

Annual Report for Blakesley & Cote Ward-2021

Ward Joint Councillors Sandi Smallman and Roger Clarke

It is with some regret that both Sandi and I retire from Council at the forthcoming Elections. Between us we have mustered 29 years of service to this Ward and South Northants.

As Ward constituents you will be used to the intimacy that Sandi and I have endeavoured to portray, we have been accessible, we have regularly attended Parish Council Meetings and your Annual Parish Meetings in our nine villages and hamlets, when invited. We have answered and addressed questions and queries on many aspects that affect our rural area.

The change from a rural efficient District Council to a Unitary Authority will encompass the rural Councils of Daventry and South Northamptonshire, and the urban sprawl of Northampton Borough. This is bound to bring changes. The huge benefit is that the wellbeing of the young and old is now going to be shared county wide between West and North Northamptonshire and is considered a priority.

You will be aware that the new Unitary Authorities were brought about by the incompetence of the Northamptonshire County Council over several years, running a debt-ridden council that could not be maintained! Because at SNC we have diligently husbanded our resources, we go forward into the Unitary with a very healthy financial situation. That is all now behind us. The new 'Shadow Council' for West Northamptonshire has produced a balance Budget for the coming year, which has included an increase to the Council Tax, which was inevitable.

There have been several highlights during our time as Councillors;

- Moving from Springfield
- Sandi was Cabinet Member holding the portfolio for Art, Leisure, Young, Old and Benefits
- The Development of The Forum, Bury Mound and Moat Lane
- Sandi becoming Chairman of the Planning Committee
- Roger becoming Chairman of South Northants Council
- Joining Cherwell as a joint Administration
- Huge Housing and employment developments throughout the District in particular, Towcester, Brackley, Silverstone, Deanshanger.
- Roger as Cabinet Member holding the portfolio for Planning and the Environment
- Silverstone Commercial Development
- The Northampton Gateway (junction 15)

- The separation from Cherwell
- Towcester Relief Road
- Creation of parking in Towcester including the old Co-op premises
- West Northamptonshire Unitary

Sandi, whilst holding her portfolio oversaw the installing of the 'South Northants Leisure Trust' enabling the Council to save millions of pound of VAT charges, making it possible for the Council to use those savings throughout the District for the benefit of the community.

Whilst Chairman of the Planning Committee, Sandi introduced planning tutorials for all Councillors particularly Members of the Planning committee. This, to clarify planning procedures and policies.

It was a great privilege to become Chairman of South Northamptonshire, it enabled me to represent SNC on many Civic and Private occasions. I was proud to promote the District because it had achieved so much, other Counties and Districts were quite envious. We had a close working relationship with RAF Croughton as they planned to enlarge their site population, and were delighted at the digging the first 'sod' of soil for the Silverstone Employment Development, all lovely things to look back on.

Taking the Planning portfolio with the 'brief' to modernise the forward thinking was terrific. During this time the South Northamptonshire Design Guide and the Local Plan Part 2 were published, the latter overlaying and updating the 1997 South Northamptonshire Local Plan. Two huge document that Sandi and I worked on as a Planning team to lay the foundations for future work in the District. I also had the opportunity to instigate a complete review of the Planning department within the Council, its procedures, its method of presentation and its method of charging.

Sandi and I have enjoyed our time representing one of the largest Wards in the District; there have been times of joy and some of disappointment; whatever the outcome we have had your interests at heart. Both of us trust that our successors will continue to look after you representing this area of which we are very fond, having lived among you in our beautiful villages for almost fifty years. We have been committed to your service for our years as your Elected Members; have enjoyed working for you; have made new friends among you; and we thank you for the good relationships we have all enjoyed.

We wish you all well for the future.