

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:

Following my useful session with the officer in charge of the Norfolk County Council energy plan, I'm keeping pressure on to get sensible 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, and adequate grid connections and substations are available for Norfolk communities and businesses. That's the main focus of the Norfolk energy plan, but I'm pushing for it to consider equally urgent issues such as demand-reduction, including insulation, low-energy travel and zero carbon heating. I'm following with interest the proposals for solar farms on land around Long Stratton and elsewhere: there are real benefits for farmers and for residents in having these installations on our fields, in preference to development of the land for housing or intensive farming: they can make a farm profitable while practising sustainable agriculture, give a reliable income alongside smaller scale and more varied cultivation, provide wildlife corridors and help with regeneration of the land. They're not smelly, noisy, nor polluting to our rivers. I'd favour a positive response to these solar farms, especially if they're combined with rewilding, wildflowers, traditional hedges, sustainable agriculture, footpaths, regenerative farming. I've submitted a question for the Cabinet meeting on this topic.

Info from Norfolk County Council

Special Educational Needs: On 24th October the National Audit Office issued a [report](#) calling for urgent reforms in support for children with special educational needs & disabilities (SEND).

The report highlights the significant deficits to local authority schools grants and outlined the risk of councils going bankrupt if the government does not address the financial pressures. Some uplift in funding has now been provided in the Autumn budget (see below).

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 £44.7 million budget gap. There will be public consultation on the budget over the autumn.

NHS consultation

Norfolk and Waveney ICS are encouraging people to take part in the national consultation about how to improve the NHS. Links to the survey are available [here](#).

Info from Central Government

Support for horticulture and poultry businesses

The government has [announced a package of measures](#) to provide support to farmers and growers in the UK's horticulture, poultry and sheep sectors. These include:

Confirmation about the 2025 Seasonal Worker visa route: 43,000 Seasonal Worker visas available for horticulture and 2,000 for poultry next year.

Introducing legislation in early November to protect poultry farmers from the impact of avian influenza by changing the rules on 'free range' labelling. The proposed legislative changes will mean that eggs can be labelled as free range during mandatory housing measures. They have also launched [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 in funding (equivalent to 6% real growth) for SEND reform and improving outcomes.

The Core schools budget grant will increase by an additional £2.3 billion next year (a rise in per-pupil funding that is much needed). There is also funding for school building repairs.

For early years and families, £30 million in the rollout of free breakfast clubs in schools next year and £69 million to continue delivery of a network of Family Hubs.

£500m for Project Gigabit and the Shared Rural Network to deliver faster connectivity in rural areas.

Contact me on

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