

Liberal Democrats

*A People First Council
for West
Northamptonshire*

“We can’t ignore the challenges that being a new council presents, most notably the residual consequences of our previous financial history and the challenges the former county council faced. Previous financial challenges resulted in a disinvestment in prevention services to ensure statutory duties and responsibilities could be maintained, which has resulted in our new unitary authority inheriting the position of having some of the highest unit costs for care in the country for the provision of care, and having the lowest spend of unitary authorities nationally on adult social care services per 100,000 of the Population”.

**Officer report to Scrutiny Spring 2025
CQC Self-Assessment**

the challenge

Introduction

West Northamptonshire Council has been in existence since 2021, created due to the abject failures of the previous Northamptonshire County Council.

The enforced restructuring resulted in the County Council and the District and Borough Councils being brought together in an endeavour to create efficiencies and save money.

But what has happened?



Sally Beardsworth



Jonathan Harris



Rosie Humphreys



Carl Squires

our councillors' view

The creation of the council was initially delayed by a year, which meant there was an extra year of so called “shadow authority”, the expectation being that much of the groundwork would have been put in place to have a council ready to roll. The reality was somewhat different.

There were still lots of key vacancies, and many core strategies missing. We were surprised at how much of the basics still needed to be done.

It is worth remembering that West Northants Council was only created due the abject failure of Northamptonshire County Council. What has become apparent in the last four years, was that a number of the District and Borough councils had their fair share of problems too. The creation of the new council has shone the light of many of these failings.

Our biggest concern with the direction the council is taking is how distant and remote it is becoming from the people that matter most. All of us. The residents of West Northamptonshire.

We place ‘localism’ at the heart of everything that we do but increasingly it feels as though the council has stopped listening.

There is no denying that times are tough, and projections seem to indicate that circumstances may get harder. In many ways, not helped by policy choices of Conservative national governments for the past 10 years. There will continue to be difficult decisions and choices to be made, however, **putting people at the heart** of those decisions will be the most important thing.

Let’s make sure the people are heard.

Planning our vision

There have been six Liberal Democrat councillors for the past four years. They have worked hard to get involved in as many aspects of the council as possible, including key representation on a range of committees. This has ensured that we have been able to have insight into the workings of the council; seeing what works and what still needs improvement or change.

This document sets out to give a broad overview on how the Liberal Democrats would do things differently in a new a council.

A vision that starts and ends with:

Putting People First - Your council, working hard for you.



“I still say ‘shoot for the moon’ - you might get there.”

Buzz Aldrin

Identifying priorities

All councils across the United Kingdom continue to suffer from severe pressures and West Northamptonshire Council is no different.

If you listen to the local Conservatives you might think that they have never made a mistake, yet look at many of the poor decisions made in our area during the extensive period of time that they have run our councils. It increasingly seems the Conservatives can't do national government and equally struggle to do local government. When the county council was effectively bankrupted in 2018, all preventative services were cut. This was an extremely short-term decision and the fall out of this continues to be felt today.

This document sets out to give a broad overview on how the Liberal Democrats would do things differently in a new council.

One of the most important factors that needs to change is a greater focus, investment and emphasis on prevention. Often, once a person has entered the 'system' it is much harder to get them back on track, to ensure that they are able to live their best life. Whether this is in adult social care, children's care or for those in need of urgent temporary accommodation due to changes in their personal circumstances, finding ways to ensure people don't need 'the system' is a far better way of working.

Unfortunately the inevitable impact of a lack of focus on prevention is additional costs for the council and therefore for tax payers.

There is much to do, and with a new Labour government bringing in a swathe of policy changes, it is very much a moving platform. An example is the new proposal relating to planning. Our concern is that local people, as well as parish & town councils, will find it increasingly difficult to have their say on planning. We know that people really don't respond well to having things imposed on them and want to bring your voice to council.

We have identified seven key priorities for our council:

- Improving our roads, pavements, transport and facilities
- Protecting and enhancing nature and our environment
- Housing Matters. Let's get it right
- Supporting young people to support the future
- Creating more local jobs and better local jobs
- Providing the local services you need
- Building a council that works for you



“We will ensure value for money and provide proper funding and prioritisation for fixing our roads and pavements”

Andrew Simpson, Spokesperson & Candidate for Braunston Crick Ward



Priority One

Improving our roads, pavements, transport and facilities

Improving our roads:

- We will draw up a '**pothole priority plan**' that moves away from continually patching up problem areas towards permanently replacing worn out roads and identifying those vulnerable to future damage. Each local Parish/Town council will be asked to report areas of priority.
- Pavement repairs will move from short term patching towards permanent replacement where usage is high and/or where better pavements will encourage more walking.
- Every road will be assessed for cycle safety and this will be an added criteria when considering a priority for repair/ replacement.
- The roads maintenance contract will be kept under constant performance review and reporting.
- We will record and report highway repairs by ward for transparency and fairness.
- We will explore additional opportunities using AI and moving-vehicle reporting mechanisms.

Improving Transport:

- We will ensure developments include the provision of improved transport facilities for the area concerned with provision of cycle ways, footpaths and bus services as a priority above new roads.
- We will restore bus services to local communities where demand exists and support growth of 'on demand' services currently provided by some charities.
- We will develop a Strategic Rail Plan for West Northants that will aim to increase rail services and connectivity across the area.
- Specific priorities will be to improve access to Long Buckby station, support new parkway stations in both the north (Crick area) and south (Northampton/Road area).
- We will initiate feasibility studies into the re-opening of former railway lines such as the Northampton to Wellingborough line.
- We will ensure that all key areas (doctor's surgeries/schools/ retail and leisure, industrial parks etc) are accessible by cycling and walking as an alternative to the use of vehicles – working with local schools and health services to support the promotion of healthy journeys.
- We will invest in new technology to allow real time information of the availability of transport services and the ability to buy 'travelcards' for use across various providers.
- We will work to ensure electric car charging points will be available in every community.

““Our natural world is precious. Climate change and impacts on nature are interlocked. We will provide leadership on environmental issues. All our futures need protecting along with our health and well being” .

Rosie Humphreys,
Spokesperson & Candidate for Braunston And Crick

Show Your Stripes
Global Warming
(1850 - 2024)

Ed Hawkins
University of Reading



Priority Two

Protecting and enhancing nature and our environment

The state of nature report shows that almost 1,500 species are at risk, this includes 43% of birds. Climate change increasingly causes flash flooding affecting lives and livelihoods. Climate change damages are projected to increase from 1.1% of GDP at present to 3.3% by 2050 and 7.4% by 2100 (Sources: RSPB/LSE)

- We will maintain a commitment to the UK100 **net zero carbon strategy**, with the ambition of reducing the council's carbon footprint immediately and the ambition of net zero carbon by 2030 and the West Northants area by 2045.
- Focus on 'powers in place' to make meaningful carbon reductions in energy, waste, transport, buildings and nature.
- Focus on our three main areas of influence for this objective:
 - Direct influence (estate, offices, operations and procurement)
 - Indirect influence (planning policy, standards and licensing)
 - Leadership by example (communities and partnerships)
- Ensure that new/revised third party contracts, such as waste collections, have electrification (or other means of greener energy) as part of procurement contracts.
- Require all taxis to be electric through licensing, possibly offering incentives to move to electric vehicles.
- Further encourage and enable energy saving behaviour by all council staff.
- Ensure council's procurement strategy specifies that low carbon lights and appliances are acquired.
- Require the integration of renewable energy such as solar thermal, PV or heat pumps in local authority owned buildings.
- Identify areas suitable for renewable energy in the local plan.
- Invest in the development of renewable energy and energy storage.
- Cut the council's waste by only producing papers electronically.
- Use food waste according to the food waste hierarchy of prevent, reuse, recycle - and use remaining biodegradable waste to generate biogas.
- Support SME businesses in particular to access funds and expertise for reducing carbon pollution.
- Encourage and support schools to cut carbon e.g. through participating in the LESS CO2 programme and through accessing salix finance.
- Through procurement, ensure the local authority supply chain is minimising carbon emissions.
- Ensure the implementation and funding of the Tree Strategy.
- Ensure the implementation of the Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Set progressive policies through our emerging local plan.
- Develop a practical strategy to cut the blight of fly-tipping.

“Providing good quality, sustainable homes that are affordable to buy or rent will be our priority. Just 7 social homes have been delivered to date this financial year”.

Chris Leggett Spokesperson & Candidate
for Kingsthorpe North



Priority Three

Housing matters. Let's get it right.

Through the development of the local plan, we must ensure that the council's policies drive affordable housing, with no ifs, buts or wriggle room from developers. They must be held to account to deliver on infrastructure for health services, community services and active travel provision.

- All new development must demonstrate developers' contribution to our zero- carbon target for WNC, pushing policies for developers as far as we possibly can.
- Allow housing development which meets identified local needs.
- We will seek to improve the quality of the private rented sector by supporting both tenants and landlords.
- End the scandal of homelessness on our streets and in our rural areas through learning from the 'Everyone In' initiative.
- We will commit to building the right homes that people need and can genuinely afford by:
 - providing greater support for first time buyers:
 - reducing the minimum threshold for provision of affordable housing in a new development from 10 to 5 homes;
 - maximise and make best use of financial assets and resources of both Council and Registered Providers.
- Gain greater control over the delivery of housing through provision of homes by Council and registered providers.
- Require planning permission to be built out or be lost, or to explore business rates impositions for sites with planning permissions not built out.
- Promote deposit funding schemes to assist both first time buyers and those needing a deposit to privately rent.
- Support innovation in bringing empty homes back into use.
- Provide homes which are well designed, adaptable 'for life' and incorporate local distinctiveness.
- Wherever possible, reuse developed land rather than undeveloped land.
- Require any homes built on council land to include options suitable for first time buyers, e.g. smaller houses, flats or shared ownership.
- Allocate an additional £20 million capital for the acquisition of properties to be used as part of the council's social housing estate.
- Bring Northampton Partnership Homes back in-house and under the direct control of West Northamptonshire Council.
- We will do our best to ensure that local Neighbourhood Development Plans are fully considered in planning decisions and that local input to 'shaping our place' continues.



“We believe in life-long learning. We will protect and evolve our libraries and community centres to include support for young people.”

Dr Stewart Tolley
Spokesperson
& Candidate for Towcester



Priority Four

Support young people to support the future.

Youth services have been regressively cut across the whole of Northamptonshire for the past 18 years. Funding reductions of in the region of 94% across the county. These cuts have failed at least one generation of our young people during this time.

- We will encourage community projects, development environments and focus for our young people.
- Develop a new Career advice and work experience scheme which will be made available to all young people.
- We will protect our schools in smaller communities.
- A commitment to keep all libraries open, providing a 'backstop' to community operated libraries ensuring that they can't fail.
- Review how we can make existing libraries more viable such as utilising these spaces for training or parental support or to trial a 'Citizen Curriculum' for school leavers without qualifications.
- Improve training for school governors and look to improve local school standards with 'improvement boards'. This will help set goals and priorities post-pandemic.
- Look into the viability of a Youth Services Mutual, tailor-making Youth Services to the needs of young people.
- Provide Careers advice - connect with schools to find out what the gaps are in the system.
- Keep the citizens curriculum and emphasis the need for flexible adult education.
- Youth services mutual - research what is lacking among young people, using surveys, youth councils and youth forums.
- Explore the opportunity for parish procurement of youth schemes/provision to provide things for young people to do over and above sporting activity.
- Develop broader life skills training e.g. paying bills, mortgages, rent, extra support for school leavers who do not choose further education.
- Build more effective relationships with our local university and further education establishments.
- Invest in further provision to support counselling and safeguarding in our schools.



Priority Five

Creating more local jobs and better local jobs.

We broadly support the vision set out in the new West Northamptonshire Economic Growth Strategy of a: 'Thriving West Northamptonshire - a place of opportunity and growth for all. A must-invest destination, driving innovative technologies, enabling innovation and enhancing UK plc.'

Specifically:

- **People:** ensuring that people can be "skilled, active, confident and empowered to live prosperous and fulfilling lives."
- **Place:** providing better connectivity and access to quality housing and business premises, with thriving mixed purpose town centres.
- **Business:** building "on strong and dynamic" businesses to promote economic growth.
- Support and build on traditional and new areas of Northamptonshire business excellence including:
 - The boot and shoe industry
 - Advanced logistics
 - Hi tech engineering associated with the motor sport industry
 - The visitor economy and sports

We will work with companies, the university and colleges to:

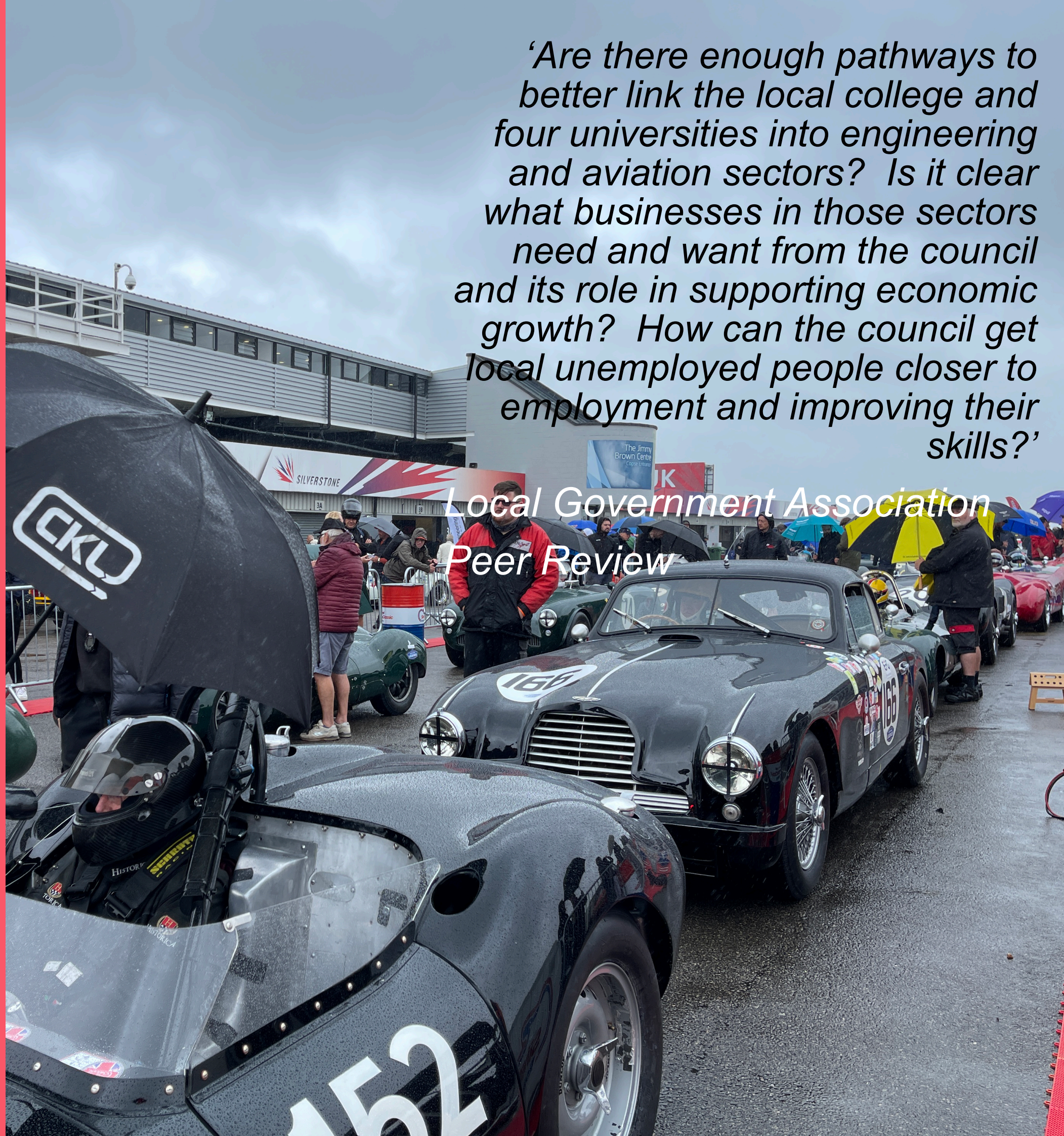
- Provide vocational training equipping our workforce with the skills to take up job opportunities and develop careers in West Northants.
- Research and encourage innovative ways of working giving our key business sectors a competitive advantage.
- Reinforce the operation of the Economic Growth Board proposed for West Northants as a way for ongoing two way dialogue between the council, businesses and any other stakeholders in the economic growth of the area.
- Maximise the benefits of our position in the Oxford – Cambridge Growth Corridor. We will liaise with other local authorities within the Corridor and the East Midlands to maximise regional funding.

We will further commit to:

- Considering the establishment of a Local Growth Company working with the Growth Board to directly invest and promote regeneration and growth in West Northants.
- Being a "job opportunities for everyone" council. We will review all council decisions and activity based on job creation and positive local economic impact criteria.
- Completing a feasibility study into the creation of a film and TV production hub within West Northants.
- Encouraging and facilitating environmentally sustainable business models and ways of working to ensure businesses reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2045.
- Giving greater emphasis to support the establishment and growth of small local businesses in our rural and suburban communities by encouraging:
 - Farming
 - Green energy
 - The provision of small business units, including good quality internet and other support services.
 - Tourism and creative and craft industries based around West Northants' heritage sites.

'Are there enough pathways to better link the local college and four universities into engineering and aviation sectors? Is it clear what businesses in those sectors need and want from the council and its role in supporting economic growth? How can the council get local unemployed people closer to employment and improving their skills?'

Local Government Association Peer Review





Priority Six

Providing the local services you need.

Social care is a national issue and requires government to move at pace. Until care is 'fixed' nationally, councils will continue to face challenges. However, we know through our case loads that, at a local level, the council is failing to get a grip of the issues faced by so many people's loved ones.

- We will create a 'listening Council' to understand people's needs so all are able to lead happy and independent lives.
- We will review case work management and communication processes.
- Our priority will be improving children and adult services.
- We will move increasingly to a 'prevention model' to ensure that investment is made upstream as much as possible to prevent the need for care.
- We will work closely in partnership with the Children's Trust to ensure that it succeeds.
- We will continue the capital programme to acquire properties for use as small community childrens 'homes'.
- We will ensure that services are safe and effective for all people and their carers, whatever their age or disability.
- Ensure all services are good or outstanding and great value for money.
- Ensure all services are accessible through both face-to-face and digital methods.
- We will work to restore social workers morale through developing a common strengths based approach and ethos along with good support.
- We will make local foster and other care a top priority and ensure continuity and stability is delivered to give the best outcomes for our cared-for children.
- We will ensure the council works positively, productively and proactively with the local Integrated Care Boards to ensure that no one is left in limbo between the health care system and the council's care provision.

"Our priority will always be to ensure that children's care and social care services are safe, responsive and put the needs of those that need these services first"

Sally Beardsworth,
Spokesperson
& Candidate for Kingsthorpe
North





Priority Seven

Building a council that works for you.

Although some progress has been made during the last four years, our perspective is that, culturally, there are still pockets of the legacy county council at play. This presents the need to build better communication strategies, quicker response times, and a need to build more fundamental human 2 human interactions with the council's customers.

- We will ensure your council tax is spent wisely - 'no taxation without explanation' (any increases in council tax will be explained and justified).
- We will set high standards of openness and integrity across West Northants Council.
- We will never forget that we represent you - keeping in touch – engagement - transparency and openness at all times.
- We will explore the introduction of themed representative groups or Citizens' forums to ensure a greater connectivity to our communities.
- We will listen to you - not just at election time, providing more support for Parish & Town Councils along with the development of Local Committees, User Forums and Opinion Polls to keep the council focused on local needs.
- We will work to establish a new way of operating for the council, with more openness, engagement and transparency by introducing a committee-based system.
- We will work to re-build your confidence and trust in local services.
- We will work with under-represented communities to build a council that reflects the diversity of our residents.
- We will focus on shifting the culture to be human 2 human, giving our residents the choice to speak to a person if they want to.

"It was clear that there is a risk that with such a high number of councillors, a significant majority and operating a Cabinet system that opposition and back bench members could feel disenfranchised and unable to influence or effect change".

**Local Government Association
Peer Review**

“The announcement on the capitalisation directive has resulted in WNC being listed alongside councils who are in a state of financial distress. Whilst WNC is clear that the organisation is not in this position, others may view them as such, and the council should consider appropriate stakeholder communications as the directive progresses”.

Auditors Report 2025

in summary

Our commitments to you:

- We will base the council on committees with members from all parties rather than a cabinet structure dominated by one party, tribal politics and a small group of individuals.
- We will aim to climb into the top 10 performing councils on value for money and productivity.
- We will provide a citizens' tax contract showing how your money has been spent and value for money outcomes.
- We will put our residents at the heart of the services we provide.
- We will encourage and develop new community projects.
- We will establish an advisory board of residents, local neighbourhood committees and user forums.
- We will use local opinion polls to help inform decisions and policy.
- We will support community partnerships.
- We will provide and develop a Parish Council network.

There is so much to do at West Northamptonshire Council to make it work effectively for its residents.

There will always be tough choices and difficult decisions to be made but we will make sure that residents are, wherever possible, part of that decision making process.

By changing the structure of the council to a committee system, we believe that we can create a more collaborative, representative council that really does work for its residents.

Such a system would create transparency of debate and we believe that it will create more adult, people focussed discussion instead of sometimes poor or non-existent conversation on key issues.

It is imperative that we establish a clear purpose, or 'north star', that sets a laser-like focus on clarity for council employees and sets the strategic direction of the council. It will also create a framework for how people should behave in order for the council to deliver the best services it can.

Following the clarity of direction, we will ensure there is alignment between all of the different service areas so that everyone is pulling in the same direction.

We will set high expectations regarding service standards and an expectation of getting things right first time.

We will explore greater use of technology, such as AI and predictive analytics but we will never forget the need for a human connection.

We will review spans of control to ensure that reporting lines are clear, accountability is clear and that there aren't excessive management layers.

In short, our mission will be to create an environment which encourages all team members to be the very best that they can be, to provide the best services to you, through your council.

Putting people first.

Our approach to running the council will embrace our fundamental values - a strong sense of **fairness** and **equality** to ensure that no one is disadvantaged in West Northamptonshire Council.

The Liberal Democrats have a strong sense of **localism** and a deep sense of **community**.

We will ensure that West Northamptonshire Council works for you and maintains real and direct connections with communities across our council area, working with parishes and other community groups.

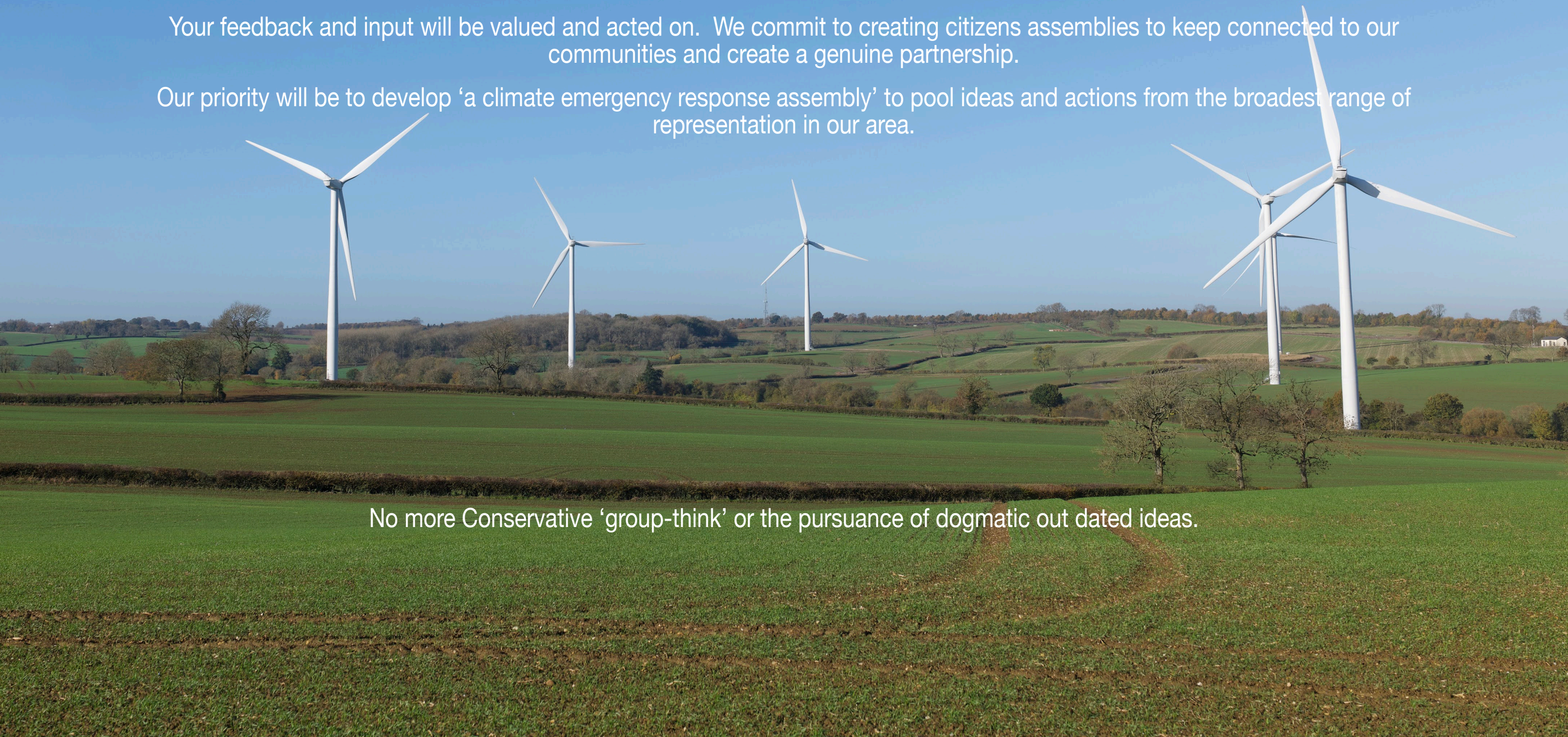
The Liberal Democrats will be your representatives for YOUR council. The council exists to provide services to our communities, that it is its sole purpose. It is your council and we won't forget it.

We pledge to create as many consultation and engagement opportunities as we can with residents of West Northamptonshire.

Your feedback and input will be valued and acted on. We commit to creating citizens assemblies to keep connected to our communities and create a genuine partnership.

Our priority will be to develop 'a climate emergency response assembly' to pool ideas and actions from the broadest range of representation in our area.

No more Conservative 'group-think' or the pursuance of dogmatic out dated ideas.





“The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity”.

our spokespeople

We have a number of our candidates who are spokespeople for our key priorities.



Highways & Transport

Harry Minns
Andrew Simpson



Environment, Recycling & Waste

Rosie Humphreys
Jonathan Harris



Housing, Planning & the Local Plan

Chris Leggett
David Tarbun



Children, Families & Education

Lucy Newbury
Stewart Tolley



Local Economy & Leisure

Tom Lawler
Tony Nixon



Strategy, HR & Corporate Services

Jonathan Harris
Christine Ware



Adults, Public Health & Regulatory Services

Sally Beardsworth
Chris Leggett



Finance

Alan Knape
Carl Squires

“There are significant challenges facing the council’s long term financial sustainability. The General Fund reserves that it inherited are low relative to other unitary councils, and reserves were used to fund one off expenditure in 2022/23 and 2023/24”.

Local Government Association Peer Review



www.westnorthantslibdems.org.uk

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FOR A FAIR DEAL

Liberal Democrats

