

District Councillors' Report to Annual Parish Meetings

Councillors Sarah Peck and John Shephard

With both a heavy heart and optimistic anticipation for the future we write the final district councillors' report to parish councils.

This year will be remembered for introducing Zoom council, committee and officer meetings, councils being used to channel unprecedented support to local businesses, officers' home working and officers' and members' support for the most vulnerable and of course the demise of Daventry District Council at midnight on the evening of Monday 31st March. At that time your district councillors lose that role and become members of the West Northamptonshire Council. We hold that title until the elections on 6 May.

What is the legacy of DDC? We would like to think that the local plans it has introduced over the years have been welcomed by parishes. Of those that we represent, Boughton has of course seen the most growth and we now welcome the newcomers to the village via Buckton Fields. Harlestone is to face the next phase of building locally; hopefully the experiences of the Buckton Fields development will be useful in managing the greater scope of new housing there.

For many years we have heard constituents' understandable moans that, *"We pay tax to DDC and get nothing back"*. It is true that the centre of Daventry has been transformed to the great benefit of residents; the most recent investment is that of the new cinema, now complete and ready for its Opening Night. But with the massive investment in the new Moulton Leisure Centre, featuring one of the best swimming pools in the country, any imbalance has certainly been redressed. The recent DDC press release gives details:

"Facilities set to be opened to the public include the centre's six-lane, 25m swimming pool, and a 60-station gym featuring a wide range of modern fitness equipment. A diverse range of other facilities, including two therapy pools, multi-activity studio, spin studio and the first health spa in the area – comprising a steam room, sauna and spa pool – will reopen when coronavirus restrictions are expected to be further lifted on 17 May."

On a parochial level, the council year began with the creation of the new Harlestone Manor Parish Council. John lead the DDC process in its gestation. He chaired its first meeting for the purposes of the appointment of a chairman. The meeting was by Zoom. There was a tie, 8 members voting 4 – 4 for two candidates. What was to be done? He had a pack of cards to hand. An ace was chosen and one of the candidates invited to say whether it was red or black. The chairmanship was resolved on the turn of a card!

The year also saw planning permission being granted for the NWRR. We now concentrate on monitoring delivery of the mitigation measures. As Buckton Fields moves into Phase 3 we are active in pursuing two significant outstanding issues: community facilities and early years

education. We have yet to see any firm proposals for either of these. They are very much work in progress.

During the year John was appointed to the task and finish group of the shadow authority setting the 2021/2022 budget and council tax. That involved some 15 Zoom meetings over an 8 month period.

As you all know, on the 6th May we will be going to the polls to elect a total of 93 councillors for the new unitary authority, West Northamptonshire Council, which will be formed on the 1st April this year. This will replace the existing district, borough and county councils. Residents in Daventry, Northampton and South Northamptonshire are being encouraged to apply early to vote by post. On the same day in May, residents will also be able to cast votes for the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and to elect representatives for many of their local parish councils. A lot of work has been done to make voting safely during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, with a range of Covid-safe measures being planned for polling stations, alongside the other usual options such as voting by post or by proxy. Polling arrangements are currently being organised by elections staff in Daventry District, South Northants and Northampton until the new Council is formed in April. We would encourage everyone to vote in these important elections.

We know that a huge amount of progress has made getting the new unitary Council ready and setting up the wider leadership team.

We were made aware of the rise in crime over recent months and raised these matters with the Northamptonshire Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire. House-to-house enquiries have been taking place in the areas where the break-ins have been reported and they have also been collecting CCTV to ascertain whether there is any footage of note that may help us identify suspects.

We know the Sgt has also held meetings with some of the parish councils as well as the community safety partnership and held talks regarding the setting up of a local Streetwatch scheme.

The office of the Superintendent, Local Policing Commander (West) Northamptonshire Police informed us of intelligence gathering in respect of online marketplace disposal of items that have been stolen, ANPR research of vehicular movements during the period of note and ongoing patrol and proactive deployment of response and neighbourhood staff as well as Rural Crime Team and officers from Specialist Operations including Road Crime Team and Dog Support.

We all face new councils in May. To those retiring from parish council duty, we wish the very best. To those seeking to carry on we wish good fortune in your election process.

SP & JS
March 2021