

**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL  
REPORT FOR KINGS SUTTON ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

This report covers three main items: first, the County Council Budget for the current financial year, secondly, the Council Plan for the next five years, thirdly, concerns about the large number of houses being built in north Oxfordshire and the effect that this will have on the villages in south Northamptonshire.

You will have received details of your council tax for the financial year 2015/16 and be aware that the county council element has risen by 1.95%, increasing the tax for a Band 'D' property by just under £21. Northamptonshire still has the lowest county council tax in the country. The total net revenue spend this year is £415m with £238m coming from the tax you pay. As usual the biggest single expenditure is on Adult Social Care at £140m, followed by Children, Families, and Education at £123m. The other large cost is Environment, Development, and Transport at £63m.

Far more important than the Budget is the Council Plan for the next five years. The present method of providing services is no longer sustainable; we can't keep on reducing costs by improving efficiency in the way we have done over the last few years. Costs of the base budget have already been reduced by £200m and we still have to reduce by a further £148m over the next five years. A continuation of the present method of providing services would just drastically reduce the quality to an unacceptable level. The simple fact is that the traditional model of local government is no longer sustainable. The method of largely paying for public services through government grants, which are being reduced every year, no longer works and a new way has to be found. This has resulted in a Council Plan which is dramatically different to anything done before. It plans the biggest transformation of public services in the county since the creation of the council 125 years ago. The council will become a much smaller organization commissioning other agencies to carry out activities to help the council achieve its goals for residents. A move has already been made some way along this route; for example, the Children Centres are no longer directly controlled by the council but by lead service providers commissioned to cover ten geographical areas. The charity, Action for Children, controls six areas, Spurgeons, three areas, and Pen Green Children Centre covers Corby area. Other examples are: Olympus Care Services, a council owned company which provides support for elderly adults, people with physical or learning disabilities, and people with dementia. We also have KIERWSP who have the £200m four year highways services contract which expires in 2020.

The County Council will dramatically reduce the number of employees down to about 250, commissioning services from a federation of organizations including private businesses, social enterprises, council owned companies, and charities. The intention will be to transfer as many existing staff as is possible to the new providers. These changes will be implemented gradually over the next five years. I really do hope it

works! It is of course not the only way of reducing costs; an alternative would be to follow the same path as the one being considered by Oxfordshire to form a Unitary Council, removing one tier of local government.

In my report to you last year I expressed my concern about the number of houses being built in Oxfordshire which will result in a traffic increase in many of our villages. I have initiated talks between the two county councils as I am very concerned about the adequacy of planned increased road infrastructure to support the larger traffic volume even in north Oxfordshire, and there is of course nothing at all planned for the roads in our county. It is worrying that at a recent meeting in Bodicote House the Government Inspector is reported to have said 'subject to a significant modal shift everything will be fine'. In effect he means that if everybody used buses or bikes there would not be a traffic problem! The next meeting of the two authorities is scheduled for the 15<sup>th</sup> May and I shall be attending to press home my concerns. I think it is absolutely necessary for Northamptonshire County Council to prepare a study of the impact that additional traffic is going to have on all the roads in the south of the county and to take action to mitigate its effects. As many of you will have read in the recent press the quality of life in south Northamptonshire is ranked as one of the highest in the UK. We are living in an area with good health facilities, long life expectancy, low crime rate, good weather, full employment, good school results, and a better than average feeling of personal wellbeing. We don't want to spoil it! Increasing traffic is going to erode the advantages we enjoy and the situation will be made worse by construction traffic for HS2, if it goes ahead.

The only other item I should mention is the Empowering Councillors' Scheme. As advised at previous meetings. Each County Councillor receives £7,000 to spend on locally based projects and my allocation last year was used as follows: £1,833 to Aynho towards the cost of the refurbishment of the Children Playground; £1,344 to Evenley to refurbish the War Memorial; £960 to Charlton for the replacement of a streetlight; £800 to Kings Sutton for a new Bowling Mat and £400 for a computer for the Memorial Hall. I had reserved the balance of £1,900 to refurbish the Children Playground at Farthinghoe but I am now going to fund this from the current year's allowance.

Ron Sawbridge MBE,  
County Councillor for Middleton Cheney Division.  
10<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2015