

### Work in Progress

In theory we have progress on a number of things I've been trying to get done, though sadly you may not yet have seen the results in reality. We've got speed limits approved (but no sign of them implemented yet, of course) for Bressingham and Fersfield. I asked for speed limits for Bunwell but it was refused, so I have commissioned a feasibility study for making a safer crossing on the Turnpike. I've been chasing and got promises for action on the speed limit (long approved but never installed) on Pottergate Street in Aslacton. I've ordered, and will fund or partially fund, various signs, paint and chevrons for some of the roads with problems of dangerous bends and misleading junctions, and I'm co-funding with Councillor Wilby a solution for the unmarked and neglected Furze Green Hamlet that crosses two parishes/divisions and highways officers. I've also commissioned the designers to come up with signs to stop long lorries from using Tabernacle Lane in Forncett.

I believe we have some work going on to solve drainage problems in the Street in Bunwell. There's also been a lot of work going on at the environment agency to come up with natural flooding solutions for the feeder tributaries for the Tas and for the area around Shelfanger. I'm also looking into better signage at the very steep and deep Ford in Forncett where vehicles regularly get into trouble.

Several parishes have been concerned that the grips to let water run into the ditch are not cut right through but only part way. In other cases they are allowing water to flow from the ditch to the road. These cases are hard to deal with because the water level in the ditch should be lower than the road, not higher, and if this is not so, there is sometimes something more fundamentally wrong with the capacity of the ditches and ponds, due to silting up of pipes or ponds, or run off from the fields. Since SNDC has now appointed a riparian obligations officer, there may be some progress with improving drainage where the obligation to clear the ditches falls to farmers and other landowners.

I've been pestering the footpaths officers with various issues, particularly cases where enforcement is not happening, such as in Gissing. I know there is limited funding and officers are overstretched, especially because of the wet weather problems. I very much appreciate the work that parishes do to help by using their own teams of volunteers to keep footpaths and drainage in good order, and to help residents with issues they have locally. I am also seeking to get better responses from the officer in charge of buses to address our issues relating to bus timetables.

### Norfolk County Council Climate Change Strategy

Troublesome wet weather and coastal erosion/rising river levels are among the growing consequences of global climate change. On 13 March 2024 the Infrastructure and Development Committee discussed the third tranche of Norfolk County Council's strategy for actions to deliver the climate change strategy. The actions will support low carbon transport, climate adaptation, and decarbonisation of local business and industry. Initiatives include:

- A pilot to develop a sustainable and viable seaweed industry in Norfolk - the project will work with partners in the Netherlands, already implementing sea farms.
- Supporting the development of nature-based solutions to help secure Norfolk's long term water resilience.
- Further walking and cycling improvements in places including King's Lynn, Norwich, Great Yarmouth, and Dereham.

Read the Infrastructure and Development Committee report [here](#) or watch the meeting [here](#).

### County Council in March

The Full County Council met on 26<sup>th</sup> March. During the time for questions to the leader and cabinet, I was able to ask the Leader of the Council about how we might combat the government's planning regime for strategic infrastructure projects which silences the voice of local people and imposes unsuitable infrastructure instead of seeking agreement. I raised the example of the Norwich to Tilbury Pylons. Aside from this issue, we also asked some searching questions about the financial risks incurred from the likely cancellation of the Norwich Western Link.

Council then passed and approved the usual array of reports from the committees covering routine business and decisions.

We also reviewed the Climate Policy. In June 2023, Norfolk County Council launched its Climate Strategy (see previous entry in this report: the third tranche of this came to committee in March). The strategy sets out how the council can address its own carbon footprint as well as its role in supporting Norfolk's low carbon development and green growth. The paper brought to Council in March encapsulates the climate strategy into a more concise policy format. It also adjusts the council's countywide commitment, to align with the UK's 2050 net-zero target and the ambitious trajectory set out in the national carbon budgets. Previously the Council had set a target of 2030 for

making its own estates net zero but had only a vague ambition to “work with partners towards carbon neutrality county-wide”.

The climate strategy is focused on the following key areas:

- Reducing our estate emissions
- Reducing our indirect emissions
- Addressing Norfolk’s county-wide emissions
- Promoting a green economy for Norfolk
- Climate adaptation
- Ensure nature has space to recover and grow
- Engage and collaborate.

The policy was approved by Council.

Besides the designated business above, motions were brought for discussion, as follows:

Two motions proposing improvements to the information pack for parishes concerning public footpaths (one from the Conservatives and one from the Liberal Democrats). Only the Conservative motion was heard.

Motions from the Liberal Democrat group on opposing the Wisbech Incinerator and on Experiential Tourism. Only the one on the Wisbech Incinerator got time for discussion.

Motions from the Labour Group on parking permits for carers, on flood responses, on malnutrition and on the Norwich Western Link Road. Only the one on parking permits got time for discussion.

A motion from the Green Group on proper funding for childcare. For the first time this Council year, our motion got time for discussion and a vote. Next month I will bring back the speed limits for rural roads motion, and hope that we get a motion debated again.

Watch the meeting [here](#) . (NB the opening statement from the Leader is quite something and you may have seen newspaper reports about it).

### A new station for South Norfolk?

You may have seen the report in the newspaper about my proposal to get the old Fornsett station (near Long Stratton) reopened. I’m keen that communities that have a railway running nearby should have easy local access to speedy travel to Norwich and London. I was unsuccessful in February with my suggestion that the County should invest in the land for this station. However, there are many campaign groups who are keen to rebuild a good railway system, so I shall continue to push for this, and a parkway station at Cringleford for the research park, having sown the seeds of the idea in my budget proposals for 2024.

### Local Enterprise Partnership integration into Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils

Key functions and employees of the “New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership” (LEP) transferred to Norfolk and Suffolk on 1 April 2024 as part of the Government’s “devolution” process. LEP functions include business representation, strategic economic planning, and responsibility for the delivery of government programmes.

Business support will continue to be provided by New Anglia Growth Hub – which delivers the LEP’s business growth programme, including the administration of grant schemes.

### New registration requirements for bird keepers

On 19 March the government announced [new measures to help protect the poultry sector from bird flu](#) which say that all bird keepers must register their birds and update records annually. The new rules cover owners of backyard flocks, birds of prey and pigeon fanciers, but do not affect caged pet birds inside your own home (excluding any poultry species). Keepers are encouraged to register their birds ahead of the legal deadline on 1 October 2024.

### Defra Report on levelling up for rural areas

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has published "[Delivering Rural Opportunity - The Third Report on Rural Proofing](#)" which is a report on the Government’s progress to address the needs and challenges of rural areas under what they call “levelling up”. It includes stuff on transport and broadband and on rural hardship and isolation etc. Worth reading to decide whether they deserve a pat on the back or not?

### Norfolk things:

#### Big Indie Read has started

The Big Indie Read at Norfolk libraries aims to celebrate exceptional writing from independent publishers. The read runs for two months and features 26 publishers, almost 200 books and 17 author chats. Further information about Big Indie events at Norfolk libraries is available [here](#). Browse the full list of Big Indie Read books [here](#).

### Contact me on

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*7<sup>th</sup> April 2024*