

## Progress report

The usual situation with some improvements happening here and there as new speed limits and signage get progressed. I'm hard at work on trying to get safety improvements and a speed limit on Ugate Street in Carleton Rode, as well as the problem of how to repair that road which has been surfaced on areas wider than the foundations of the road, and with below surface cables laid alongside that make building a wider foundation impossible.

I've been involved with visits and urgent work to challenge the threat to woods in the Bunwell Hill area that arise from the changes proposed by National Grid from the proposals they put out in 2024. In response to my submission, I've been invited to a meeting with National Grid about it.

I'm working with Dickleburgh and Rushall on questions about their buses to Pulham. More improvements to bus stops and other bus related facilities are to be funded by the Bus service improvement plan funding and proposals are to be approved by a delegated decision by the cabinet member. I've asked for the Infrastructure and Development committee to get to look at these proposals before they are decided.

## Devolution and local government reorganisation

A consultation has been launched by the government regarding the idea of having an elected mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk (which is called "Devolution"), so please do add your thoughts to that. You can find it here: [Norfolk and Suffolk devolution - GOV.UK](#).

Note, this consultation is not about the change to local councils and combining district and county councils in a number of councils for Norfolk. That is called "Local Government Reorganisation".

The County Council has drawn up a proposal for what it would like to recommend to the government for the Local Government Reorganisation for Norfolk. They are favouring one single unitary council for the whole of Norfolk (abolishing all district and borough councils). Parish and town councils would remain. The majority of district and borough councils favour having more and smaller unitary councils, and Norwich City Council is keen to keep a local council for Norwich, but with an expanded area that would absorb parts of what is currently South Norfolk and Broadland. Cabinet on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> March is expected to approve their submission (which considers three options for how to carve up the county into one, two or three blocks). They think that having it as all one would save money. In my experience reorganisation never saves money.

## Budget

On 18<sup>th</sup> February, the Council passed the administration's budget plan for 2025-6. Costs have been rising faster than inflation, and the latest settlement from government includes a small uplift to cover National Insurance, but does not meet the increasing demand on services so a range of services face cuts. Council tax will rise by the maximum that is allowed, which is just short of 5%.

## Info from County Council

### New enhanced Norwich Park & Ride services from 30<sup>th</sup> March

Park and Ride services were retendered last year, with the objective of running the services from all five sites with no subsidy from the council. From Sunday 30 March, First Bus will operate services from Airport, Thickthorn and Sprowston, while Simonds will run Harford and Postwick.

On the first day there will be free travel from all sites.

The new service includes: Earlier journeys in the morning, later journeys in the evening, increased frequency at most sites, Sunday services at all sites.

Airport, Thickthorn and Sprowston services will have zero emission buses, and fares will be subsidised from the Bus Service Improvement Plan funding (a government grant).

Full details of the services including timetables and ticket prices are available [here](#).

#### Norfolk Rural Business Awards – nominations open

Farmers, food and drink producers, tourism attractions and others that champion our county are eligible for the Norfolk Rural Business Awards. The closing date for applications is Monday 21 April. The final shortlist will be announced in May and the winners will be announced at the Royal Norfolk Show in June. Further details are available [here](#).

#### Bird flu: good news

No new cases have been reported but mandatory housing continues.

### Info from Central Government

#### Government consultation on plans for North Sea clean energy

The Government is consulting on “plans to put the North Sea at the heart of Britain's clean energy future and to drive economic growth.” You get what that means, right?

The Government says it is committed to “working with industry, communities, trade unions and wider organisations to develop a plan that will ensure a phased transition for the North Sea – creating tens of thousands more jobs in offshore renewables”. My view is that the main concern has to be the destruction caused by siting too much energy production in the same place, instead of distributing it across the country close to the areas where the energy is actually needed.

The consultation also includes delivering the Government’s “commitment not to issue new licences to explore new oil and gas fields in the UK”. (Yes, this is good, but...)

The [consultation on Building the North Sea's Energy Future](#) is open until 30 April 2025. Please have your say.

#### Planning and Infrastructure Bill

The [Planning and Infrastructure Bill](#) was introduced to Parliament on 11 March 2025.

The Bill is intended to speed up and streamline planning processes to accelerate delivery of infrastructure and housing and to get what they call “clean energy infrastructure” built ASAP.

It proposes that people living within 500m of new pylons across Great Britain will get money off their electricity bills up to £2,500 over 10 years. Additional guidance will set out how developers should ensure communities hosting transmission infrastructure can benefit, by funding projects like sports clubs, educational programmes, or leisure facilities. The new community funds guidance means communities could get £200,000 worth of funding per km of overhead electricity cable in their area, and £530,000 per substation.

We are unimpressed with the attempt at bribery, or the government’s attitude to nature and local communities. We see an attempt to take away rights that are there to protect the voiceless.

Factsheets and a Guide to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill that are available [here](#).

Contact me

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