

West Northamptonshire Council Budget 2023 - 2024

Tonight, West Northamptonshire Council is holding the annual budget meeting. The proposed budget is a balanced one, which is not easy to achieve under the current economic climate, as there will be rising costs unfortunately due to a great extent to children's services and adult social care, not to mention increasing salaries and other costs.

The proposals seek to raise the average Council Tax by 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 for properties in south Northamptonshire.

This year's proposals will also see households in the former Daventry, Northampton and South Northants areas paying the same Council Tax charges, following a three-year plan to harmonise them and something we are required to do by law.

The budget follows a commitment to making services as efficient as possible and reviewing income streams to maintain and protect services, with £32.3m of savings proposals put forward, primarily through productivity gains and savings in operating costs. There are also plans to increase discretionary fees and charges in areas where residents can choose if they wish to use the service, including aligning fees with national averages and raising charges which have not been reviewed for years, to ensure they fairly reflect today's operating costs.

The outcome of tonight's meeting should be announced tomorrow.

Truck Stop application.

There is a strong case building against this application but, as ever, the ride can be bumpy.

The objections submitted by Environmental Protection (impact on neighbouring amenity) relating to noise affecting the properties adjacent to the site at High Cross and in particular the effect on meetings held in the Meeting Hall that was granted planning consent in March 2020 have since been challenged by the applicant in a letter from its consultants received a week ago. Environmental Protection will be responding to this.

The latest news is that the applicant has agreed an Extension of Time until 21st April (with the hope it can come to committee by then) so there is still time for anyone who has not done so and wants to make comments, to send them in and ideally using the link from the website page <https://snc.planning-register.co.uk/Planning/Display/WNS/2022/2012/MAO> there is a click box saying 'comment on this application'

To summarise what has been received regarding material objections –

First from the Local Highways Authority (WNC), which has many concerns and requires more information in several areas. In fact this is the longest report that the planning officer has seen from Highways.

It contains the following recommended reasons for refusal

1. The application fails to demonstrate that safe and suitable access for all users can be achieved in line with paragraph 110 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
2. The application fails to demonstrate that the development will not result in an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or that the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would not be severe. The development is therefore contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework.

3. The applicant has not included adequate provision for vehicle parking, cycle parking and EV vehicle parking. The development is therefore contrary to the Northamptonshire Transportation Plan (March 2012) the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy and the Northamptonshire Parking Standards (September 2016).

In addition, I have submitted the results of investigation work I carried out because my biggest safety concern is the proximity of the A43 junction from the proposed entrance to the site. It is approximately 60 metres from the exit of the nearest junction roundabout to its entrance. It is not unreasonable for a car to come off the A43 in either direction and be doing 40 mph as it exits the roundabout accelerating on to Welsh Lane – I have done this several times to confirm it. According to the AA, at 40 mph the stopping distance is 36 metres. However, in the wet this can increase to 72 metres or more. This means that a collision could be unavoidable if, in wet conditions, a vehicle was entering or leaving the entrance to the site as a car approached from that direction and worse if there was one or more vehicles waiting to enter the site.

Other issues relate to -

The AZ34 Bridleway runs alongside the site adjacent to the A43 embankment and crosses the B4525 between exit from A43 junction and proposed entrance to site. For safety, a gate is required for this to link to the Truck Stop but this contravenes the requirement for continuous secure perimeter with just one entrance/exit.

I also commented on noise and exhaust fumes/air quality from vehicles using the truck stop affecting adjacent properties at High Cross, one of which is only 60 metres from the nearest parking bay. Noise and fumes would continue all night for refrigerated trailers, which must keep their fridges running, usually powered by a diesel engine mounted in the trailer. This is partly covered by the objections from Environmental Protection as mentioned earlier.

Security - Inevitably vehicles with high value cargo and diesel in their tanks would be stopping at the site, these will be a target for thieves. Prostitutes commonly also target truck stops. Light pollution will be caused by the lighting required to ensure site security although there are proposals to reduce this. With regards to this, Northants Police says that there should be a minimum standard required which is the British Parking Association's Park Mark. Amongst other things, it requires –

- good lighting covering the perimeter and entrance/exit
- continuous secure perimeter
- landscaping to enhance uninterrupted views of site by CCTV

The Environment Agency had objected to the application because underground fuel tanks were proposed but has withdrawn its objection since above-ground tanks are now proposed. However these could be considered a theft threat (diesel theft is very common from tanks above ground) and a fire hazard.

Finally Planning Policy states that new developments are to be strictly controlled in the open countryside to protect its rural character and beauty and in the interests of sustainable development. Therefore the proposals would need to be weighed against the wider policy considerations contained within national and local policy. I am not aware of any reason that would override this policy.

I support the objections raised to date and on the evidence so far submitted aim to speak at the Strategic Planning Committee Meeting when the application is heard.

As soon as I have more information I will make it known to the Parish Council.