

Work in Progress

In theory we have progress on several things I've been trying to get done, though sadly you may not have seen the results yet. I've now had the official results letter for my applications for the Road Safety Community Fund, which have turned out to be rather puzzling since what they say in the letter doesn't match what I understood I'd been awarded nor what I thought I had requested! It appears that we're getting all or some of the speed limit improvements in Bressingham and Fersfield (not 20 mph but 30, since 20 wasn't an option under this scheme), and perhaps they have indeed discovered that one can get a collection of speed limits done under one (costly) Traffic Regulation Order, which, if true, is a very good precedent. These will be implemented within the next 12 months, God willing. I also asked for a 30mph speed limit on the Turnpike in Bunwell. That was refused, so I believed we had got nothing, but they now say they have awarded a Vehicle Activated Sign for Bunwell (which I didn't think I had ever asked for, or even considered). I am trying to find out what exactly this is and where it is to be installed. I trust it is something that the Parish had asked for. Meanwhile, believing I had nothing to assist with the dangerous crossing point on the Turnpike, I have commissioned a feasibility study for making a safer crossing there, using part of my 2023 highways budget. In Aslacton, I've been chasing and got promises for action on the speed limit (long approved but never installed) on Pottergate Street, which should be done by June this year. 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. This is now in progress. I've also commissioned the designers to come up with signs to stop long lorries from using Tabernacle Lane in Fornsett. I'd like to get a UK-wide solution to change the way Sat Navs work, when it comes to tiny single track lanes to eliminate the problem of delivery vans and lorries taking short cuts at speed due to delivery targets and carbon reduction targets.

In addition to work to solve drainage problems in the Street in Bunwell, the Environment Agency has been researching natural flooding solutions for the feeder tributaries for the Tas and for the area around Shelfanger. They're reporting to Shelfanger in May. I've been looking into better signage at the steep and deep Ford in Fornsett, and I'm told that the Council is undertaking a review of all the County's fords, to improve safety. This is promising, but I fear it will take a long time before we get action.

I've been pestering footpaths officers, particularly with cases where enforcement is lacking, such as in Gissing. The new route for the FP6 in Gissing is now official so we can put pressure on to get it opened up. In some places we have problems with irresponsible dog-owners. There's no one-size-fits-all solution to this, so we need to work out what might help in each case.

Norwich to Tilbury Pylons

My input to the County's response to the Statutory consultation must go in by Wednesday so I'll be preparing it today and tomorrow. Many thanks to residents who have sent local information about effects in their area. I have attended some important briefings with other councils/councillors from Suffolk and Essex, and I'm working on a response that reflects the fact that we need a better solution, and a better way of ensuring that government planning systems work with local people to place important infrastructure in appropriate places, without destroying the environment in the process. I attended the fantastic art exhibition in Fornsett, highlighting the beauty of the local area. I am concerned about the damage that preparing for and erecting the pylons will cause, not just their long term presence. Undergrounding would also damage local ecologies, roads and hedges. Local consultation information events are in Ashwellthorpe (Thursday 9th May), Tibenham (Friday 10th May), Diss Town Football club (Wednesday 15th May), all afternoon-early evening.

The attempt to silence local voices is not a good look on the part of the current government, nor is the blithe assumption that we can just build more and more and never ask whether less would be better—less demand, less consumption, more economical ways of living, more nature, more happiness.

Norfolk County Council Full Council meeting, Tuesday May 7th.

This meeting is the AGM so we'll be appointing the leader and cabinet etc for the coming year.

There will also be motions. I've submitted my motion about rural speed limits and hope it will be discussed and voted on. I've also submitted a motion about the National Grid Pylons scheme. The Conservatives have tabled an amendment to my Pylons motion, which will probably pass, but I don't know whether they will support or oppose the motion. The amendment will remove some key points I wanted to make to protect us for the future. There are also motions on NHS Dentistry and on the Norwich Western Link road. I shall speak on the one about dentistry.

Norfolk things:

Long Stratton Bypass

Construction of the bypass has begun and we now have road closed signs on all side routes that the road will cross. For further details on the closures [view the Long Stratton Bypass works public information notice \(PDF\) \[173KB\]](#). Further information and updates relating to the Long Stratton Bypass, plus a link for those wishing to subscribe to Long Stratton Bypass e-news, are available on the county council website [here](#).

National Government things

Prime Minister's "moral mission" to reform disability benefits

Mr Sunak is proposing reforms to disability benefits. He wants to solve the fact that the number of people claiming disability benefits for mental health conditions has doubled since 2020. The plan is to change the eligibility criteria, assessment process and types of support, and remove the cash that people are allowed to spend on what they need on a regular basis, including things that they might enjoy. helping people on benefits to stay in or return to work. The government say that they will consult on proposed reforms to disability benefits system to ensure benefits are targeted at those who need it most.

The information about the proposed changes can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/modernising-support-for-independent-living-the-health-and-disability-green-paper/modernising-support-for-independent-living-the-health-and-disability-green-paper>

I would strongly encourage anyone who is concerned about the well-being of people they know who struggle with their disabilities or mental health or receive these PIP payments to respond to this consultation, if you care about the values that this country has lived by over the last century, in trying to care with compassion for those who have received a hard lot in life and for those who are waiting for non-existent NHS treatment or other kinds of help.

Fit Note Reform: government call for evidence

Another related issue is this call for evidence to inform a programme of work announced at the autumn statement in 2023, to explore reforming the "fit note" process. The government says this is "to support those with long term health conditions to access timely work and health support". What they mean is that they don't want doctors to assess whether a person is fit to go back to work, and they want a system that allows them to set targets for cutting people off from getting sick notes, remove their access to sick pay and force them back into work (or starvation), as they do with other benefits. They are looking for "enhancements that stakeholders would require for the fit note to better support people to start, stay and succeed in work". Please consider contributing to this evidence-gathering process. They want to hear from employers, healthcare professionals, patients, carers and those who access fit notes, representatives of local systems or local system partners (e.g, local authority, community social enterprise), interested academics and stakeholder organisations

To participate in this call for evidence use [this online form](#). Further information about the call for evidence is available [here](#)

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6th May 2024