

County Councillor's Report

January 2025

Fly-tipping

A resident contacted me to ask what monitoring was being done to check the impact of recycling centre closures and the new booking system that's in place. I thought the reply I received was interesting enough to share it more widely so here it is. Doesn't alter my view that having to book a slot to dispose of waste is a bad idea because it just makes it harder for people to access a public service that could and should be easily available to all:

Fly tipping is a regular concern, shared by many of our residents, that has been raised prior to any service changes that we have made to recycling centres. Our own experience of closing sites (Mayton Wood, Mile Cross and Ketteringham) and reducing operating hours does not reflect that there has been an increase in fly tipping as a result. The vast majority of Norfolk residents do care about our environment and have continued to dispose of their waste responsibly. In January 2023, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) carried out a study to find if there were any [links between recycling centre booking systems and incidents of fly-tipping](#) and Essex County Council has also published their [findings on their website](#). Neither report found a link, however we will be monitoring all Norfolk data carefully.

We work closely with our colleagues at the district, city and borough councils, on anti-fly tipping campaigns and joint initiatives to prevent and enforce against it. We have been pleased to have the support of both the police and the Environment Agency on delivering our SCRAP fly tipping campaign.

North Norfolk's Local Plan

Some of you will have been involved in discussions about the revised North Norfolk Local Plan – the document that sets the outline of planning policy decisions across the District. Planning issues are dealt with by the District Council, not the County Council. But the County Council does have a role as a consultee on individual planning issues so I thought I would ask what role the County Council has in relation to the Local Plan. This is the reply I have received to my enquiry. I thought I would share it for your information:

As a Highway Authority we are a consultee in the Local Plan process.

At the local plan stage, we look at the principle of the proposals to understand whether there is a likely highway solution. We provide technical advice throughout the process on a range of sites and highway issues.

Currently we are formulating the technical view on the current North Norfolk consultation and that is prepared by a range of officers, including those involved in considering planning applications.

Defibrillators available at Fire Stations

Defibrillators for use by the public are now available at more than half of Norfolk's fire stations. Defibrillators give a high energy shock to the heart of people in cardiac arrest and they are available in many public buildings. They were also located at 10 Norfolk fire stations, but this has now been extended to include 22 fire stations in the centre of communities right across Norfolk.

Norfolk fire stations with defibrillators for public use are:

Wroxham, Downham Market, Terrington, Kings Lynn North, Massingham, Wells, Cromer, Mundesley, Carrow, Acle, Swaffham, Watton, Aylsham, Fakenham, Holt, Great Yarmouth, Martham, Wymondham, Earlham, Hunstanton, East Harling and Methwold.

You can find your nearest defibrillator here [Defib finder – find the defibrillators nearest you.](#)

Devolution

Just as the BBC likes nothing better than talking about the media, so the County Council loves to talk about Council structures. The Devo Deal is back thanks to the new government – except this time we are being told much more forcefully what's on offer and to either take it or leave it. In a nutshell, the offer is a directly elected Mayor covering Norfolk and Suffolk in return for extra money and powers and an expectation that we will move to a 'unitary system' with the functions of County and District Councils being merged. In place of the two County Councils and 12 District Councils across Norfolk and Suffolk we will likely end up with somewhere between 2 and 5 councils. Lots of people will have spent lots of time over Christmas coming up with plans for the new council boundaries so expect to see lots of discussion of it in the coming weeks. The County Council will hold a special meeting on 9th January to discuss the devolution deal. We should know by the end of January whether it will be taken forward by the Government. This is the briefing I have received:

Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, set out, via a White Paper, the Government's desire to progress devolution and local government reform. You can read that in detail [here](#) if you are interested.

The Government describes what the alternative might be for Norfolk in the absence of our previously agreed County Deal. This would see a Mayor and combined authority covering a larger geography and the mayor would have some additional powers to the previous deal. In addition to this, the White Paper outlines a national approach to structural change that may involve replacing

some or all existing district and county councils with new unitary authorities. A Unitary Authority provides all services in their area for example in Leeds or Cornwall. At this stage, no decisions have been made about what will happen in Norfolk.

County council leader Councillor Kay Mason Billig has issued a statement which says: "I agree with the Government that we need to look at the structure of councils and ensure we have a system that delivers the most efficient and effective services that are fit for the future. I am also prepared to support devolution and a Norfolk and Suffolk mayor, if that is the only way to get additional powers and funding to improve lives here. I am keen to engage with the Government and our district councils to consider what the future shape of local government in Norfolk should look like. Let's put the people before politics and attempt to design something that is the right shape and size to deliver efficient, accountable services to our residents."

We will now have talks with the Government to better understand the process and timescales. Let me reassure you that this will not be an abrupt change and that a lot of discussion, consultation and planning will be required over the coming months before any changes are introduced. If Norfolk does progress devolution or local government reform, a Mayor will not be in place before 2026 and new authorities will not be created before April 2027 or 2028.

Highways maintenance

Norfolk County Council is to receive £56 million from the government next year to pay for highways maintenance. That's the biggest increase in the east of England (up by 16 million).

I am sure councillors will be keen to know what Highways plan to spend it on. I will keep you informed!

Wishing you all the best for 2025.

Ed Maxfield

www.edmaxfield.org.uk