

February 2021 County Councillor's report

There's a lot going on, apologies for the bumper edition!

Carbon reduction plans

The County Council has announced plans to reduce their carbon emissions from 11.6 million tonnes per year to zero by 2030. Action already underway includes:

- Plans to plant one million trees over five years
- A £1.5 million investment in active travel, including cycling and walking
- Increasing the number of on-street electric car charging points
- Further work to install LED streetlights across Norfolk

I'll be keeping an eye on where the investment is spent and complaining if North Norfolk doesn't get a fair share. At a recent council meeting I also had a proposal accepted to expand the county's Environment Awards.

Flood management

The County Council has adopted a new policy on flood risk management. It adds three new factors that will inform its approach:

- Towards Net Zero. All parties involved in design and construction of local flood risk and water management structures associated with development will be expected to make reasonable efforts to minimise the carbon footprint, while maximising opportunities to contribute to environmental and climate improvements.
- Biodiversity and Environmental Net Gain. New local flood risk and water management structures will protect and enhance the environment in a manner that results in biodiversity and environmental net gain for local communities.
- Flood Resilience and Adaption. The Council will support communities to plan and develop local flood risk adaption and resilience activities. They will provide information and advice on property level preparedness, resistance and resilience improvements to property owners and occupiers at risk of local flooding. They will encourage communities at local flood risk to develop community led and focused flood action plans and support groups to improve community resilience.

I asked what this last point means for Parish Councils and got this reply:

The work that comes under Policy 3: Flood Resilience and Adaption, will be driven by the recommendations of Flood Investigation Reports, Flood Risk Mitigation Schemes and funding bids such as the Innovation Resilience Fund i.e. where there is a level of flood risk and/or flooding and we have the resource to offer support and advice. We aim to do this in conjunction with our Resilience Team and other Authorities such as District Council's and the Environment Agency. Given their key role, we will need to develop a mechanism for Parish Council's to also feed into this process.

My advice on this is that if a Parish Council is keen to be involved in this, let me know and I will push it: I'm not entirely confident that the County Council will prioritise involving local people in their plans if they are left to their own devices.

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I have also submitted a question to the Council's Scrutiny Committee to ask whether the flood management team should have more resources available to it and whether it needs stronger levels of oversight and accountability. The experts tell us there will be more and more incidents of flooding to deal with and so it will be increasingly important that the people running the service listen to the needs of local communities.

Frustratingly they haven't yet put the new policy up on their Flood Management web page ([Flood and water management - Norfolk County Council](#)) although I have reminded them. The new policy can be read in full here: [CMIS > Meetings](#). Go to page 87 on the Cabinet agenda.

Latest pandemic briefings

As a County Councillor I get regular briefings from the Council and from the NHS on the state of play with the pandemic locally and efforts to tackle it and to assist those in need.

Here are the latest briefings I have received: <https://edmaxfield.org.uk/2021/01/23/latest-briefing-from-county-hall-and-the-nhs-on-the-pandemic/>

The County Council's budget

The County Council will decide on its budget for the coming year at its meeting in February. The overall budget is well over £1 billion each year but a large part of that is passed directly through to other organisations (mostly to schools). The 'net' budget - the bit the Council has control over - is more than £430 million a year. Government funding has reduced by £93 million since 2015, while the cost of running services for children and adults (social services etc) rose by £40 million in the last year alone. The Council looks set to miss its planned savings (cuts) target for this year by £17 million and despite getting more than £100 million from the Government in emergency Coronavirus funding, the extra spending caused by the Pandemic will add around £10 million of costs to the Council's budget. They are planning for another £19 million of unfunded Pandemic costs in the coming year.

The Council is proposing to:

- Raise general Council Tax by 1.99 per cent and raise the adult social care precept by two per cent in 2021/22 and one per cent the following year. This would increase band D bills by £56.43 to £1,472.94 for 2021-22.
- Make spending cuts of £41.2 million, including a net £20.4 million of new proposals
- Invest £102 million in the capital programme, taking the total infrastructure programme to £537.66 million. New items include £11.5 million for supported housing for young adults, £4 million for children's residential homes and investment in the Long Stratton bypass, new libraries and green trails. I have already made the point that capital investment in North Norfolk looks very thin and I will keep making that point.

Most of the spending cuts will come from Adults and Children's Services through changes to the way support is offered: reducing reliance on expensive care options.

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