

Councillor's Report: South Northamptonshire Council

Gregor Hopkins - King' Sutton Parish Council AGM - 25/4/18

Dear Chairman,

It was an honour to be elected as King's Sutton's District Councillor at the by-election last year. It has been a pleasure to meet so many people in the village, many that I had not had the opportunity to meet before I became a candidate. I look forward to working with everyone, villagers, Parish Councillors and my colleagues at SNC and others alike, to combat the challenges and welcome the opportunities that await us in the year ahead.

SNC Finance

SNC's funding continues to be reduced from central government, we are getting less money from the block grant. But with growing housing numbers and growing business rates returns we have balanced the books again this year.

Fortunately, SNC continue to be one of the best local authorities at collecting council tax, with 99% of all tax collected. The national average is 98% and SNC is ranked 16th in the whole of the Country on collection rates. The SNC proportion of the Council Tax will increase by 3% (about 10p a week), which is £5.41 a year for a Band D property, making the total now £185.78 per year.

The net cost of providing SNC services in 2017/18 increased by £1.2m from £11.5m to £12.6m, a 10% change. This was mainly driven by a new recycling contract, £500k and staff cost increases, £375k.

Grant Funding

In King's Sutton, in the past year, the Community funding panel at SNC approved £127,462 for the new pre-school building, which goes a good way towards the £300k required for that project.

Across the District In 2017-18, almost £1.152m of grant funding was awarded to communities for 120 projects to improve their environment and lifestyle. Over the lifetime of the New Homes Bonus Scheme over £2.6m has been re-invested in South Northants.

CIL funding for the upcoming new developments on The Knob will also come through. Around £8K will come directly to the parish, while the rest is collected by SNC. I encourage any group that has a requirement for funding to check out the SNC website (link below) and apply.

Horton Hospital Consultation

SNC supported the group action opposing plans for the reconfiguration of the Horton Hospital. Unfortunately, we lost the Judicial Review in the High Court, but we were successful in getting a referral to the Secretary of State about the CCG's proposals. The feedback from that process which

labelled its consultation as flawed, means that the CCG has now scrapped the review and agreed that the A&E and paediatric services, which were potentially going to be reviewed, are no longer threatened. The decision to downgrade the obstetrics unit as part of a wider reconfiguration will be reviewed again, although at present it is still a limited 'Midwife led' unit. The 100 beds that were closed are yet to return. But we will monitor the new reconfiguration plans closely as they develop.

Help for King's Sutton Villagers with 'Home Safe'

I wanted to highlight the following scheme which could be very useful for villagers who could be classified as 'vulnerable, disabled or elderly'.

People in those groups could apply to access free home repairs following a partnership between South Northamptonshire Council (SNC) and Care & Repair (Northamptonshire) Ltd.

The scheme, entitled 'Home Safe', will offer support with a range of small home improvements such as small repairs, home security and energy efficiency measures, gas safety checks, fitting smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, trip reduction measures, the installation of grab and stair rails and assistance with electrics, plumbing and carpentry.

The scheme is great news for individuals and families, who need a helping hand when it comes to keeping their home safe, warm and secure. Those vulnerable people who may not have the means or the ability to carry out essential, minor works can benefit from this initiative which will help promote independence and allow them the chance to go home should they be in hospital.

The scheme is available to home owners and tenants on low incomes if one or more of the following criteria applies to them:

- suffer from a long term chronic illness or have a physical disability
- they have been identified by a hospital as needing urgent minor adaptations or services to facilitate discharge
- they are at risk of further injury or illness without essential minor works or services
- 65 or over

For more information on the scheme visit the [Care & Repair](#) website or email office@careandrepairnorthamptonshire.org.uk or call 01604 782250.

Quality of life and Recycling

Something that may interest villagers is that it turns out our District is ranked as one of the best places to live in the country. The Halifax survey 2017 rated the SNC District as 13th best in the country (a lucky number for us)!

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 having achieved 61% recycling rate. This put SNC in 8th position in the country.

You can find the documents by googling 'Halifax survey 2017'. A link is here if you have the time to type it out: <https://static.halifax.co.uk/assets/pdf/mortgages/pdf/halifax-rural-qol-1-april-2017-housing-release.pdf>

Flood Prevention and Planning

The past year has been one of disappointment for Wales St residents as the ramifications of the Environment Agency's new hydrology modelling data became fully apparent. Those of us who wanted to see it continue challenged the findings, but there is no possibility of the hoped-for full flood prevention scheme going ahead, the data means it's against EA rules and therefore there is no funding. Individual property level protection has been offered to 16 properties on Wales St deemed at greatest risk of flooding.

National Planning Policy states that where there **is not** a 5-year land supply then there should be a presumption in **favour** of the development irrespective of village confines and other planning tools that the council can rely on. If you can show less than 5 years land supply it becomes a lot easier to get planning permission, especially in places that would be unlikely in normal circumstances. Throughout the year SNC could demonstrate a bank of almost double the 1680 minimum at 3296. Our land supply is 10.2 years. Meaning we can continue to exert a good deal of local influence on planning decisions.

Related to that, some residents on the Knob were less than pleased about the new development of 3 houses next to the Rec (where the small bank of disused garages sits), I too was a worried, however, from speaking to the developers I am reassured that the development will take every care to ensure residents are not inconvenienced. The approval of good quality developments like the one on The Knob, with the upsides and yes downsides it brings, should be seen in the above context i.e. contributing to the ability of SNC to demonstrate a reasonable approach and provide greater leeway to refuse permission to unsuitable developments (like the 14 additional houses proposed behind Halestrap Way). The decision to refuse that application was upheld at a recent appeal, meaning the development won't go ahead.

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