

Great Places To Live

Labour's response to the local
plan for West Northamptonshire



Great Places to Live

Everybody deserves a great place to live. A decent home, in a good environment with access to facilities and green spaces to enjoy. The local plan being developed by West Northamptonshire Council is how we can achieve these goals.

The future of West Northamptonshire is being shaped now. Where we build the new homes that will be needed for future families, what those homes will be like, and whether there will be shops, schools, GPs and bus services for them. Where people will work. And how we protect our local heritage and our beautiful green environment.

West Northamptonshire Council's local plan will guide development up to 2043 – but the buildings will last for very much longer.

In this report, we set out the views of the Labour Group of Councillors, based on our consultations with local people.

We're grateful to all the individuals and community groups across West Northants who shared their hopes and aspirations for the area and how the Local plan could best achieve them. We're especially grateful to Graham Robb from South Northants for his help. We'll be putting this report into the planning process and pressing for the best possible outcome for local people.

We hope you will read it too, and help us to make it a reality.

With careful planning, and the commitment to follow through, we can deliver the future we all want.



Cllr Sally Keeble
Leader, Labour Group



Cllr Bob Purser
Deputy Leader, Labour Group

Summary of Recommendations from the Labour Group of Councillors

Below are the key recommendations from the Labour Group set out in this report.

1. We strongly recommend that the plan should include specifications for improvement of existing buildings.
2. The Local Plan should use the Housing and Economic Needs Assessment (HENA) evidence base to bring forward proposals in the Local Plan for a significant focus on social housing across West Northants.
3. WNC should revise the Local Plan to reduce HMO densities to no more than 5% within a 50 metre radius, and show that improvements in HMO management are put in place after analysis of the comparator local authority practice.
4. Provision must be made for community and faith buildings in housing developments.
5. Labour recommends that recognition of mental health needs should be incorporated into the Local Plan.
6. This Plan should set a context by outlining some strategic themes in the likely structure of the economy up to 2043.
7. The Local Plan should make clear how WNC will work with providers to deliver the identified skills and training.
8. The Local Plan should be revised to demonstrate consultation and responsiveness to local needs in towns and rural areas as well as specifically in Northampton, underlining the importance of urban green spaces for urban communities.
9. The Local Plan should bring forward proposals for biodiversity and wildlife corridors in the existing town centre housing communities.
10. More measures to mitigate the impact of climate change should be included in urban areas.
11. The Local Plan should encourage and support the implementation of Active Travel Plans by schools, which will help minimise vehicle use at school times, and should support other local travel plans.
12. The Local Plan should strengthen requirements for employment sites to have travel plans connecting to public transport services, especially for out-of-town sites.
13. Policy TR2 (Railways) should include specific reference to the opportunities for further rail links which may be provided by the East-West railway.
14. Infrastructure analysis and plans should be reflected in the Settlement Hierarchy designations and consequent development plans.
15. There is a need to strengthen officer and councillor capacity to work robustly with National Agencies and Developers so WNC can commission and deliver effective plans from a position of strength.
16. That issues raised by residents of the villages and rural areas should be considered and the Local Plan amended to reflect the interests of rural communities.

Introduction

The Labour Group on West Northants Council welcomes the consultation on the developing plan for West Northamptonshire.

The development plan provides the opportunity to put into practice the Council's stated aim of creating a 'Thriving place – One Future': growing, creating and delivering a thriving future for West Northamptonshire with: a thriving economy, a great environment to live in, good connectivity, a skilled workforce, more and better quality homes'. (*One Northamptonshire Plan*)

In particular, the Labour Group stresses that this should be available equitably, to all and not just those who are better off. It should be delivered in a way that protects and enhances our environment

and celebrates our heritage..

It is important that the spatial planning of West Northamptonshire does not reinforce the inequalities in our society, in which people on lowest incomes may be placed in marginal housing areas, public spaces may be inaccessible for people with disabilities or perceived to be unsafe, low income families may not have access to our beautiful green environment, and vulnerable communities may be exposed to unacceptable environmental hazards.

We want to ensure that development serves the people. We are concerned that in recent years, new housing has only occurred where it has been led by the market-based housing developers, with minimal public sector investment in housing. This has resulted in the needs of low-income families and individuals being 'priced out' of the housing market.

This has been exacerbated over the last 30 years by the selling off of state-owned land with the result that local authorities and public bodies have had less access to affordable land on which to develop social housing.

Additionally with about 10% of Northampton's social housing stock sold off into the private market a significant resource has been lost to those with the highest level of need.

Our concern is that the three development plans which this plan replaces have not delivered equitably across society resulting in too many people living in inadequate and overcrowded housing. Many of our neighbourhoods are tired, our Victorian terraces and houses produced by the development corporation need to be updated and the environment within which they sit rejuvenated.

Strategic priorities

These are set out in **Chapter 1** of the Development Plan. The impact of the previous plans is evident – they produced more houses and roads but not the range of houses needed to meet the changing population, and not the infrastructure, especially health, transport and other services, required to meet those needs.

The Economic Strategy (2025) which is the basis of this Local Plan is not sufficiently forward thinking. For example:

1. In envisioning employment, there are insufficient Further and Higher education opportunities linked to industrial sectors to keep young people in West Northants or encourage them to return after university.
2. The East West Railway linking Greater Cambridge and the newly-announced Greater Oxford will take years to fully complete. However, the Western end (completed) can support enhanced rail access, eg a line from Oxford to Rugby which would significantly enhance rail connectivity in West Northants. Meanwhile the proposed new town at Tempsford will have more houses than Oxford or Cambridge. WNC should identify how that development could support the West Northants economy, including during the building phase.
3. Approved entertainment venues at Bedford and Bicester will generate employment and services

spin offs if West Northants is agile and imaginative in responding to the demand for workers in the entertainment, creative and hospitality industries

Structural employment changes will take place by 2043. WNC should commit to supporting these as current manufacturing changes and in some cases declines. Strategic links with the existing Formula 1 Industry, Silverstone Campus, and innovation hubs in Oxford, Cambridge and the Coventry/Warwick hub could support, for example:

- **New Energy Vehicles (NEVs)**
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**
- **Advanced Materials & Biotechnologies**
- **Green Technologies in all sectors**

Spatial policy

Chapter 2 of the Local Plan on Spatial Policy sets out well why West Northants should be a thriving Council area. It is very clear that the previous Plans have not been meeting the needs of all the residents – nor are they positioned to meet the emerging economic needs.

We welcome the explicit commitments to well-planned and sustainable growth. We would urge a much stronger commitment to achieving Net Zero targets in the context of environmental recovery for the next generation.

We urge a commitment to supporting local resilience strategies so that communities are as ready as possible to deal with flood, drought, heat and civil emergencies .

A spatial strategy

We would argue that the starting point of the spatial strategy should be is about enabling residents to lead a good life – in terms of health and wellbeing, family, employment and services.

We support the importance of drawing on the evidence base which the WNC commissioned,

National evidence

We note the selective use of the National Planning Policy Framework which requires that development is supported by adequate infrastructure and that plans are based on proportionate evidence. The details in the current Local Plan do not include for example transport assessments, health capacity analysis, and adequate flood risk mitigation work for some of the

developments, especially in the rural areas.

The settlement hierarchy

We note the inconsistency in functions between the designated Primary Service Villages. We argue that a label of Primary Service Village can only be justified if assessment of functions and mitigation strategies are put in place covering the following, and cannot be considered sustainable without investment in these areas:

- Public transport
- GP and health provision
- Education capacity
- Utilities (water, sewage, electricity)
- Flood mitigation

The same issue also applies to the Rural Service Centres.

Placemaking

We strongly support the objectives set out in Chapter 4—Placemaking in the Local Plan, namely:

- Achieving Net Zero
- Creating excellent places
- Health and wellbeing
- Community and sports facilities, and open spaces

And we support the explanation of what the outcome would look like set out in 4.1.4 and 4.1.5

We strongly support the planning principles set out here to achieve Net Zero. The description of the human drivers of climate change is clear, welcome and requires urgent action.

Creating healthy, resilient and inclusive communities is a core purpose of planning. Development proposals must demonstrate how they address the wider determinants of health, including: access to green space and nature; active and sustainable travel; environmental quality (air, noise, water); safe, inclusive and socially connected places; access to healthier food; resilience to climate risks such as heat, cold and flooding; protection of vulnerable groups; and reduction of health inequalities as identified in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA).

Labour Recommendation: We strongly recommend that the plan should include specifications for improvement of existing buildings.

These should include measures to ensure that:

- Urgent and equal focus is given to retrofitting older properties as much as equipping new builds for a sustainable future.
- Installation of solar panels is required on all new builds, both residential and commercial.
- Strategies are put in place to minimise the use of open fires and log burners to improve air quality.
- Clarity is provided on how carbon emissions for the whole of WNC will be monitored and tracked (not just for the WNC functions).
- Building standards that are applied to All commercial development should achieve the highest level of Environmental Impact assessment classification. This will drive a need for more skills training.

Renewable and low-carbon energy

We strongly support local community energy schemes – and would urge that smaller schemes, especially on brownfield sites should be encouraged. The Middle East crisis starting in March 2026 has demonstrated vulnerability to economic hits which should drive more local resilience.

Flood Risk

Details in the Local Plan appear to be based on isolated sites, not taking account of upstream or downstream impacts. We urge that WNC undertakes assessments of the hardening of the landscape by roads, driveways, houses etc on a catchment-wide basis – not least to understand what peak flood flows might look like for specific areas.

Creating excellent spaces

We note that some specific locations in Northampton and other areas will need significantly more intervention and resource to achieve the goals of ‘excellent spaces.’

Neighbourhood Development Plans

We strongly support the vital role of community engagement in developing neighbourhood development plans, but note how reliant they are on local parish capacity and quality of local leadership. We urge maximum support be given to enable effective local plans which have the support of the community.

Many of the parished communities in West Northants have well-developed parish plans and this is to be welcomed. However, whilst some communities in Northampton have plans – Trinity and Spring

Boroughs – much of the town does not and this results in a planning deficit in these areas – which probably include the majority of the West Northants population. Inevitably this results in residents feeling less engaged with the planning of their areas and have less ability to shape their locality.

The withdrawal of funds for developing parish plans will make it more difficult to develop local area plans. However, we believe it is important that the West Northants Plan recognises the value of developing local granular plans.

Health and Wellbeing

This is a vital element in order to achieve the place-making objectives. We welcome this section and make specific recommendations in the Housing chapter (below) that are relevant to achieving this.

We are shocked by the current health disparities described in the Director of Public Health's Annual Report for 2024 and believe that factors in the built and green environment can play a significant role in improving health especially among those with the poorest health outcomes.

We also note the changing nature of health provision as set out by the government, shifting the focus from hospital to community with increasing investment in digital and a renewed focus on prevention.

We therefore need to ensure that our communities are future-proofed to support this move towards prevention.

We question why the plan is only concerned with the primary health needs of our growing and ageing population and suggest that the secondary and tertiary needs of our people should also be part of the plan whether they are met in hospital or more likely in the community.

We question whether Northampton General Hospital is fit to meet the needs of the growing population set out for the time period of this plan. For comparison, we note that Coventry has 1007 beds for a population of 360,000, with its District General Hospital rebuilt in 1965 and again in 2006. Meanwhile NGH has 760 beds for a population of 425,000 and uses facilities built in 1793.

We believe that by the end of this plan period West Northants should have a modern fit for purpose medical facilities geared to the needs of the mid-twenty-first century healthcare.

Health provision – on this the plan is silent. The case is strong for more paramedical provision eg by enhancing pharmacy services including Triage. But we also know the likely health needs over the next years are:

- Enhanced elderly care
- Under five health care especially promoting immunisation
- Working with the schools on health and wellbeing strategies and services for young people

Hot food enforcement

We strongly support the goal of minimising fast food outlets near schools.

We would also urge that under PL9, spaces for farmers markets and other fresh food outlets are supported. NB – we note that two sections are labelled 4.12.1 and ask that this be rectified.

Community spaces

We welcome the principle in the section on community spaces, but would ask for specific recognition of the need, mainly in urban areas, to have meeting spaces for a full range of community groups and organisations, including those who may be marginalised and may not be able to afford the high rents for public spaces in inner urban areas. These spaces must be fully accessible for people with different levels of mobility. Consultation with local groups can help model what provision can look like.

Social Infrastructure

We believe that good planning should consider not just physical buildings but how they enhance social connections; building social fabric providing spaces for people to meet, reducing isolation, and supporting community cohesion. This process should provide necessary services for thriving communities, including childcare, local health facilities, education, and spaces for youth. It should offer opportunities for volunteering, participation in local governance, and help residents take control of their neighbourhoods, serving as a seed-bed for community life, offering opportunities for interaction that build trust in diverse areas

There is also a particular need for faith buildings as well as community facilities. Faith buildings are particularly important for people of faiths other than Christianity which often already has a substantial number of buildings. It can be very difficult to get planning permission for mosques, temples and

gurdwaras, so provision of faith sites, with the necessary supporting facilities, is important in the planning of any substantial residential area.

The Cambridge Horizons project recognised the role that faith communities can play in building cohesive new communities and the difficulties they face in securing premises and other facilities. *Cambridgeshire Horizons, (2008), Facilities for Faith Communities in New Developments in the Cambridge Sub-Region: Executive Summary, Cambridge*

Community facilities are needed by all communities. The absence of them is largely a function of poverty, land values and development policies. When the eastern district was developed provision was made for community centres including faith communities, although some of them have since deteriorated or been lost to the community.

Labour Recommendation: Provision must be made for community and faith buildings in housing developments.

Making Great Places:

Northampton

Chapter 5 of the local plan deals with the detail of proposals for Northampton. The town experienced substantial growth during the late Victorian period and then again in the third phase of new town development during the 1970s and 1980s. This has resulted in housing that now needs renovation to bring it up to modern standards, especially with regard to energy efficiency.

Gateways to our towns

Linked with the degradation identified above, the town's inner gateways, the Kettering Road, St James, Wellingborough Road and Harborough Road have become tired and give an uncared for appearance. They also need renewal.

Brownfield sites

Whilst the Local Plan has a brown field first policy, in practice in Northampton, this has been more honoured in the breach than the observance. A number of sites have remained vacant for many years and the development plan must demonstrate policies, perhaps through the use of compulsory purchase powers, or linked S106 agreements, to ensure these sites come forward before further greenfield sites are developed.

Identifying further development sites in Northampton

We recognise mistakes were made by the former Northampton Borough Council in identifying potential development sites without proper public consultation. However, we believe that together with brownfield sites there are sites within the West Northants urban areas with potential for housing development and where higher density developments are possible, above the 35 units a hectare set out in the Plan for sustainable urban extensions. This requires a sensitive but determined approach to green and brown field sites which could be developed for housing.

Greyfriars

The emerging masterplan for the Greyfriars development and its associated major investment in the centre of Northampton is to be welcomed, as are the links this development makes with the town centre. The continuing and major challenges of this project include:

- The continuing need for consultation with local residents,
- Integrating the planned new development with the existing local streets; and
- Building a sense of community as the new communities grow.

Northampton's town centre transport infrastructure poorly meets the needs of walkers, wheelers and people with mobility problems. The regrettable de-pedestrianisation of Abington Street is indicative that development has been regressive so that active travel needs to be actively designed into the town centre.

Housing

Housing is one of our key areas of concern. Our comments below are in response to **Chapter 11** of the plan and focuses on four themes itemised below and set out in more detail further on:

1. The need for explicit planning to increase the availability of social housing
2. The management of Houses in Multiple Occupation
3. Responding to the evident link between housing and health
4. Future demand for University accommodation.

Various West Northants policies support the creation of an economy with high skills and high pay, and we

strongly support this. There are good example of the local economy reflecting this.

However, there are big sectors of the West Northants economy where pay is in the lowest quartile. Inevitably this places a limit on the capacity of individuals and families to afford open market housing.

Whilst housing in West Northants may be attractive to those on higher incomes relocating from outside the area, the plan should also cater for West Northants residents on lower incomes with housing needs and working in the local economy.

We are concerned that some housing proposed in planning applications does not meet the minimum space standards set for new housing. To future-proof housing it is important that all new housing meetings minimum space standards.

Theme 1 Social housing

The WNC Local Plan Policy does not mention social housing explicitly but the WNC commissioned HENA is explicit on the need for social housing. The policy is quoted in the Local Plan. The two boxes below set out the general policy, and then HENA estimate of the need for social housing for people who cannot afford either open market or “affordable” prices.

Policy HO6

New residential development will be expected to provide a mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures to meet the identified needs of local communities and to contribute towards the creation of sustainable mixed and inclusive communities. This includes catering for the needs of younger people, care leavers, families with children, older people, people wishing to build their own homes and people with disabilities and special needs.

9.2 The 2021 Census indicated that 14% of households in West Northamptonshire lived in social or affordable rented homes, with the sector accommodating around 24,800 households

9.22 Overall, the demographic modelling estimates that 3,400 new households would form each year and around three-fifths will be unable to afford market housing; this equates to a total of 1,900 newly forming households that will have a need per annum on average – the majority are households unable to rent OR buy.

The WNC Local Plan is silent on this quantified need and projected demand and also on the key recom-

mendations in the HENA (Dec 2025) which looks at housing stock and affordability across WNC. What the plan says focuses on affordable housing, either for sale or rental, rather than the needs of people who require social housing. Note that affordable housing prices are at 80% of market price, while social are usually 40-60%.

Here's what the plan says:

1.25 The evidence indicates that there is an acute need for affordable housing in the Council area. The majority of need is from households who are unable to either buy or rent and therefore points particularly towards a need for rented affordable housing rather than affordable home ownership

1.27 The analysis suggests there will be a need for both social and affordable rented housing – the latter will be suitable particularly for households who are close to being able to afford to rent privately and possibly also for some households who claim full Housing Benefit

1.34 Notwithstanding any local policy decision or viability issues, as a starting point, we recommend the council consider an 80:20 split between affordable housing to rent and affordable housing to buy. The majority (c70%) of affordable rented housing is at social rents, and 30% at affordable rent and the 20% of intermediate housing focuses on shared ownership and rent-to-buy;

Labour Recommendation: The Local Plan should use the HENA evidence base to bring forward proposals in the Plan for a significant focus on social housing across WNC.

Pepper potting

We recognise that some housing associations and developers may resist pepper potting due to challenges with maintenance, service charges, and management. We would counter that the integration of affordable housing units throughout a private development, rather than clustering them together creates tenure-blind, mixed-income communities, reducing stigma and promoting social cohesion by making affordable and social homes visually indistinguishable from market-rate housing.

Theme 2 Houses in Multiple Occupation

The WNC Local Plan includes this policy (HO9) but no

specific proposals. This is a major concern for people living in parts of Northampton.

Policy HO9 – Houses in multiple occupation

A. Within Northampton, proposals for change of use from dwellinghouses to a small house in multiple occupation (Class C4) or a large house in multiple occupation (sui generis) will be supported provided that less than 10% of the dwellings within a 50m radius of the application site are houses in multiple occupation.

B. All proposals for change of use from dwellinghouses to a small house in multiple

occupation (Class C4) or a large house in multiple occupation (sui generis), applicants, throughout West Northamptonshire, will need to demonstrate:

i. Compliance with the Council's space standards for houses in multiple occupation; and

ii. Appropriate provision is made for car parking and secure cycle storage; and

iii. Sufficient secure refuse storage can be made within the curtilage of the site; and

iv. Proposals will not result in an increase in flood risk and risks arising from surface water drainage; and

v. Future occupants of any ground floor bedrooms are protected from flood risk

Evidence Base cited by WNC as part of the Local Plan process

Housing and Economic Needs Analysis (HENA) – Dec 25 and Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) – Jul 25

The WNC commissioned 2025 HMO report gives this assessment of the current status of HMOs

1.55 HMOs play a vital role in meeting housing needs, including for affordable housing. The latest Local Authority Housing Statistics suggest that there were 895 mandatory licensed HMOs and an estimated 2,200 total number of HMOs – there is likely increasing demand for HMOs or even smaller rented units.

11.35 According to the 2021 Census, in West Northamptonshire, there were 1,409 "Other" household types excluding all student households and those with dependent children. While not all 'Other' households are necessarily HMOs, this category is generally a good proxy for them. This level equates to around 0.8% of all households. The largest numbers of these can be found in the Northampton area, particularly Castle, St George, Abington, Phippsville and Delapre and Rushmere wards.

Around 3,254 people live in these households as of the 2021 Census.

And the report recommends active monitoring:

11.49 While Article 4 Directions can better manage the supply of HMOs, there is also the possibility that it could displace them to other areas. With this in mind, the spread of HMOs in West Northamptonshire should be monitored and responded to accordingly.

But the WNC Local Plan makes no quantitative recognition of the role of HMOs in the housing mix proposals nor suggests policy adjustments identified

in the HMO report (July 2025). The Plan is silent on comparisons with a range of local authorities both large and small (HMO report Table 6-1 on p 127) which would help WNC to refine local policy and practice under **the criteria** (shown below) .

* NB examples given in the boxes are from three different LAs

Concentration thresholds including Licensing

**Concentration threshold of 20% in wider radius
The sandwiching of a non-HMO dwelling between two HMO dwellings will not be permitted.**

- Character and amenity impacts
- Space standards and dwelling amenities
- Flood risk
- Parking standards
- Housing Mix

Sub-division of properties, currently or last lawfully used as single-family accommodation, or by a single household, will not be permitted.

- Deprivation

Applications for HMOs within an area falling within the 30% most deprived areas in England require additional assessment.

The report also gives example of LA Inspection and Enforcement approaches (all extracts from HMO Report July 2025).

We note and welcome the recent extension of the section 4 directive to cover the whole Northampton urban area. The Consultant's report describes the impact of Houses in Multiple Occupation on local communities – on rubbish, fly-tipping, parking and transience, and particularly notes the concentration of Houses in Multiple Occupation in Castle, Abington

and Phippsville, and Semilong wards, noting that this applies both to the registered and unregistered HMOs. We also note the growing need for single person accommodation as younger people live alone for longer.

We have also observed that many residents of HMOs are now “working from home” and have been shocked to find residents with rooms at the minimum space standard sleeping and working in these restricted conditions.

We note the projected pressure for housing growth which will inevitably result in an increased population, and associated with it a commensurate growth in employment.

Most of this housing will be delivered by housing developers through the market, with only a limited amount of ‘affordable’ housing – at 80% of market rate.

Despite the aspiration for a high skill high wage economy, a significant proportion of the new local employment will be provided in the warehousing sector, which is relatively poorly paid.

It is noted that new housing will not be affordable to low-income workers and so low income workers will not be accommodated in new build areas.

This additional growth in workers in low-income occupations will necessarily create a demand for low-cost accommodation, which will take place in existing areas of our towns. This demand will be at the expense of low-cost family housing.

There will therefore be continuing pressure on the central wards of the Northampton to meet the need for low-cost housing.

We note that most parishes within West Northants have local neighbourhood plans, whilst few areas of Northampton have neighbourhood plans. Some of the parish plans are not supportive of affordable housing.

Additionally, plans for affordable single person accommodation should be made as part of other developments in town centres across West Northants.

It is the view of the Labour Group that additional measures in planning policy should be taken to mitigate the impact of over-concentration of Houses in Multiple Occupation in the wards of where there are high concentrations of HMOs.

We propose that:

- Within the high concentration wards the current density should be set so that **no more than 5% of the total number of dwellings within a 50-metre radius** of the application site are Houses in Multiple Occupation.
- When permission for HMOs is granted, it should contain a condition that permitted development rights are removed or suspended.
- HMOs which are exempt from registration should be included in density calculations.
- HMOs should be included in Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy eligibility.
- The plan should bring Air B&Bs within the remit of HMO regulation.
- Every ward in Northampton should be supported to have a neighbourhood development plan.

Additionally, it is suggested that for HMOs with more than three residents, there should be a per person Council Tax surcharge.

Labour Recommendation: WNC should revise the Local Plan to reduce HMO densities and show that improvements in HMO management are put in place after analysis of the comparator local authority practices.

Theme 3 : Housing and health

Local Plan Objective 7 is clear on the role of housing in promoting health and well-being.

Labour welcomes the commitment to Health Impact Assessments in the WNC Local Plan. Labour recommends that the WNC Housing Policy should be adjusted to incorporate Mental Health needs and use evidence on the impact of improved housing to inform practice with partners especially in Health provision,

Objective 7 and the detailed policies relating to it are set out in the two boxes below:

To promote health and wellbeing to support healthy outcomes through high quality development which supports independence, encourages active and healthy lifestyles, supports social interaction, and creates inclusive and safe communities. To ensure the delivery of necessary health and social care infrastructure alongside new development.

Policy PL8 – Health and wellbeing – Health Impact Assessments

A. The health and wellbeing of communities will be maintained and improved. Major residential and commercial developments, or any development with significant population health impacts, will need to demonstrate, through an appropriate Health Impact Assessment, that they will contribute to creating an age friendly, healthy and equitable living environment and reducing health inequalities through:

- i. Creating an inclusive built and natural environment;
- ii. Promoting and facilitating active and healthy lifestyles through design and sustainable transport layouts;
- iii. Preventing negative impacts on residential amenity and wider public safety from noise, ground instability, ground and water contamination, vibration and air quality;
- iv. Providing access for all to health and social care facilities;
- v. Promoting access for all to green spaces, sports facilities, play and recreation opportunities; and
- vi. Use of design tools such as Building for a Healthy Life.

B. The Council will support the provision of health facilities to accommodate primary and secondary needs in accessible locations, either on or off-site, which contribute towards health and wellbeing.

WNL objectives: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,

Policy Base for strengthening the WNC Local Plan in relation to mental health

National Policy (NPPF) is clear that all plans should take account of the mental health needs of local residents. The Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health (August 2024) is explicit about the role improved housing can make in improving mental health of residents and about the role local planning authorities should take in achieving this.

Evidence Base for the strengthening the WNC Local Plan

The Centre For Mental Health identifies the Triple Jeopardy of poor housing:

- **Poor Quality:** Cold and damp conditions contribute to chronic stress
- **Affordability:** Financial strain leads to social withdrawal
- **Stability:** Frequent moves disrupt therapeutic environments and support networks

Meanwhile, the 2025 edition of The Big Mental Health Survey highlights that **one in five adults** identify housing issues as a primary driver of their mental health problems, with housing insecurity acting as a key trigger for crisis.

Labour Recommendation: Labour recommends that recognition of mental health needs should be incorporated into the Local Plan.

Theme 4 : University student demands (LP Section 11.14)

We recognise the need to keep allocations for student numbers under review as higher education provision changes over the coming years. It is arguable that changes may release a number of current student housing units for other housing uses in due course.

Women's Safety

Women's safety is important as it improves public spaces for everyone, fostering an environment that is inclusive and secure for all users. It requires gender-mainstreaming from the outset – involving active, participatory, and data-driven approaches as well as actively involving women and girls in planning processes,

Key strategies should include conducting Equality Impact Assessments, conducting safety audits through exploratory walks, ensuring high-visibility lighting and open sightlines, providing accessible, well-lit transport, and incorporating diverse voices into urban design.

Building in safety for women and girls involves designing secure transport links with high-visibility, safe routes, and enhance safety in pedestrian/ cycle pathways as well as installing bright, reliable lighting and maintaining vegetation to remove hiding spots.

Proactive maintenance programmes should be planned, including prompt repair of lighting and removal of vandalism, to prevent areas from feeling neglected. This work needs to involve careful consultation with the local community, especially including young people to enable all to feel safe moving about public spaces.

Economic growth

Chapter 12 of the Local Plan covers economic growth and starts with an analysis of connectivity and employment. However, it does not take a strategic approach to the foreseeable structural changes in the economy over the next two decades. For example, Logistics centres are going to be substantially robotic environments employing a very few high skilled people. A strategic view would identify that trend and be clear about the scale of opportunities, and in addition point to the likely growth sectors-green technologies, new energy vehicles and AI based services.

Labour Recommendation : This chapter should set a context by outlining some strategic themes in the likely structure of the economy up to 2043.

We welcome the policy which stresses the importance of education, skills and training development. We would stress that this should cover all education sectors including Higher Education and lifelong learning. It also requires practical steps to support those out of work, and improve skill levels for the disproportionately large percentage of inner Northampton residents who are trapped in basic level jobs, as identified in ONS data.

Labour Recommendation : The Local Plan should make clear how WNC will work with providers to deliver the identified education skills and training.

Built and Natural Environment

Chapter 13 of the Local plan covers the built and natural environment—areas in which the public hold strong views and have high aspirations.

Evidence Base

Local Nature recovery WNC draft strategy in consultation. The Local Plan has two key relevant objectives:. These are set out in the boxes to the right.

The box at the top translates into Local Plan Policies BN9-BN 18. The key overall policy is BN9, set out in the box on the next page, along with the Labour response and recommendations.

River Nene

We support the focus in the plan given to the “blue” environment through the Grand Union Canal Conservation Area and the focus on the River Nene. We would stress the need for a strategic managed

The LNRS states on P5

Currently, West Northamptonshire is one of the most nature-depleted areas in England, with highly fragmented wildlife sites. Our strategy strives to replenish West Northamptonshire’s wildlife , which includes making existing wildlife sites better, creating more, and ensuring they are bigger and joined up.

LNRS 2.9 p35 We aim to put Nature Recovery at the heart of policy in our area, seeking to achieve its improvement through all our activities

LNRS P83 New developments can greatly increase their support of urban biodiversity by incorporating simple features such as species-rich planting, wildlife-friendly lighting, nesting provisions, and gaps in boundary features such as walls and fences. Other urban greening features such as green roofs and walls and street trees support urban wildlife and provide wider environmental benefits such as air purification, while SuDS features greatly reduce flood risk and improve water quality. New developments must also consider larger-scale wildlife connectivity, such as by incorporating larger publicly accessible greenspaces of high quality that act as stepping stones and using linear features such as roads to facilitate movement of wildlife through the urban environment

Objective 1 – Environment (extract)

To support the transition of West Northamptonshire to a net zero carbon area by 2050, and deliver effective resilience and adaptation to and mitigation of the impacts on the environment by:

Ensuring the location and layout of new development promotes the use of sustainable travel modes and reduces the need to travel.

Objective 2 – Green Infrastructure and Natural Capital

To conserve and regenerate natural habitats and species, provide net gains in biodiversity and enhance West Northants network of natural capital and green infrastructure by improving existing areas and designing green and blue infrastructure into development. To support the delivery of the local nature recovery strategy including improving connections between habitats and the creation of new habitats such as woodland for carbon capture and meadowland for biodiversity.

plan for the whole of the River Nene within West Northamptonshire, including developing attractive river frontage pathways for both walkers and wheelers to access the town centre and linked urban and country parks.

Labour welcomes this broad strategy. Below we make responses to key section of the plans, and three recommendations which will support this set of goals.

Policy BN9 – Nature conservation. (extract)

Development will be required to

i. Protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity.

All proposals likely to affect biodiversity/ geodiversity will be expected to provide an ecological assessment which demonstrates an understanding of the importance of biodiversity/ geodiversity assets on site and in the surrounding area, and the potential impact of the proposed development on these assets. The assessment must set out the measures to be taken to minimise harm to nature conservation assets by following the mitigation hierarchy of:

- a. Avoiding harm to biodiversity/ geodiversity, particularly where it is irreplaceable, and including consideration of alternative sites where appropriate, then
 - b. Mitigating (within the local area) any harm to biodiversity, then
 - c. Compensating for any remaining harm to biodiversity (within the local area or in other identified areas).
- ii. Achieve a net gain in biodiversity and
- iii. Make appropriate provision for long-term management of habitats and geological features connected to or affected by the development

Labour Response : Responding to local needs

The Foreword to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (Draft 0.7 Mar 26) states:

It is not clear what consultation with local communi-

At the heart of this strategy lies a clear ambition: to create cleaner, greener spaces that meet the needs of our local communities. Everyone should have the opportunity to connect with nature, right on their doorstep. We are committed to a 'Together with Nature' approach—embedding nature into our decision-making to deliver positive outcomes for both wildlife and people.

Cllr Stansfield

ties in Northampton has taken place to enable the Local Plan to truly respond to community needs as set out in the LNRS. In Labour Party consultation session in St James, people were asked for green corridors and green walking/wheeling routes. There was also a desire for protected wildlife and biodiversity areas around new developments. The Local Plan identifies a number of green corridors but very few are in Northampton, and many are only on new developments.

Labour Recommendation: The Local Plan should be revised to demonstrate consultation and responsiveness to local needs in towns and rural areas as well as specifically in Northampton, underlining the

importance of urban green spaces for urban communities.

Promoting wildlife and wellbeing in established housing communities

Three key points in the LNRS are not incorporated into the Local Plan.

The Local Plan is not ambitious enough about creating biodiversity and wildlife corridors in existing communities where the health and wellbeing gains could be most significant. The proposed requirements for new developments set out in the LNRS should be reviewed to apply also to existing housing communities.

The LNRS states 'Everyone should have the opportunity to connect with nature, right on their doorstep.' That must mean a focus in the densely populated urban areas as much as in rural areas.

Labour Recommendation: The Local Plan should bring forward proposals for biodiversity and wildlife corridors in the existing town centre housing communities, and ensure that all residents can get access to nature.

Climate change resilience

The Local Plan should be more explicit on actions to mitigate against the impact of climate change including in the urban areas – more shading by tree planting, water harvesting and flood mitigation. The draft Local Plan is focused on the buildings alone rather than the built environment especially those many elements where the Council has the prime responsibility.

Labour Recommendation: More measures to mitigate the impact of climate change should be included in urban areas.

Transport

Labour welcomes the acknowledgement of the need to develop non carbon travel options, and the recognition of specific needs for transport provision in rural communities.

However, we consider that insufficient attention is given to the need for sustainable transport plans for out of town employment sites, especially to the need for these sites to connect to public transport networks. The lack of this results, for example, in the high use of private cars for people living in low-cost housing, including by people living in HMOs in central parts of Northampton and working in outlying

warehouse and distribution sites. This will require careful attention for those employment sites operating 24 hours a day.

Labour Recommendation: The Local Plan should encourage and support the implementation of Active travel Plans by schools, which will help minimise vehicle use at school times. Similarly, the Plan should encourage and support Local Travel plans and community travel schemes – particularly where those maximise access for those with limited mobility.

Labour Recommendation: The Local Plan should also strengthen requirements for employment sites to have travel plans connecting to public transport services, especially for out-of-town sites.

Labour Recommendation: Policy TR2 (Railways) should include specific reference to the opportunities for further rail links which may be provided by the East-West railway. We specifically recommend investigations should take place into a rail freight link from Oxford to Rugby, which will build on the existing network to DIRFT.

Infrastructure

The Local Plan must address the weaknesses in S106 funding, namely the delay in delivering funding and the difficulty in holding developers to account.

Labour Recommendation : infrastructure analysis and plans should be reflected in the Settlement Hierarchy designations and consequent development plans.

Implementation and Monitoring Framework

We support the importance of the implementation and monitoring framework but assert that monitoring a weakly formulated plan is not acceptable. We identify issues on which WNC has not been able to negotiate effectively with developers and so deliver a good value plan for residents.

Labour Recommendation: There is a need to strengthen officer and councillor capacity to work robustly with National Agencies and Developers so WNC can commission and deliver effective plans from a position of strength.

Examples of this would be in securing health service structural investment and in ensuring housing developers meet the commitments they make.

Development is more than Sustainable Urban Extensions

Some parts of the new town development in Northampton East were completed 50 years ago and, without adequate maintenance or upgrading, have deteriorated. Patterns of life have changed, car use has increased, and housing and environmental features have degenerated. Forest trees wrongly planted near housing require pruning or replacing, green spaces require action, pavements need upgrading, or in some areas provision, and there is the need for additional parking.

Improving rural communities

The Labour Group received submissions from Towcester, Long Buckby and a number of the larger West Northants towns and villages. We welcome the contributions which bring together the urban and rural community of interest that exists across West Northamptonshire.

Making Towcester greater

Concerns were raised about the adequacy of the infrastructure to meet the needs of new housing developments, especially:

- School places.
- Health provision including pharmacies and GP services
- Safe road crossings for walkers and cyclists by underpasses or bridges
- Safe access is needed to employment locations off the A43

Long Buckby housing development

One of the issues in housing provision is that of density to maximise the number of units. We urge WNC to model an increase in density if the Long Buckby development is progressed. This is in line with Government guidance for developments near railway stations.

Improving rural areas

Labour welcomes the commitment in the Local Plan to well-planned sustainable growth in rural areas by:

- Regeneration of existing urban centres
- Maximising brownfield development
- Supporting development in locations with strong sustainable transport links

- Sustained commitment to achieving Net Zero.
- Health and wellbeing focus including Health Impact Assessments
- Designation of local open spaces

We note that The NPPF requires that development is supported by adequate infrastructure and that plans are based on proportionate evidence. The absence of transport assessments, health capacity analysis, and flood risk work for rural allocations means the plan does not meet these requirements. The approach to rural growth is therefore not consistent with national policy.

Rural community concerns

Concerns were raised by people in rural areas that:

- Rural allocations appear to be made in isolation, without assessing cumulative impacts across neighbouring villages.

- Rural housing needs stronger commitment to **social rent** provision, not just affordable housing .
- The Infrastructure Delivery Plan contains no rural-specific proposals for roads, health, schools, utilities, or flood management.
- All neighbourhood plans should be required to demonstrate local resilience as the starting point in relation to emergencies. WNC needs to enable local community resources to be fully engaged in planning and response.
- Enabling creative linking of green spaces and corridors eg along old railway lines.
- Strengthening biodiversity includes challenging water companies to improve sewerage treatment and minimise overflows into the rivers.

Labour Recommendation: That issues raised by residents of the villages and rural areas should be considered and the Local Plan amended to reflect the interests of rural communities..

Thankyou for reading our report. It is going to into the consultation on the West Northamptonshire Local Plan, and the Labour Group will be following its progress through the Council.

If you want any more information about it, or have any comments, we would be very happy to hear from you. You are very welcome to contact us at the email addresses below.



For more information about this report or the work of the Labour Group on West Northamptonshire Council, you are very welcome to email
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