September Report to Parish Councils

Margaret Thomas

County Councillor for West Depwade Division

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Dear Parish Council Chairs, Councillors and Clerks,

I am pleased to provide my September update on matters affecting Norfolk residents and communities across the West Depwade Division.

Local Government Reorganisation

Norfolk County Council has welcomed the Government's decision to halt proposals for a three-council model for Norfolk. The announcement provides greater certainty for residents, businesses and local councils and allows resources to remain focused on delivering frontline services rather than being diverted into structural reorganisation.

This development follows action taken by the new Reform administration, which has sought a judicial review, alongside Suffolk and Essex County Councils, of the Government's proposals.

The County Council continues to maintain that any future arrangements must offer value for money, protect essential local services and ensure strong local representation. In the meantime, the focus remains firmly on supporting communities and delivering services effectively.

New Priorities for Norfolk County Council

Following its first 100 days in office, Norfolk County Council's Cabinet has published a report setting out its assessment of the challenges facing the authority and its priorities for the future.

The full Cabinet report, *Standing Up for Norfolk: The First 100 Days and Priorities for the Future*, can be viewed online via Norfolk County Council's committee papers:

The Council's five priorities are:

1. Putting Norfolk residents first.
2. Growing Norfolk's economy.
3. Keeping Norfolk moving.
4. Building strong communities and places.
5. Running an efficient and effective council.

Early Achievements of the New Administration

The administration reports a number of achievements during its first 100 days in office, including:

- Investment of £1.2 million in Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service.
- Investment of £924,000 in roads and highways.
- Savings of more than £1.5 million through contract renegotiations.
- Savings of more than £300,000 through service changes and efficiencies.
- Savings of £170,000 by stopping non-essential marketing expenditure.
- Introduction of stronger controls on spending and major projects.
- Launch of a review of net zero activity to ensure value for money.
- Trialling innovative technology to repair potholes more quickly.
- Challenging Government proposals for local government reorganisation.
- Support for Trading Standards operations which resulted in five illegal tobacco shops being closed in Great Yarmouth.

Planning and Infrastructure

A recent report from Local Government East has identified wastewater infrastructure capacity as a significant constraint on housing growth across the East of England.

For Norfolk, ensuring that infrastructure keeps pace with growth remains a key priority. Wastewater capacity constraints can affect housing delivery, local development and economic growth, making long-term infrastructure investment essential.

Community Safety

Tackling Illicit Tobacco and Vape Sales

Norfolk County Council's Trading Standards team has continued its successful campaign against the illegal sale of tobacco, cigarettes and vapes across the county, particularly in Great Yarmouth. Working with partner agencies, these intelligence-led operations have targeted premises suspected of being linked to organised criminal activity.

As a result of this work, five illegal tobacco shops in Great Yarmouth have been closed, helping to disrupt the sale of illegal products, protect legitimate businesses and reduce criminal activity within local communities.

The County Council has worked closely with Great Yarmouth councillors, Trading Standards officers, police and other partner organisations to support this activity and

respond to concerns raised by residents. This collaborative approach has played an important role in identifying problem premises and tackling issues affecting local high streets.

Members of the public who suspect illegal tobacco or vape sales can report concerns through Citizens Advice, online reporting systems or HMRC. Parish councils may wish to help raise awareness of these reporting routes within their communities.

Rural Service Pressures

Norfolk continues to face the challenges common to large rural counties. Delivering services across dispersed communities presents unique pressures in areas such as adult social care, highways maintenance, school transport and public transport.

The County Council continues to make the case for fair funding that recognises the additional costs of providing essential services in rural areas and ensures that Norfolk residents receive the support and infrastructure they need.

Additional Appointments and Responsibilities

Alongside my responsibilities as County Councillor for West Depwade Division, I have recently been appointed to a number of important roles representing the interests of Norfolk residents:

- Forum Member, Norfolk County Council Local Access Forum.
- Member of the Council of Governors, the James Paget University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.
- Trust Partner Governor, the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust.
- Vice Chair, Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Board.

These appointments strengthen the links between local government, health services and community organisations and help ensure that the interests of Norfolk residents are represented across a range of county-wide bodies.

As Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, I am currently involved in reviewing the Council's adult social care strategy and forward planning priorities. This work is helping to inform budget setting for the next financial year and will ensure that resources are directed towards supporting vulnerable residents, maintaining independence and meeting the increasing demands being placed on adult social care services across Norfolk.

As part of my role, I have also been promoting a range of new services and initiatives designed to support residents to live independently for longer. These include community-based support, preventative services, supported housing and extra care provision, all of which help people remain active within their communities while

reducing unnecessary pressure on hospital and residential care services. Supporting innovative and sustainable approaches to care remains a key priority as we prepare for future demand and financial challenges.

Recent Engagements and Activities

Alongside these appointments, I have continued to represent Norfolk County Council at a range of events and community initiatives across the county.

- Attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Thorpe St Andrew Independent Housing Scheme, marking an important investment in housing and independent living opportunities for older residents.
- Attended the opening of the new Drug, Alcohol and Mental Health Community Hub at St Xavier's Yard, Anglia Square, which provides joined-up support services for residents requiring specialist help.
- Officiated at the RM2 Excellence in Leadership Awards, recognising leadership, innovation and achievement.
- Continued to represent Norfolk County Council through a range of radio interviews, promoting new developments, initiatives and opportunities within Adult Social Care.
- Continued to highlight and promote new Adult Social Care services, helping residents access support that enables them to remain independent and connected within their communities.
- Initiated discussions with Norfolk County Council's Digital Services team to improve digital access and connectivity in rural communities. As part of this work, I have been highlighting the importance of tackling digital exclusion, improving access to online services and raising awareness of the challenges faced by rural residents. I will continue to champion this issue across Norfolk County Council to help ensure that digital connectivity remains a priority for communities, businesses and access to public services.

Local Issues

East Pye Solar Planning Application Consultation

One of the most significant local issues currently affecting residents across the division is the proposed East Pye Solar development.

A public examination of the application is due to take place at Dunston Hall on 15, 16 and 17 September.

I have applied to speak on behalf of local residents at the examination, where I will raise concerns relating to the potential impact on residents' health and wellbeing, the local environment and the financial implications of the proposal.

I remain firmly opposed to the East Pye Solar proposal and to large-scale solar developments within this area because of their impact on productive agricultural land, the rural landscape, local communities and the distinctive character of our countryside.

Closing Remarks

I remain committed to working closely with parish councils across the West Depwade Division and welcome hearing about local concerns, community projects and opportunities to improve services for residents.

Yours sincerely,

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