

Cosgrove Annual Parish Meeting 2019

Thanks

I first want to thank you all for all your help and support over the past twelve months. It has been a real rocky ride but I do appreciate all you have done to make my life a little easier.

South Northants District - A Great Place to Live

South Northants District continues to be ranked as one of the better places to live in the country.

Unemployment is one of the lowest in the country although SNC runs a job club to help anyone get back into work.

The waste and recycling record is one of which we remain proud and is the best in the County and 7th best in the country. Customer satisfaction remains very high while the costs of collection have been reduced over the medium term.

There has been much talk about local government reform, and I will come to that but lost among all of that we had a successful year as SNC, the **Brackley Pool** was opened, we had visit from HRH Prince Harry to Silverstone, we had a successful commemoration lunch to mark the 100th anniversary of the ending of WW1. We also held dinners to celebrate the sporting achievements of **Mercedes Formula 1** team who won for the 5th successive year, and we celebrated the success of **Brackley Town FC** who won a fairy tale final at Wembley to bring on the FA Trophy.

SNC submitted its Local Plan Part 2 in January and we hope this will be open for inspection in June 19 with an aim for adoption by the autumn / later part of 2109.

SNC Financial Highlights

Funding from Central Government is now limited to the Rural Services Delivery Grant. However, our growth in terms of homes and businesses allows us to continue to balance the books.

SNC continue to be one of the best at collecting council tax with 99% of all tax collected. The national average is 98% and SNC remains the 16th best in the whole of England on collection rates. We are considerably higher than the other Authorities in Northamptonshire.

	Rank 2017/18	2017/18 Rate
Corby	206	97.1%
Daventry	123	98.1%
East Northamptonshire	158	97.8%
Kettering	152	97.8%
Northampton	247	96.3%
South Northamptonshire	16	99.0%
Wellingborough	128	98.1%

New Homes Bonus

Unlike many Councils SNC uses some of the New Homes Bonus it receives from new developments to invest in the local community. Local organisations can bid for grants to help them achieve their objectives.

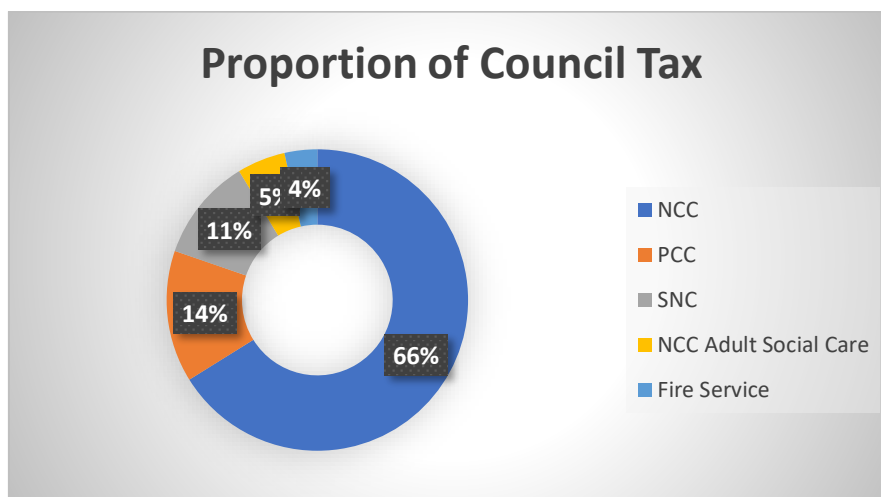
Grants are awarded by the Community Funding Panel that meets for times a year and application forms and details of the criteria can be found on the SNC web site.

In 2018-19, almost £1.507m of grant funding was awarded to communities within South Northamptonshire across 167 projects to improve their environment and lifestyle. Over the lifetime of the New Homes Bonus Scheme over £3.3m has been re-invested in the Community.

Examples of grants made include:

Council Tax

The SNC part of the Council Tax bill was raised by 2.99% which is £5.55 a year for a Band D property, making total now £191.33 per year. The increase is in line with inflation. SNC only get to keep 11% of the total bill. Northants County take the biggest share at 71%, PCC 14% and the Fire Service 4%.



The SNC proportion of the Council Tax will increase by under 11p per week.

The breakdown of the Council Tax bill is below for a Band D Property:

Body	2018/19	Increase	Increase Amount	2018/19
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NCC ¹	£1,146.63	4.99%	-£0.25	£1,146.38
NCC Adult Social Care ²	£89.72	0.00%	£0.00	£89.72
PCC ³	£221.04	11.00%	£24.00	£245.04
Fire Service ⁴			£60.76	£60.76
SNC	£185.78	2.99%	£5.55	£191.33
Total	£1,643.17	5.48%	£90.06	£1,733.23

This year there are a number of differences:

Note 1 From 2019/20 the Fire Service comes under the responsibility of the Police and Crime Commissioner. Therefore, the cost for the Fire Service has been removed from the County element of the bill, hence the seeming decrease. In fact, the County's part has increased by the 2.99%, the maximum allowed by the Government without a referendum. The Government has permitted the County to surcharge the residents by an additional 2% to offset the woeful state of the County's finances.

Note 2 The Government allows the charging of an Adult Social Care premium. Councils were allowed to raise it by 2% per annum over 3 years, or 3% over two years. NCC have already increased it by the 3% in 2017/18 and 2018/19 and therefore there is no further increase allowed for 2019/20.

Note 3 The Government this year has allowed Police and Crime Commissioners to raise their portion of the Council Tax by a maximum of £24. The Northamptonshire Police and crime Commissioner has decided to apply this increase in full.

Note 4 This year the Fire Service portion of the Council Tax is shown separately, previously it had been included in the overall figure for the County.

In addition, individual Parish Precepts will be levied and charged for.

Planning

Local Plan part 2

After five lengthy years, South Northants completed the LPP2 and submitted it to the Inspectorate ahead of schedule on the 22nd January 2019. It has been acknowledged, and we have been allocated an Inspector who will begin his due diligence in June 2019. Any issues raised will be done so through a Programme Manager also appointed, which means that points raised and answers given will be guided through the Programme Manager. There were some issues relating to 'employment land' north of the A43 and some parish 'green spaces' that may be contentious, but apart from that, the Council are confident with their submission.

Should issues be raised by the Inspector requiring attention, they will once again be presented for public consultation and should this be the case, it is likely that the Plan will become 'statute' during the winter of 2019. At this stage it will replace the 1997 South Northamptonshire Local Plan.

Neighbourhood Plan

Two Neighbourhood Plans have been 'made': - Harpole and Kislingbury. The latter winning a National Award with presentations made in London. There are a number of other villages/parishes that are at various stages of 'making' their plans and when completed will be presented for consultation and scrutinisation. Once adopted and 'made' they will lie alongside the Local Plan Part 2.

Although some expense is incurred when preparing the NP, it is a vital means of protecting our rural villages. Whilst promoting acceptable development it avoids speculative development.

South Northamptonshire Land Supply

This Council has built up a good reserve of planning land in-hand. We have been fortunate with growth for both dwellings and employment land in Brackley, Silverstone, Deanshanger and Towcester. This has enabled us to build to 11.2 years of land supply. (The Governments guide is 5 years plus 20%).

With the anticipated Unitary, even with, SNC 11.2 years, Daventry DC 6 plus years and Northampton BC 2.3 years these numbers will not meet the average figure required by the Government's minimum requirement! This actually puts greater emphasis on the need to protect our rural villages and thus we should encourage Neighbourhood Plans.

Conservation and Heritage

This Council is fortunate firstly to have such a committed Conservation team but also to have a District with so many Conservation areas. The team continue to work through our total of 96 villages and hamlets, updating where necessary and removing certain villages that no longer marry up to the Conservation requirements, thus we maintain a very high standard.

Again South Northants is blessed with many monuments, buildings of architectural interest and special landscape areas. These remain an asset to our area and play an enormously important part in our tourism visitations. We are very conscious of maintaining these items to the highest standard.

West Northamptonshire SUE

A joint development of 7,700 dwellings with Daventry DC and Northampton BC in the area from Kislingbury to Harlestone Heath. This includes a proportion on SNC's land known as Norwood Farm. Attached to this development are the usual primary schools (2), health centre, retail shops, green spaces, sports fields and the Sandy lane Relief Road (SLRR).

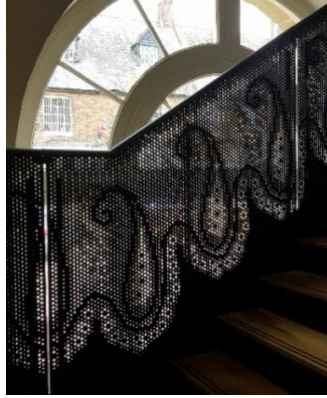
Currently known as the road leading nowhere, we have very recently found the key to unlock progress on this vast area. Hitherto the developer has claimed non-viability if the road is to be completed before a single phase of building. Homes England have agreed to build a section of the road that is missing, enabling the developer to alter his phasing to work off the newly completed section of the SLRR. Details relating to Affordable Homes have been agreed and suddenly the whole development become viable. This has been an extremely important development in the process as this site is calculated in our building land in-hand figures. Had this programme stalled further, in could have had a huge impact on that calculation and thus made our rural villages susceptible to speculative developments!

Brackley Town Hall Restoration

On the 11th September the newly restored Town Hall was re-opened. This was the culmination of a project that was funded jointly by the Heritage Lottery Fund (£2.3m), South Northamptonshire Council (£500k) and Brackley Town Council (£500k) that has totally refurbished the iconic Georgian Town Hall in the centre of Brackley so that it may continue to serve the community for many, many years to come.



The entire building has been restored, with new stonework replacing those blocks that had suffered from decay, some 60% of the roof tiles replaced, the clock cleaned and serviced, and a new bell installed (from Taylors Bell Foundry in Loughborough).



A completely new staircase has been installed which winds round a central lift, providing easier access to the civic chamber on the first floor. Note that the design on the hand rail on the right-hand side picture is representative of traditional Northamptonshire lace.



All windows on the first floor now have stained glass panels that illustrate life in Brackley, ancient and modern. Here are the two windows that commemorate SNC's and the HLF's involvement. Originally these windows had the Brackley Council crest but had been replaced with plain glass.

Towcester Town Expansion

Towcester Relief Road (TRR)

Included in the Section 106 agreement for the Towcester South Urban Expansion (SUE) is the completion of the TRR by occupation of the 1016th dwelling, sometime in 2026. This Council has been trying for some time to accelerate the delivery of this road. Recent negotiations with Persimmon Homes and Highways England continue to find a way to get an early delivery of the road.

With the TRR in place HGV vehicles will be encouraged through signage to use the 40mph TRR rather than go through Towcester town centre at a restricted 20mph. Hopefully this will have a huge impact on the Air Quality in Towcester Town Centre.

Health & Wellbeing in the District

Brackley Leisure Centre. January this year saw the official opening of Brackley Leisure Centre, it was a truly special and incredibly successful day. Olympian champion swimmer Mark Foster said he hopes the new pools will inspire future generations to stay healthy as he cut the ribbon on South Northants Councils £4.5m redevelopment of Brackley Leisure Centre. SNC promised Brackley a new pool and we have delivered it.

Towcester Centre for Leisure. We are incredibly pleased and proud that we are able to commit just over £1million towards making long overdue improvements to Towcester Centre for Leisure. More and more people are using our leisure centres, we know that people who come from the town and the surrounding areas to Towcester will all really welcome this investment.

Summer activities for children. 1207 children from across our District enjoyed the summer activities we provided, making 2018 a record year. Much work went into ensuring we were able to provide great opportunities through the summer holidays to children from all walks of life, including those with disabilities and children from low income families.

Towcester & Brackley Community Fun Days took place at the Islington Road Recreation Ground in Towcester in May and at Brackley's Leisure Centre in Springfield Way in June. Hundreds of families attended these free events which showcased the clubs and activities available to young people in South Northamptonshire.

Disability Sport. We started the South Northants Disability Sports Forum just over a year ago and the Forum consists of local sports clubs, third sector organisations, Legacy Leisure, Northamptonshire Sport and of course South Northants Council. One of the aims of the Forum is to break down the barriers faced by disabled people making it possible for people to lead healthy lives, and that means all people.

Towcester Watermeadows came to life in October when Chairman Cllr Richard Dallyn hosted a fun run to raise money for the hospices which serve South Northamptonshire. The Watermeadows are currently underused, Cllr Dallyn thought this would be a great way to introduce new people to this wonderful public space, and for anyone who keeps putting off that lifestyle change, this could be their first step towards a longer and better life.

Art & Culture

Centre Screen. The rural cinema scheme continues to be popular in communities where the village hall or library (in Brackley) is a convenient place for residents to get together for social activities. Some village groups have invested in their own film equipment now, but many rely on Centre Screen to provide it, show the film and deal with licensing. There are more regular screenings in South Northants than other parts of the county: Blakesley, Blisworth, Brackley, Cogenhoe, Culworth, Evenley, King's Sutton, Marston St. Lawrence, Milton Malsor, Moreton Pinkney, Nether Heyford, Paulerspury and Whittlebury.

Private Sector Housing Initiatives

Home Safe Project. This year sees the launch of the second year of the Home Safe Project to improve the wellbeing of low-income households by assisting with essential works to their homes. In 2018 the project helped 29 households by assisting with general repair works and improving security, lighting, warmth as well as adaptations to support access and mobility issues reducing the risk of falls.

Financial Assistance for Adaptations and Repairs. Private Sector Housing provides Disabled Facility Grants to help people with a disability undertake major adaptations to their homes to facilitate access in and around their home. Last year, 49 people and their families were assisted in the provision of level access showers, stair and through floor lifts, ceiling track hoists, ramps and door widening.

New affordable housing. We work hard with housing associations to provide additional affordable homes to meet the housing needs of local residents. Since April 2018 there have been 145 new affordable homes built across the district. We have a strong delivery programme for the remainder of this financial year and into 2019/20.

Communities

Residents will now benefit from a new community transport scheme. ABILITY Community Transport is providing a service across the rural communities of South Northants to provide a weekly shopper bus service to the main shopping areas of Towcester, Stony Stratford, Wolverton and Northampton. South Northants Council has awarded a grant of £59,924 towards ABILITY's total project costs of £171,214.

Good Neighbour schemes are established by communities and run by local people to provide day to day support for other residents in their village and community, particularly those more isolated or older residents, who may need help on an occasional or regular basis.

South Northants Council Wellbeing Activity Map, developed by SNC's Community Services Team is now live on our website. You can search for activities near where you live by entering your postcode on the website. Lots of the activities are free of charge and none cost more than £5 per session. They include opportunities for sports, arts, learning and socialising.

Annual Comfort & Joy Campaign. The annual Comfort and Joy campaign, started in 2015, ran again in December, which helps those who are staying in refuges as a result of experiencing domestic abuse. Jointly organised by the Daventry District and South Northamptonshire Community Safety Partnership and the Daventry District Forum, its aim is to provide people with a few gifts and treats, as well as food, toiletries and other essential items.

Environmental Services Report

This year has been very active and positive for our teams in Waste & Recycling, Licensing and Environmental Health, with significant achievements thanks to their hard work.

Waste & Recycling

We were the 7th best authority in England for recycling out of 345 areas and one place higher than before. Of the waste we collect, 60.5% is recycled thanks to our residents taking care to make sure the right things go in the right bins – this is good for the environment and keeps costs down.

Our booking system for collecting bulky waste – such as kitchen appliances and furniture – is now on line. This has seen an increase in the number of collections made and has proved a great success with 97% of those who have used us happy with the service. For £34 we will collect up to six items.

Street cleaning is another service we provide and are planning to introduce on-street recycling bins in Towcester at car parks, and in Brackley at sites to be determined. The bins have two compartments one for litter and the other for recyclables such as cans, plastic bottles etc.

Licensing

Safeguarding of young and vulnerable people is increasingly important and we are playing our part by training staff in licensed premises, hotels and the like as well as taxi drivers. This teaches people who meet the public what to look out for and what to do if they see it.

Other activities include working across the county to ensure high standards in taxi and hire car services including regular checks to make sure vehicles are safe and drivers properly licensed.

Working with Community Protection and Environmental Protection to address nuisance issues has also been successful. We have further undertaken training on new animal licensing regulations.

Environmental Health & Protection

Food hygiene is vitally important and we ensure businesses are rated in the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and have carried out 250+ food hygiene inspections. We promoted the Eat Out Eat Well healthy eating awards for food businesses and made 17 awards - 3 Gold, 7 Silver and 7 Bronze. Such high standards require support from our Environmental Health (EH) team and this year we launched EH Sense. This enhanced support service helps businesses comply with environmental health laws. In addition, we run food safety courses. Food Safety Week was a successful promotion demonstrating the role of our food inspectors in ensuring that the food on your plate is safe.

We continue to review and assess air quality across the district, respond to consultations and attend the Local Authorities Noise Group meeting regarding matters relating to HS2 in order to secure the best mitigation possible. Over 1,200 service requests were responded to including matters such as noise, smoke and odour nuisance. We also responded to over 400 planning consultations mainly with regard to noise, air quality, and contaminated land issues - including the proposals for two large rail hubs near Blisworth and in particular their impact with regard to noise and air quality. There have been successes in enforcement at Roade and Helmdon relating to land contamination and smoke nuisance respectively. Inspections for all businesses subject to the new animal welfare legislation were carried out and officers trained to meet the new requirements.

Our teams work with partners in preparing for major events at Silverstone Circuit and other venues in the district. One of the initiatives is the Silverstone Campsite Award scheme. With thousands of visitors camping at Silverstone for the British Grand Prix in particular, this scheme helps and encourages high standards of safety particularly, in the neighbouring sites. Standards continue to improve and the number of campsite operators taking part in the scheme has also increased.

Supporting Local Business



This year, South Northamptonshire features in a national league table of local authority areas as being in the top 40% places in the country. The ranking is a measure of growth, innovation, social equality, health and happiness. Despite it being a time of uncertainty, the District continues to be a good place to live, work, invest and grow.

Eighty-three per cent of the working age population is employed, and the District's workforce also has an above average level of education, with over ninety per cent qualified to NVQ1 and above.

The Council's Business Support Adviser continues to help businesses in the District. The Council assists new and small business start-ups, which supports the wider work of the Economic Growth Team in working closely with our business community to support investment and growth. In 2018/19, over 100 businesses received such support helping them to expand and create new employment.

The District has historically experienced high levels of out commuting and low job density, which has impacted on the sustainability of urban and rural settlements. Despite low levels of official unemployment, demand is still high for the Job Club and Job Match Service, which has been running since 2009 and supported 477 people into work.

Local Government Reform (LGR)

The past year has been dominated by the events at NCC dealing with the fallout from it. As we began the new municipal year in 2018 NCC had just issued a Section 114 Notice, the local government equivalent of a bankruptcy notice. Max Caller had reported in his opinion Best Value was not being satisfied and that such was the mess at NCC it was not possible to recover this in a sensible time period and concluded that the best thing to do was to have two new unitary councils.

The unitary councils would abolish NCC and all the 7 districts and boroughs. He proposed that there should be one in the North encompassing Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough and East Northants and one in the West taking in Daventry, South Northants and Northampton Borough.

Max Caller also recommended that the Secretary of State appoint Commissioners to take over the running of the council.

In May the Secretary of State advised he was minded to appoint Commissioners for take control of all matters of Financial and Strategic decision making and Governance and Scrutiny. Mr Tony McArdle and Mr Brian Roberts were appointed. In November a third Commissioner, Malcom Newsem was appointed to take over Children's services and to recommend how these would be structured in the future.

At the same time as appointing the commissioners the Sec of State issued an invitation to all the districts and boroughs and the county council to request that they submit a proposal for the future governance of the county. That invitation set out some strict rules that needed to be followed for a proposal to be considered valid.

- Whole councils to be used as building blocks
- A single county proposal was not allowed
- A population had to be substantially in excess of 300,000
- The proposal had to have a credible geography
- Whilst it was also possible to overstep the county boundary it was also necessary to respect the laws on policing.

In effect this meant that there was only one proposal that would fulfil all the criteria, namely the one set out by Max Caller for a West and North unitary council.

On 31 August all the councils, except for Corby, who for political reasons wanted to retain the socialist republic of Corby, submitted a proposal to the Secretary of State.

To date, the Sec of State has not given any indication as to whether or not he is minded to implement those. He has taken longer to read and consider the proposal than he gave the councils to prepare them.

The councils are working on the assumption that the Sec of State will approve these proposals and so are not wasting time waiting but beginning to make some of the preparations for unitary councils.

As a result of this, Cherwell and South Northants both decided that their partnership would not need to be broken and everything that we had achieved with Cherwell unwound. This process has been ongoing since the autumn and will be complete by June.

The unwinding of the Cherwell partnership has resulted in a management restructure at SNC. Yvonne Rees took a new post of joint chief executive of Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell

and Richard Ellis took up the post of Chief Executive of SNC. The other members of the senior management also split between Cherwell and South Northants.

In December an order was passed in parliament to delay the elections that were due in 2019 until 2020. That should dovetail with the new elections for the new councils.

The current timetable is not fixed, but is something along the lines of: -

- Secretary of State consultation ended 25 January 2019
- Secretary of State to indicate his opinion of the proposal – spring 2019
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Assuming he is minded to proceed

- Orders laid in Parliament around the time of the Easter Recess, it moves from immediately before to immediately after, but approx. late April /May
- Shadow council will come into being 14 days after the order is made
- Shadow council will comprise of all the members of all the councils and those from NCC who represent this area
- Shadow council will elect a shadow executive to do the work and prepare for day 1
- The new council will come into being 1 April 2020
- SNC will cease to be a council on 1 April 2020
- Elections to the new unitary authority will be 7 May 2020

There is a lot of work between now and then to get a council set up and running to be safe and legal on day 1. Thereafter there will be many issues to be dealt with but the focus will be on being ready for the first day.

In reality there will not be a great deal of difference on the first day. A lot of effort will be placed in getting statutory items sorted and harmonised where required. For example, housing allocations policy and taxi licensing policy would need to be the same whereas at present Daventry, South Northants and Northampton have different ones.

Transformation (SNC/Cherwell)

The saying a week in politics is a long time rings true sometimes even one hour is challenging for South Northants Council especially as 1 year ago we with our partners at Cherwell District Council were delivering our joined-up services to both our communities with considerable benefits to our residents and significant value for money savings to our Council Tax payers.

With the announcement of the Section 114 notice issued due to the financial failure of Northants County Council, the government appointed commissioners to come in to take financial management control of the County, the Government then decided to replace the County authority and pursue a two unitary solution for Northamptonshire to replace the County Councils, Borough and district councils in Northamptonshire.

The unitary proposals were consulted on and were duly agreed by the Government and therefore in May 2020 Our Council, Daventry District Council and Northampton Borough Council, will cease and be replaced by a new West Northamptonshire Council.

The law does allow for Local Authorities in this case Cherwell as they are in Oxfordshire to be part of the new West Northamptonshire proposal as they are under a different Police and Crime commissioner area.

Sadly Cherwell and South Northants are divorcing, so all the hard work in bringing us together has to be undone, as with setting up our partnership, we work so well together and we have delivered great services and still are and I must once again thank everybody affected by the changes, for the professional way they go about their role as officers in putting our residents first.

Cherwell having made the decision to leave our working arrangement then had discussions with Oxfordshire County Council and our joint Chief Executive Yvonne Rees applied for and was appointed as the Joint Chief Executive at Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council and whilst we still meet up with Yvonne in her new role I know she did an amazing job when she was at the helm at SNC and continues to do so in her new position.

SNC then appointed our Interim Chief Executive Richard Ellis, Richard had been part of Yvonne's management team, so he was able to hit the ground running dealing with the arrangements with Cherwell and the pressing work on setting up the new shadow board necessary to bring about the creation of the West Northamptonshire Unitary Authority. Our new management team is in place and we have the necessary officers to continue to provide our excellent services to our residents.

The ongoing excellent relationship with Cherwell is a great way of how local Government can work together in partnership and as we go into the unknown let's hope South Northants commitment to providing great services and strong financial management over many years will be at the forefront of the new Unitary Council for West Northamptonshire.