

County Councillor's Report

February 2025

Recycling

Following on from my report last month about fly tipping, I have asked Norfolk County Council's Scrutiny Committee to examine the performance of the Council's waste and recycling service. Particularly with reference to the impact of the new booking system, the charges that are imposed and the closures and reduced hours. Hopefully we will receive a report on that soon.

I also asked for an update on plans for North Walsham Recycling Centre as a couple of years ago there were plans to move it to a new location so that they could improve the re-use facilities there. This is reply I received:

Plans for a new North Walsham Recycling Centre remain within our infrastructure programme and the project is in the early stages. We have carried out some initial land searches and pursued a couple of options, which have so far been ruled out.

Waste Services Infrastructure programme is addressed as part of the Cabinet paper published later today, which through the Monitoring Report covers the Council's financial strategy for capital. We are continuing to consider land options, even though there is currently no fixed programme to deliver the North Walsham recycling centre. Finding suitable land can be challenging so time scale of delivery will, in part be guided by when we find an appropriate site.

So, in short, I don't have any further progress to share with you at this point but can let you know that it remaining part of our Infrastructure development plans.

Devolution

Well, we were supposed to know by now what was happening with devolution and the County Council elections. It seems like we need to wait another week or so before we get an indication from the Government whether Norfolk has been accepted on to the devolution programme and whether the elections scheduled for May will be postponed.

Norfolk County Council met on 9th Jan and voted overwhelmingly to apply to join the devolution programme. This is part of what I said in the debate:

*My view is that the devolution deal has the chance to bring transformative change to the region. **If** we see it as the start of a journey and not the end point. Which is a point I made when we debated the last proposal. If we get on the bus we can drive local government – and the region in a new direction. But it will need determined leadership with a clear vision.*

We need to avoid the talk from last time of the new mayor being a celebrity chef, a comedian, a comedy turn ex Prime Minister or even Ipswich Town's number 17.

We need the new authority to focus on the needs and the potential of a diverse region and not to focus obsession on concrete and steel vanity projects or to disappear into the weeds of managing decline in public services. I hope whoever occupies the seat in the end will have real ambition to change things for the better for people living in Norfolk and Suffolk.

We also need the new structure to be properly open and democratic. So that people living in my division on the North Norfolk coast – people who are literally living on the edge - feel they have a voice.

That certainly means the new unitaries need to be close enough to people that they feel they are in control and their needs are seen. That doesn't mean two large councils to cover the region and if the administration is wise they will realise it is extremely unlikely that such a proposal will be approved anyway.

Western Link

The County Council has admitted defeat and withdrawn its planning application to build the Western Link road that would have completed the Broadland Northway/NDR. I think the only really surprise is that it has taken this long to realise the project was not going to happen. There is a meeting of the County Council coming up where I am sure the leader of the council will be pressed on how much the County Council has already spent on planning the road and how much of that is lost. This is an extract from the Council's press release on the issue:

Since March, our serious efforts to find a solution have unfortunately not provided a way forward. Most recently, in December, we received responses from Natural England and Defra, the Government department that sponsors Natural England. Neither response helps to resolve the issue that is preventing us from progressing this important infrastructure project, nor answered the specific questions which we asked, which is disappointing.

It was right for us to leave no stone unturned in relation to Natural England's stance on our proposals. We will write to them again hoping to get answers to our unanswered questions but at present, we have exhausted all our options in relation to this, so we have made the difficult decision to withdraw the current planning application and prioritise discussions with the Department for Transport (DfT) on the way forward for the project.

Gritting

I received a note from Highways about the start of their gritting programme recently and it included this extract which I thought you would find useful:

The council receives a specialist weather forecast from Meteo, which breaks the county down into seven different areas for winter gritting. This is backed up by a

number of weather stations around the county. The decision to grit is then taken by the council's Highways teams based on these weather forecasts. The council's policy is to treat when the forecast road surface temperatures fall below +0.5 degrees.

Roadside Nature Reserves

I received the attached update from County Hall:

Since the establishment of RNRs in the 1990s, Norfolk has led the way in preserving natural habitats alongside our roads. Our RNR network functions as essential wildlife corridors, connecting diverse habitats across the county. These reserves protect remnants of our natural grasslands and serve as sanctuaries for rare and important species both locally and nationally.

Work will soon commence in your division to designate and install new markers for RNRs. As part of this process, letters will be sent to landowners and parish councils to provide them with details about the project and installation plans.

New RNRs within your division are:

RNR Number	Parish	Road
233	Gimingham	Heath Lane
253	Paston	Paston Road
295	Trunch	Brick Kiln Lane
299	Mundesley	Cromer Road

Council Tax

The Council will examine budget proposals in February. The proposal from the ruling group is for a Council Tax increase of 4.99%

Grass cutting contracts

I was asked recently whether a Parish Council can give back the contract to cut grass if they have taken it on. The advice I have received is:

The Service Level Agreements are on a rolling one year contract so either party can terminate at the end of each year.

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