

## **March 2026**

This month;

1. **Five Year Housing Land Supply.**
2. **South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP).**
3. **Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP) and Funding.**
4. **Local Government Reform.**
5. **Cost of Living – Iran War effects and vulnerable households fuel costs.**
6. **Council Tax 2026/27.**

### **Five Year Housing Land Supply**

The 5YHLS remains well below the target. How can that be with all the planning applications for outline schemes of 10's, 100's, and 1,000's of new homes? Well, they don't count until there is a confirmed build-out plan that is open to scrutiny. Of course, the build-out rate is controlled by the developer not the Planning Authority. If developers don't see the demand, then they do not start building. It takes roughly six or seven months to bring a new house onto the market from breaking ground. So, they would need to start in March for delivery in August/September. My understanding is that demand is very low for the houses that developers want to build so we could be in a situation where there will be a huge bank of available land, and we will still not have a 5YHLS.

I am also told that the real demand is for one- and two-bedroom houses and starter homes at affordable prices and rents. Unfortunately, SDC is not a Housing Authority and cannot build significant quantities of houses itself. This should change with the establishment of the new Unitary Authority.

### **South Warwickshire Local Plan**

The SWLP has suffered some delays in its preparation. It is needed to replace the current Local Plan – the Core Strategy which has been determined by an inspector at appeal to be out of date as there is only 2.74 years Housing Land Supply. Not all the Core Strategy policies are deemed to be out of date only specific policies, specifically:

- CS.15 -m Distribution of Development.
- CS.16 – Housing Development.
- CS.21 – Gypsy, Traveller, and Travelling Showman (because the County does not have sufficient sites to meet the calculated need.
- AS.10 – Countryside and Villages.

All the above are very pertinent to this Ward. It should be noted however that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is the overarching policy for planning and therefore applications must meet the conditions of the NPPF regardless of the status of the Local Plan.

### **Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP) and Funding**

If a NDP is made and current (up to five years) then in the case where the Local Plan is deemed out-of-date, then the NDP takes precedent assuming that it has been drafted reflecting the NPPF, the parish has land supply to fulfil stated housing need in the NDP and shows site allocations.

NDP's are hard work taking two or three years to be made. Once made, they are legal documents and form part of planning policy. Small parishes can join to build a NDP covering both settlements. This is particularly useful if they are close together and can then protect the countryside between them from unwanted development. An example is the Tysoe Parish NDP which has made the open space between Middle and Lower Tysoe protected and therefore stopping coalescence of the two communities.

SDC has a grant fund of £100k per annum for the next three years available to fund new and out of date NDP's.

## **Local Government Reform and Devolution**

There are two major policy changes being put through by Central Government: Local Government Reform (LGR) and Devolution.

**Local Government Reform.** The first is Local Government reform which abolishes District and Borough Councils and establishes a Unitary Authority. Two proposals have been jointly submitted by Warwickshire County Council and the District and Borough Councils. WCC preferred proposal is to have a single Warwickshire Continuing Authority. Rugby Borough Council preferred option is for a single UA but not continuing authority, and the remaining District and Borough Councils prefer a two UA of North Warwickshire and South Warwickshire. The Government will determine which option is to be established later this year. There are arguments that 'big is better' and more efficient. Indeed, the single UA option would save around £2.0m per annum, putting this into context, the gross spend of all the councils in Warwickshire is I calculate around £1.5b. This saving calculation is too small for significance in terms of forecasting, so I determine that there will be no financial gain. That means the key arguments must be around delivery of service, and it is clear from the commissioned 'PeopleToo' report that the needs of North Warwickshire are very different from those of South Warwickshire. Moreover, the same report shows that historically that the optimum size for an authority is for a population of between 250,000 and 350,000. The current populations of North and South Warwickshire ( comprising SDC & WDC) sum to 632,000, with the population of South Warwickshire at of 295,082.

**Devolution.** At the same time there is a Whitepaper (Dec. 2024) that requires the whole of England to be formed into Strategic Authorities. The target population for such authorities is around 1.5m although this is not considered to be a hard and fast rule, and there are already examples of the SUA being formed with lower populations. In addition, no single UA can qualify for a Strategic Authority on its own and must join with another UA with the prospect of forming a Mayoral Strategic Authority which will achieve full devolution powers. A Mayoral SA would take responsibility for the role of the Police Commissioner, the Police Authority, a Fire Authority and attract significant additional funding from Central Government. It should be noted that Warwickshire had already achieved significant devolved powers prior to the May 2024 elections.

What does this mean?

A single continuing or reformed UA would have to join with other authorities to qualify as a SUA. The options available to Warwickshire would be joining with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) but this has been clearly ruled out by the sitting Labour Party Mayor of the WMCA and would not be beneficial to Warwickshire residents. The population of the WMCA is 3m in a geography less than the size of that of SDC, roughly 977km<sup>2</sup> with 142k residents. The alternatives would be to join with Northamptonshire with which, except for Rugby, the County has little in common in terms of main transport communication corridors or industry. Northamptonshire also carries a significant debt. Alternatives would be joining with North Cotswolds, or Hereford and Worcestershire. Both options would achieve the population targets but would leave Shropshire as a 'Devolution Island', and that is not acceptable. I believe the best option would be for the two North & South Warwickshire Unitary Authorities combining as a SA, or South Warwickshire joining North Cotswolds in a SA.

There is however yet another layer of organisation including Police Authorities, Fire Authorities and National Health Service regions. At the same time as LGR and Devolution is progressing; Central Government is determining how to reduce the current number of Police Authorities significantly. What this means to Warwickshire residents is uncertain.

Residents can have their say by responding to the government consultations.

**Cost of Living – Iran War effects and vulnerable households fuel costs.**

The huge increases in the price per barrel of oil will have an extraordinary effect on inflation, interest rates, tax increases to businesses, and the cost of living for residents. Please keep an eye for those vulnerable residents that will find heating their homes and feeding their families more and more difficult. There is help available, so please involve both your County Councillors (copied here) and me, and we will do what we can to assist by action or signposting.

**Council Tax 2026/27.**

Warwickshire County Council has approved its budget for 2026/27. The budget includes a 4.4% increase in Council Tax, including the 2% adult social care precept. This is lower than the maximum permitted increase of 4.99%. For a Band D property, the overall increase in the Council Tax bill will amount to an additional £1.56 per week.

Kind regards,  
Malcolm

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