

Good evening. I am Alison Eastwood one of the three West Northamptonshire Councillors for the Silverstone Ward. The three of us have divided the Ward to best represent the parts in which we live; such that I look after the northern section with 14 villages and handle most of the queries for HS2 as 8 villages have the track passing thru; Charles Manners covers the middle section involving Woodend and Greens Norton and Dermot Bambridge looks after Silverstone Abthorpe, Wappenham, Syresham, Radstone and Whitfield.

Currently the Boundary Commission is reviewing the West Northamptonshire wards and the number of councillors serving them. The latest proposals out for further consultation suggest this ward taking in Whittlebury, which is currently in the Deanshanger Ward but has far more in common with us. The proposal is to remain with three councillors. The three of us support the changes with one further proposal which is to bring Thorpe Mandeville back into this ward. The only downside is that the new proposal would see the number of parishes we serve increase from 26 to 34.

Let's now look at the budget, because everything revolves around that. By now you will have received your council tax demand for the coming year, which starts on the 1st April.

The goal for the coming year was to achieve a balanced budget – that means that the money coming in balances with the money going out. We have done that, which was not easy under the current economic climate and back in January we were working to close a £6 million hole in the draft budget. This was mainly because of rising costs due to a great extent to children's services and adult social care, not to mention increasing salaries and other costs. But we got there and now have a balanced budget.

The average Council Tax rise is 4.99%, significantly below current inflation rates and in line with the Government's allowance, crucially generating extra funding of around £12m towards bridging the shortfall – with 2% of the increase going towards funding adult social care. This represents an average increase on a Band D property of £86.02 a year, the equivalent of £1.65 a week.

This year, as required by law, all households in the former Daventry, Northampton and South Northants areas will pay the same Council Tax band charges. Unfortunately for us, both this area and Daventry have to pay more but Northampton pays less than before.

The budget follows a commitment to making services as efficient as possible and review income streams to maintain and protect services, with £32.3m of savings achieved, primarily through productivity gains and operating costs

savings. There are increases in discretionary fees and charges for services residents can choose to use, including aligning fees with national averages and raising charges not reviewed for years, to fairly reflect today's operating costs.

Many residents, myself included are not happy that the cost for green bin collection has gone up to from £43 to £55. There is a misconception that this service was free under SNC. It was not – at that time the cost of collection of all waste was included within the council tax charge. Unlike the other waste collection services, which are mandatory for all households, garden waste collection is discretionary. Costs for collecting all waste has increased significantly as has diesel fuel and the income from selling recyclates has dropped and in some cases we now have to pay for them to be taken away. The £55 cost is in line with most other authorities' charges and indeed some are considerably higher. Having said all that, to pay an average of £2.20 per collection for this service, 52p more than last year, is a very fair price if you consider it would cost about £4.80 to take your garden waste to the tip with it costing 47p to run a car for a mile.

As you may have been aware at the beginning of the year the planning department was in a state of chaos.

A lot of changes have taken place ,sadly old officers have departed, new officers booked and we are slowly wittling down the number of back dated applications and should be back up to speed by September.

Now we move on to the massive shortage units at Shacks Barn, DHL and other local employment site applications. We attend a meeting with planning officers every third Friday to receive a brief on the outstanding applications.

AL1 or DHL is the largest application and is mainly to north of the Bell Plantation garden centre on the A5. They have been asked to run different scenarios through modelling to test the cumulative impact of the traffic from this and the other proposed sites. There are still other matters awaited including those related to the football pitches and the visual impact study. A re-consultation is to be sent out very soon to parish councils and others I understand. (started at 24.5 m now 21.5)

AL1 This is the land surrounding the Bell Plantation complex – very little has happened for about 6 months and further ongoing transport assessment work is being done by the applicant. (16 m)

AL2 is Woolgrowers site and is the plot of land on the corner of the A5 and Greens Norton Road facing the car sales garage. They have been asked by WNC to do further highway modelling and assessment work. (11 m).

AL3 – the IM Properties site is at Tiffield effectively behind Bell Plantation and running adjacent to the A43 going north. There are a number of issues related to it, which are being pursued at present. (21.5)

AL4 is Shacks Barn. Both WNC Highways and National Highways have requested the applicant to do further highway modelling and assessment.

AL5 is alongside the left hand side of the A5 dual carriage just after the Old Stratford roundabout. It is likely to increase traffic on the northern A5 through Towcester and therefore add to the traffic created from the other sites.

The earliest that any are likely to come to committee appears to be May.

I will also just mention the proposal for a truck stop a Syresham. In a nutshell this is against policy for that location and WNC highways and many residents have objected to it. Dermot Bambridge done some traffic work, to demonstrate that its location is a serious traffic hazard.

Looking further afield, there is a lot of exciting news in Northampton, where the goal is to get life back into the town and make it somewhere people want to visit. There are major plans on Abington Street where we have purchased some of the old larger empty stores and are working on redeveloping them into quality apartments with smaller shops below. The major refurbishment of the market square which is taking place at the moment will make it a vibrant place for the market and focal point for the town and there are a number of other projects on the go.

I am sure you will be pleased to know that the Spone Arcade Car Park in Towcester is due to fully open on 30th May. The old former Coop Poundstretcher supermarket building has now gone and the old car park will more than double in capacity to boast 150 spaces, additional lighting, CCTV, landscaping, and new walkways to make the car park safer and more accessible. motorcycle parking and a bike shelter will also be included.

Last year we engaged a Marshall to help us monitor the work of fusion and HS2

The project past thru the House of Commons as an ACT and therefore there is little we can do to alter major issues along the route But in small ways Gary

Petit has been very successful with mitigation issues. But we still have our daily tussell with sineage and road closures.

Louise Seymour has joined the staff at Angel Square to join the dots and stimulate re-generation in Northants and develop cultural links for music ,art photograpy ,ballet and drama in the Rural areas. The Northants Art Museum on Guildhall will house the contents of spectatcular Leather museum later in the year complete with George 111 leather lined loo.

Ofsted have upgraded our annual report on schools across WNC and Send has been fully launched across the county. Sadly our foster caring program has come under severe criticism but the issues are now being addressed.

The coronation is around the corner Please make sure that All in the villages participate ; It would appear that every village is doing something for the big Lunch but follow the Chronical for a multitude of activities in Northants itself on the Saturday.

Finally remember that Climate Change and sustainability are not the sole responsibilities of the G7 or Cop 20 Its our responsibility to monitor our own behaviour

I than you for listening and wish you a great year.

Alison Eastwood..