with our Volunteers Coordinator and find a role that would suit you!

Please spread the word and do come and join us.

Community Responders Age UK Northants

Age UK have become coordinators for the Community Responder service in Northamptonshire. The service provides support from volunteers to people over 60 years of age. They work closely with the Intermediate Care team and Remote monitoring hub who provide urgent care for acutely unwell patients to avoid admittance to hospital. Age UK volunteers support with welfare checks, helping people up following a fall, collecting emergency prescriptions, providing reassurance while waiting for family, friends, primary and secondary care services to arrive, doing small amounts of shopping and topping up gas and electricity meters to name just a few of the ways they support their community. The service currently runs Monday to Friday, 9am to 3.15pm. They are working to build up the number of volunteers available to support elderly people within Northamptonshire. To help them support as many older people as possible in our communities and to support us to continue to build the number of volunteers we



have available across the county, they are asking if you could kindly share the attached poster on Parish notice boards, in local community centres or even newsletters to support this project. If you would like to discuss the support Age UK can offer further or are hosting any events that you feel it would be suitable for them to attend to promote their valuable service, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Kirsty Simms, Community Responders on 07881 230222. Monday to Friday 9am - 3.15pm
t 01604 611200 General/Reception communityresponders@ageuknorthants.org.uk

Wellbeing West Northants

Are you worried about a loved one? We can help you if
They seem lonely → We have social groups
They need to stay active → Try our Walk & Talk
They're struggling with meals → Get nutrition support
Help them get the right support—check out our full list of FREE support today: www.westnorthants.gov.uk/wellbeingservice



DSPG Volunteer Drivers Scheme

Last year, I joined Kevin Hewitson and the Denton Surgery Patients Group (DSPG) for their celebration of winning the 2023-24 National Corkill Award. DSPG was considered with 25 other shortlisted Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) and was successful in winning this prestigious award. The Denton Surgery Practice catchment covers 15 villages spread over 35 sq miles connected by mainly rural roads and a serious lack of bus services serving over 6,000 patients. This creates problems for people trying to not only access the surgery in Denton but also hospitals in Northampton, Daventry, Corby, Kettering and even as far as Oxford. The Nene Valley scheme set up by Helen Cudmore, Wendy Watson, Madeleine Donald and John Smith was the foundation of the volunteer patient transport scheme that met the need for over a decade but stopped operating in 2020. In 2022/23 the new DSPG volunteer car scheme was created. Finance to cover some of the running costs came from Parish Councils and my WNC Councillor Covid 19 Support fund. I was proud to be asked by Kevin Hewitson to help secure funding to re-instate the volunteer driver scheme that collected and took patients to and from hospital and Denton surgery appointments. The grant was used to recruit and support approximately 12

volunteer drivers. The grant enabled the DSPG to advertise for drivers and hold a recruitment meeting along with providing driver awareness and training.



DSPG intends to grow its Volunteer Patient Transport Service (VPTS) by working with the Surgery and its Social Prescribers led by Jackie Power and Sue Hayton to use this valuable transport facility to make other events accessible for patients. An example of this is the fortnightly wellbeing meeting that takes place at Coffee@Carey supported by the volunteer drivers. Patients now have the opportunity to get out and meet others socially over

a coffee. All of which, supports the WNC Health and Wellbeing LAP initiative. It has been a privilege to support the DSPG and I will continue to do so in the future.



The VPTS volunteer drivers take passengers to and from:

- healthcare appointments, such as medical appointments or hospital visits
- social groups and community activities

But volunteer drivers provide more than just transport, they afford independence and a lifeline to the person in their passenger seat and also offer companionship, a listening ear, and a friendly chat.

More volunteers are always needed to ensure that DSPG can grow its Volunteer Patient Transport Service. Driving and using public transport can be challenging for people with health conditions or restricted mobility. It's more than just transportation. It's offering them a lifeline.

If you are interested in finding out more then you can e-mail the coordinator@dspg.me or telephone 07506866298.

EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Term Dates for West Northamptonshire Schools

Below are the term dates for the area, according to West Northamptonshire Council. Dates will vary at independent schools, and there could be additional days off at all schools for teacher training days, which will vary from school to school.

Spring term 2025

Monday 6 January to Friday 4 April

Half term holiday: Monday 17 February to Friday 21 February

Easter holiday: Monday 7 April to Thursday 17 April

Summer term 2025

Tuesday 22 April to Tuesday 22 July

Bank holidays: Friday 18 April and Monday 21 April

Bank holiday: Monday 5 May

Half term holiday: Monday 26 May to Friday 30 May

Summer holiday starts: Wednesday 23 July

Academic year 2025 to 2026

Autumn term 2025

Monday 1 September to Friday 19 December

Half term holiday: Monday 27 October to Friday 31 October

Christmas holiday: Monday 22 December to Friday 2 January

Spring term 2026

Monday 5 January to Friday 27 March

Half term holiday: Monday 16 February to Friday 20 February

Easter holiday: Monday 30 March to Friday 10 April

Bank holidays: Friday 3 April and Monday 6 April

Summer term 2026

Monday 13 April to Monday 20 July

Half term holiday: Monday 25 May to Friday 29 May

Summer holiday starts: Tuesday 21 July

Bank holiday: Monday 4 May

Potential Financial Crisis Over Send Funding

A concerning report from the Local Government Association (LGA) has highlighted a looming financial crisis that could affect over half of the councils responsible for supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This crisis stems from the upcoming expiration of the "statutory override," a temporary accounting measure that currently allows councils to manage SEND-related spending deficits separately from their main financial statements.



Without this measure, which is set to expire in March 2026, many councils anticipate severe financial distress. According to the LGA's findings, 53% of councils project they will not be able to balance their

budgets in 2026/27. This figure is expected to increase to 63% in 2027/28 and 65% in 2028/29, highlighting a growing trend of financial instability.

The increase in financial pressure is primarily due to the rising demand for SEND support services. Since the introduction of the Children and Families Act in 2014, the number of children and young people requiring Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) has surged by 140%, from 240,183 in 2014/15 to 575,973 in 2023/24. This rise has significantly escalated the costs associated with providing necessary support, with councils anticipated to face a combined high needs deficit of approximately £5 billion next year.

In response, the LGA is urgently calling for government intervention in the upcoming Spending Review. Their primary request is for the government to erase the high needs deficits that are crippling council budgets. The LGA emphasizes that without such measures, many councils will struggle to maintain the essential services required by children with SEND.

Admissions Portal. All applications have the right to appeal (through the independent appeals process) if they have been unable to secure a place at one of their higher preferred school options.

The next round of secondary school place allocations (for late applicants) will take place in April / May. Primary school allocations will be announced on 16 April 2025.

Northamptonshire Schools Recognised in National Poetry Competition

Two schools in Northamptonshire have been named runners-up in the prestigious Poetry Together National Competition, a project founded by Gyles Brandreth and supported by Her Majesty The Queen. East Hunsbury Primary School, in partnership with East Hunsbury Parish Council Seniors was recognised for their heartfelt poem



Friendship, while Bridgewater Primary School impressed judges with My Friends That Have Blossomed, written by a Year 4 student. Both schools will receive a £200 book voucher in recognition of their achievement. This year, 15 schools in Northamptonshire entered the nationwide initiative that encourages schools and care homes to collaborate, bringing young and older people together through poetry. Schools and older adult groups work in pairs to write, learn, and perform poems,

strengthening relationships and promoting creativity across generations.

With the success of this year's competition, plans are already in place to increase participation in autumn 2025, allowing even more pupils and older adults to experience the joy of poetry and connection. For more information or to get involved in future competitions, schools can contact the Lord-Lieutenant's Office at Lord-Lieutenant@westnorthants.gov.uk.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & GRANT FUNDING

Third Party Grant Funding Opportunities

I distribute a Grant Funding document quarterly and the April 2025 version will be available next week. Please contact me if you wish to receive this document on a regular basis.

Well Northants Programme shortlisted for LGC Award

Services that support underrepresented communities in West Northamptonshire have been shortlisted for a prestigious national award. The Well Northants programme has beaten off competition from other council and community initiatives across the country to reach the final stage of the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) awards. The programme has been instrumental in supporting underrepresented groups and communities including people living in isolated conditions or with limited access to support and care services.

The project has seen community development workers embedded in these areas to work closely with the community, enabling West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) to deliver tailored support to those facing the most complex health and social challenges. The programme has led to transformative outcomes, with more than 80% of participants reporting feeling more connected to their communities. Local projects



have included sewing groups, education sessions for families, and pop-up food banks to support those in need.

In the past year, the programme has invested £30,720 into building community assets and funding 19 projects, 14 of which were voted on by local community members. Other key Well Northants projects include the Semilong and Briar Hill evening hubs, which provide a vibrant space for weekly arts, crafts, and active play in a supportive and engaging environment. These hubs also offer educational opportunities outside traditional hours, with a split format that allows adults to gain essential skills such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), budgeting, and digital literacy, while children participate in activities nearby.

Another impactful initiative is the Healing Garden, a therapeutic space funded by Well Northants. Rooted in the belief that gardens offer restorative and emotionally calming benefits, the Healing Garden provides a peaceful sanctuary in the heart of Northampton. Open to all, the garden encourages visitors to reduce isolation and improve their emotional wellbeing through mindfulness. It also offers parents and young children a chance to connect with nature, while providing valuable volunteer opportunities and a space for quiet reflection. The garden is accessible via the Cathedral carpark on Barrack Road (NN2 6AG) and remains open to the public.

Additionally, the You Are What You Grow project seeks to transform two neglected outdoor spaces within the Danetre and Southbrook Learning Village (DSL) in Daventry. The vision for these areas is to develop them into a community garden and sensory space, as well as an outdoor learning environment for students and the wider community. The project will not only serve as an extension of the classroom but also provide a safe space for mental wellness and expose children to life experiences they may otherwise not have had. Beyond Well Northants, WNC has continued to support the full range of communities in the District through various initiatives, such as the Northampton Peace Vigil, Northampton Pride festival, Holocaust Memorial Day, the Inspirational Women Awards and the Male Role Model Awards. The Council's Community Forums have also ensured that seldom-heard groups are actively involved in decision-making, promoting a more inclusive and vibrant West Northamptonshire.

The winners of the LGC Awards will be announced at a ceremony on Wednesday, 11 June 2025. Find out more about the Well Northants programme via the Council's website.

<https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/well-northants>

TRANSPORT & HIGHWAYS

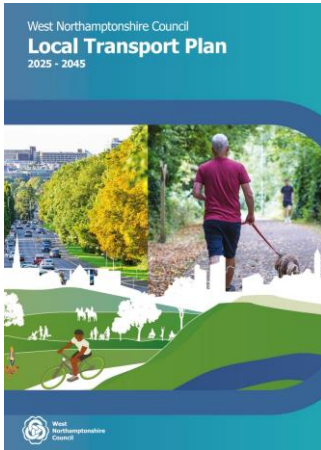
Local Transport Plan

On 4 March 2025, Cabinet approved the amendments made to the Local Transport Plan following public consultation on the plan, it was subsequently adopted at Full Council.

<https://westnorthants.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments...>

The Local Transport Plan (LTP) sets out West Northamptonshire Council's priorities for the next five years and beyond for improving how people and goods travel, both within and through the area, based on a clear vision and objectives developed with both internal and external stakeholders. The LTP is a statutory document required by the Government. It helps guide the engagement, planning, design, decision-making, investment, operation, and maintenance of our transport system. This plan replaces the 2012 plan of the former Northamptonshire County Council. The LTP development has been informed by an updated evidence base and policy context review. It has also been guided by an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) which has been developed in parallel with the plan, as well as multiple rounds of stakeholder workshops comprising officers, a cross-party selection of members and wider transport stakeholders.

Following Cabinet approval in July the draft Local Transport Plan was consulted on from 25 July to 17 October 2024. The consultation resulted in 476 responses to the consultation, 370 of which were from residents of West Northamptonshire. Overall, the consultation responses showed strong support for the LTP's vision, objectives and policies. Key themes for responses received from the consultation were buses and community transport, active travel, travel choice and accessibility, environment, funding, road maintenance and better connectivity between sustainable transport modes. Consultation respondents have suggested that a number of changes be made to the document, these range from an additional word, to additional policy measures and scheme proposals. A fuller list of the changes requested is presented in the You Said/We Did section of the Local Transport Plan Consultation Report. The LTP sets West Northamptonshire Council's transport priorities for the next five years, part of these priorities will include the production of a series of supporting strategies and action plans. These documents will cover the following topic areas, active travel, freight, road safety, mobility hubs, rail and Northampton.



The three themes and six objectives

CONNECTING PEOPLE BETTER

- Objective 1: Improve the accessibility of the public transport, walking and cycling networks, to promote a system that is fair and provides attractive travel alternatives to key destinations.
- Objective 2: Create thriving communities through local investment in a more resilient transport network, services and the public realm in urban and rural towns and villages across West Northamptonshire.

SHAPING HEALTHIER PLACES

- Objective 3: Improve road safety and reducing pollution, while expanding active travel networks and supporting infrastructure that facilitates improved public health outcomes.
- Objective 4: Enhance local environments and further reduce carbon emissions from transport by investing in low carbon and electric modes, mindful of local heritage.

MOBILITY ENABLING PROSPERITY

- Objective 5: Reduce inequalities through better transport connections to key employment and education opportunities, to support local socio-economic growth.
- Objective 6: Maximise the benefits to communities and businesses through use of technology and innovation.

Improved access to Rural Bus Services

Over the next five years West Northamptonshire Council will:

P04A: Work with operators to review bus and coach network coverage and routes, operating hours, service reliability, road and vehicle infrastructure to better serve communities and advocate for and support enhancements where appropriate, with interventions presented and costed within the Bus Service Improvement Plan and other relevant initiatives.

Queen Eleanor Interchange Improvements

Works have started on the long-awaited scheme to improve the Queen Eleanor Interchange in Northampton. The Queen Eleanor interchange is a busy roundabout that joins the A45 trunk road with the A508 London Road, B526 Newport Pagnell Road and Hardingstone Lane. As traffic has increased over the years, the junction has struggled to keep up, and improvements are needed to make it more efficient. The Council has worked closely with National Highway to develop a scheme to improve the junction to benefit residents and motorists for now and the future.

Temporary traffic management measures were in place from the week of 31 March 2025 to ensure that carriageway widening, new traffic signs and signals, drainage works, and resurfacing can be carried out in a timely manner, with the scheme expected to be complete by the end of the year. There will be lane closures on the Queen Eleanor roundabout, as well as on the road heading into Wootton Hall Park, with a full closure on the dedicated left-hand turn. A one-way system will be in place to minimise the impacts and motorists are advised to follow the signage. Full roundabout closures will be necessary at times, these will occur at night time whilst it is less busy, and dates will be communicated prior to any closure across our channels. A full closure will be in place on the cul-de-sac on London Road.



The Council is engaging with local residents and businesses that may be impacted by the scheme works, access will be maintained at all times to properties and for emergency services, and during full closures, diversion routes will be in place.

POLICE FIRE & CRIME COMMISSIONER



What's Happening in Your Area

Find your local officer, get the latest crime statistics and advice, help Northamptonshire Police with appeals for information and find out what they are doing to tackle crime in your area.

<https://www.northants.police.uk/area/your-area/>

Emergency Service Fun Day 6 August 2025

Enjoy free food, entertaining activities, emergency service demos, and learn more about the important work our Emergency Services provide for the community.

DATE: Wednesday 6 August 2025

TIME: 10am - 2pm

WHERE: Danetre and Southbrook Learning Village

The event is FREE.



CULTURE, HERITAGE & SPORT

Pop In Wednesdays

Northampton Museum & Art Gallery are holding Pop in Wednesday Afternoons during the school holidays for fun, hands on activities for families to enjoy.

These activities are free of charge, donations welcome.

<https://discover-northamptonshire.co.uk/.../pop-in-.../>

All Events

Pop-in Wednesdays

April 9 @ 12:00 - 16:00



Pop into the museum on Wednesday afternoons during the school holidays for fun, hands on activities for families to enjoy.

These activities are free of charge, donations welcome.

Help Honour West Northamptonshire's Historical Icons

Residents across West Northamptonshire are reminded that time is running out to submit nominations for the Blue Plaque Scheme, which celebrates individuals and groups who have made a lasting impact on the area. Building on the success of the 2019 Northampton Blue Plaque Scheme, this new initiative will expand across West Northamptonshire introducing 8 new plaques, celebrating local heritage and inspiring communities to engage with their shared history.

The scheme forms part of West Northamptonshire Council's (WNC) Histories of Northamptonshire project, launching in September, which recognises the county's rich heritage by honouring figures who have shaped its history, culture, and identity.

Blue Plaques nominations are open until Wednesday 30 April 2025, offering the public a chance to suggest remarkable individuals or groups who deserve to be commemorated.

To be eligible, nominees must have:

- been a person who died at least 20 years ago
- made a significant contribution to the area
- not have already been recognised with a Blue Plaque
- have a strong connection to a surviving location in West Northamptonshire



Nominations can be submitted by completing an online form or by emailing hon@westnorthants.gov.uk to request a nomination form.

A panel of historical and cultural experts, alongside community representatives, will review applications to select the 8 honourees whose plaques will be installed from September 2025, to coincide with the Histories of Northamptonshire in 100 Objects exhibition.

The scheme also welcomes volunteers to assist with historical research and content development, ensuring that the stories behind each plaque are well-documented and widely accessible.

West Northants to Honour 80th Anniversary of VE Day

Communities across West Northamptonshire will come together to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day, marking the end of World War II in Europe on 8 May 1945. This significant

milestone provides an opportunity to reflect on the bravery and sacrifice of those who fought for freedom, as well as the resilience of communities during the war.

West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) will be flying the official VE Day flag at its offices in Daventry and Towcester, while a short flag-raising ceremony will take place at 9am on Thursday 8 May outside the Guildhall in Northampton, where the public is invited to attend. Additionally, One Angel Square and Northampton Market Square will be illuminated as part of the national Beacon Lighting Ceremony at 9.30pm. A range of community events will take place across West Northants including beacon lightings, exhibitions, talks, performances, and themed activities at local libraries. View more details on the VE Day events webpage.



Other key Armed Forces dates will also be recognised this year including Armed Forces Day on Saturday 28 June, VJ Day on Friday 15 August, and Remembrance Day on Sunday 9 Nov. For more information on VE Day 80 events or guidance on planning a community celebration, including beacon lightings, visit the King's Pageant master's VE Day Celebration Guide. Communities considering to close a road to celebrate VE Day may need to apply for a temporary road closure. Groups planning larger parties are also urged to let the Council know about the event to check issues such as licensing, safety and traffic management.

Women's Touch Rugby Series from 22 April 2025

The Women's Touch Rugby Series will run every Tuesday from 22nd April over 4 sessions at Northampton Saints High Performance Centre.

- Tuesday 22nd April
- Tuesday 29th April
- Tuesday 6th May
- NO SESSION on Tuesday 13th May due to 24/25 Season Awards Dinner
- Tuesday 20th May



Northampton Saints/Loughborough Lightning's women's only touch rugby sessions are designed to engage all women aged 18+ in fun touch rugby sessions, regardless of previous rugby experience. Players will develop core rugby skills and participate in a variety of different touch games. These sessions are non contact, inclusive and welcoming of all women at any age and ability.

<https://www.universe.com/.../northampton-saints...>

Hit N Mix Free Tennis Sessions for Kids

Northampton Tennis Foundation is thrilled to launch Hit 'n' Mix, a brand-new, completely free community tennis session for children aged 12 and up! Thanks to the incredible support of Sport England, they are able to offer a fun, friendly, and inclusive environment where kids can play, learn, and connect.

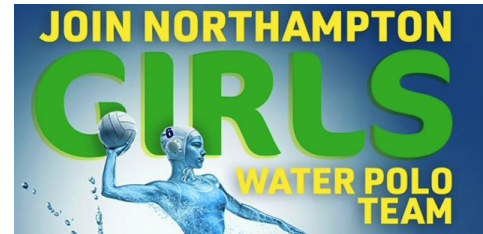
Led by qualified instructors, these open sessions are perfect for those looking to try tennis for the first time or improve their skills in a supervised, social, and welcoming space. It's all about meeting new friends, staying active, and having fun!



Join them in 2025 and be part of something special! No experience needed – just come along and give it a go at Northampton Lawn Tennis Club, NN33HH from 12pm till 2pm. To book please download Northampton Tennis Coaching app. #HitnMix #FreeTennis #NorthamptonTennisFoundation
<https://www.northamptontenniscoaching.co.uk/>

Girls Water Polo

Combine your love of swimming with a fun team sport. At Northampton Water Polo club they are trying to expand their girls Water Polo Team. Water polo is a fantastic way to exercise and to be part of a welcoming and fun club. If anyone is interested, come along and join them on Saturday morning's. If you can't make Saturday's, that's ok, come for a taster and they can advise you on all the sessions they run.



Free Taster

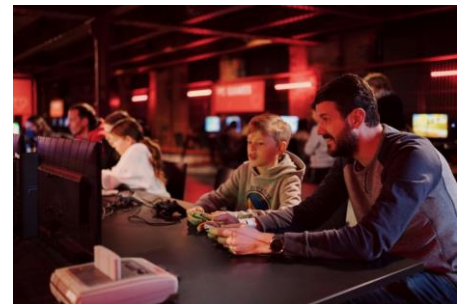
- Children born 2012-2014, 9am Saturday
- Children born 2008-2011, 10am Saturday

Get in touch on 07718525607 to find out more and arrange a taster session.

<https://www.northamptonwaterpolo.co.uk/>

Games World is Coming to Royal & Derngate

From 18-20 April 2025, step into the ultimate gaming experience, where family and friends can explore five decades of video game history. Get hands-on with legendary consoles and iconic games, from Atari to PlayStation, Sega to Xbox, Nintendo to VR—there's something for everyone. Royal & Derngate, Underground Studio Tickets from just £5 – Book your session now at <https://ow.ly/vG6650VqkQB>



Women's Rugby World Cup

In the lead-up to this year's Women's Rugby World Cup, Northampton Saints is set to host the Inter Service Championships Rugby for the first time this Easter. You can witness an electrifying showdown as the men's and women's teams from Royal Navy Rugby Union and RAF Rugby Union go head-to-head at cinch Stadium at Franklin's Gardens on 19 April 2025.

Tickets are on sale now northamptonsaints.co.uk/ISC

Find out more about the Northamptonshire Armed Forces Covenant here: afcnorthamptonshire.co.uk



Calling All Performers, Artists & Vendors

We're looking for musicians, dancers, entertainers, artists, and food & drink vendors to join the Women's Rugby World Cup Fan Zone in Northampton Market Square this summer.

With a big screen, licensed bar, and a celebration of women, sport, culture, and heritage, this is your chance to shine.

Fan Zone Themes:

- 24 Aug: Tech & Innovation
- 30 Aug: Festival Vibes



- 31 Aug: Family Fun
- 7 Sep: Art, Music & Culture

Please submit your Expression of Interest to majorevents@westnorthants.gov.uk by 30 April 2025 with details of your act or stall. Tag a performer, artist, or vendor who should be part of this celebration.
[#WRWC2025](#)