

Work in Progress

A whole host of highways stuff is suddenly coming to fruition: In Fornsett, the village gates have finally arrived, we're having the lorry signs in Tabernacle Lane moved to better locations and more signs installed at the further end, and the water problem caused by the natural spring in Spring Lane is about to be solved (we hope). In several places we're having the damaged edges of the roads mended (but major work on Upgate Street won't begin till after Bunwell Street is open again, which may be some time!). I've got requests in for inspection of collapsed culverts in various places. I'm getting some extra road safety funding for school flashing signs in Burston. The damaged equipment on the Turnpike in Bunwell is to be replaced in the near future. We're making better progress towards the long-awaited signs for the hamlet of Furze Green, to be jointly funded by myself and Councillor Wilby of East Depwade. I'm looking to schedule a site visit to Bressingham and Fersfield to negotiate the exact locations for the new speed limit provisions that need to be submitted for new traffic regulation orders.

New buses

One of the most exciting developments is the new bus service running between Diss, Long Stratton and Norwich. The Simonds bus number 82 (formerly 2) operates six days a week and runs roughly every hour and right into the late evening, providing a really superb service for residents in Dickleburgh and Tivetshall to go North to Norwich (an evening out in Norwich for £2 each way!) or to head to Diss for the railway station or the town centre. The last bus back from Norwich is at 10.15 pm (or 5 minutes earlier on Saturdays). During the middle of the day on weekdays these buses also continue to and from Norwich railway station.

Disappointingly the timetables for the 84 service to Pulham (formerly 584) and the Bressingham circular bus haven't improved.

Energy infrastructure and energy saving:

I had a useful session with the officer in charge of the Norfolk County Council energy plan. I'm keeping pressure on to get sensible (rooftops first) provision for clean energy and energy storage with good benefits for local communities, while pushing the government to commit to mandating rooftop solar on new build housing (alongside other zero carbon, low running cost provisions like insulation and solar gain). We won't make sufficient progress on these things unless incentives to export power to the grid are restored to make rooftop solar pay for itself. We also need adequate grid connections and substations for Norfolk communities and businesses. That's the main focus of the Norfolk energy plan, but equally urgent issues are measures for demand-reduction, such as insulation, low-energy travel and zero carbon heating. There's been a lot of hype about speculative applications for solar farms in South Norfolk which I'm following with interest. The potential benefits for farmers and local residents are immense. They can make a farm profitable while practising sustainable agriculture, provide a reliable income alongside smaller scale and more varied cultivation that's more resilient to seasonal disruption, they provide wildlife corridors and help with regeneration of the land. They're not smelly, noisy, nor polluting to our rivers. They can be combined with rewilding, wildflowers, traditional hedges, sustainable agriculture, footpaths, regenerative farming. Climate change disasters will more and more destroy harvests and remove the soil, so an additional source of income for farmers, alongside agriculture, that's not vulnerable to extreme weather events is very helpful.

Info from Norfolk County Council

Tree planting update: In partnership with the Norfolk Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, the Council is offering [free advice](#) on grant applications to landowners who wish to plant more the

0.5ha of woodland (Woodland creation). Please also '[Tell Us Where You Planted](#)' by letting us know online if you have planted a tree – to be part of Norfolk's *1 million Trees* story.

Winter on the roads and at home: Do check which roads are on the council's gritting routes at www.norfolk.gov.uk/gritting. On the same map you can find the locations of around 2000 grit bins in the county that are filled by the County Council and which people can use on public pavements, cycle paths and roads to help everyone get around safely. Please let me know if any of your grit bins have not been filled. You need to check that they are included on the list, especially if you recently bought one.

Council Budget: The county council has drawn up initial proposals to bridge a £44.722 million budget gap for 2025/26 and has opened a consultation on three of the “savings” (i.e. cuts) that it has proposed for consideration:

- Raising Council Tax
- Reducing Street Light usage
- Review of its Housing Related Support Services

Full detail of these proposals, and the response form, can be [found online](#). The consultation is now open and will close on Monday 16 December 2024.

NHS consultation

There is a national consultation about how to improve the NHS. Links to the survey are available [here](#). Nowhere on this site does it say when the consultation closes.

Info from Central Government

Support for horticulture and poultry businesses

The government has [announced a package of measures](#) to support the horticulture, poultry and sheep sectors. These include 43,000 Seasonal Worker visas for horticulture and 2,000 for poultry next year and legislation to protect poultry farmers by changing the rules on 'free range' labelling so that eggs can be labelled as free range during mandatory housing measures for avian flu. There is [a consultation](#) on similar measures for free-range poultry.

The Government's budget

Loads of things here affect what we can achieve at County Council and how residents and businesses will be affected locally. Too much to fit into this report! Some highlights include:

- £1bn for 2025 to extend the Household Support Fund to local authorities. Norfolk's share is administered by the County Council.
- £1bn uplift (equivalent to 6% real growth) for SEND reform and improving outcomes.
- £2.3 bn for the Core schools budget grant (a much-needed rise in per-pupil funding). There's also funding for school building repairs.
- £30m for free breakfast clubs in schools and £69m for Family Hubs.
- £500m for Project Gigabit and the Shared Rural Network for rural connectivity.

Contact me

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