

Progress report

Mayors and unitary councils

The latest bombshell on this saga concerns the County Council elections scheduled for this year. Shockingly, the minister responded to the Council leader's letter (in which she said she was committed to the importance of holding elections) and effectively asked her to revise her response. She has now written to him again repeating the claim that holding the elections would put local government reform in jeopardy, and no longer saying that she believes in holding elections. This is shocking in every respect, both the minister's request to a sitting councillor to make the request to have elections cancelled, and the leader's evident lack of commitment to what she said she was committed to in her previous reply. The truth is that the elections should not have been cancelled last year, when councillors could have been elected for a three-year term. The idea of delaying the elections to next year, only to elect new councillors to an authority that was merely winding itself down for a year is even more bizarre than electing them this year for a two-year term. It seems inevitable that next year they will be cancelled again. The situation is leading to real distrust in the government and politicians who appear to be looking after themselves and uninterested in the views of the electorate. The plans for LGR should have been made with a view to timing them to fit with electoral cycles, not adjust electoral cycles to accommodate badly planned process of reform.

Older news is the two year delay to the election of a Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk: an absurd change of schedule when election campaigns were already under way for elections expected this year and recruitment was under way for the CEO and other staff needed to set up the new authority. The priority programme that the government was so keen to get up and running has turned out to be chaos.

Pylons and panels

Some decisions have been made regarding grid connections for the energy schemes. Residents in the Fornsett and Ashwellthorpe area are breathing a temporary sigh of relief that the Tasway Energy Park has been parked for now, due to not achieving a slot in the first round of connections. New revisions have come in relating to the planning application for the (monstrous and inappropriately located) battery storage installation in Great Moulton (Field BESS) with an awkward short consultation interval over Christmas. So far I am not seeing any useful mitigations.

Community Fund

I'm pleased to report that some awards from my fund have now been made. I've funded an insect hotel in Burston, gardening tools in Gissing, catering equipment in Great Moulton, biodiversity projects in Tivetshall, improvements for the pre-school play area in Gissing, oak trees for the parish land in Winfarthing, and some other things are in the pipeline. Please do get any remaining applications in before I assign the money to other things.

You can see the schemes that are being supported across Norfolk here: [Crowdfund Norfolk | Crowdfunder.co.uk](https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk) It's a heartwarming site and reminds us that communities work together to do good things when they are filled with love and friendliness, not the hate and division that are currently being promoted across the world.

I'm also trying to get money for the bus shelter improvements in Carleton Rode, and campaign for some better bus services for Burston and Shimpling and villages whose natural place for local services would be Wymondham.

Updates from County Council and the Health Board

Norfolk Trails Public Survey

The council is seeking feedback to ensure that the future of Norfolk's Trails aligns with the values and preferences of residents. A public survey is being conducted to gather community input, which will inform the long-term planning and improvement of the trails, with the aim of enhancing accessibility for all. The survey is very confusing and there is no closing date given. There seem to be two surveys, one for stakeholders and organisations (I think this would include parish councils) and one for ordinary walkers and residents. Please encourage residents to do the individuals questionnaire which is here: [Norfolk Trails - Audience survey](#) (there's also a prize draw!) The survey for organisations is at <https://research.audiencesurveys.org/Interview/1b4334d0-3a8e-4445-8397-dd99353abf9b> .

Which roads will be gritted on cold nights?

People can check which roads are on the council's gritting routes for this season using the map at www.norfolk.gov.uk/gritting. Use this to plan your safest route if you need to go somewhere.

Encouraging fostering for Norfolk's children in care

More foster carers are needed to make family homes a reality for the five children a week who come into care in Norfolk. A new mini documentary has recently been launched that asks the questions people often have when first considering fostering. It follows writer, comedian and family man Adam Buxton as he visits two local authority foster families in Norfolk and Suffolk. Adam doesn't know anything about fostering or having children in care before he meets the foster carers. He finds out more over cups of tea, emptying the dishwasher, Top Trumps, a dog walk and a kick-about in the garden. The full documentary can be seen at www.fostereast.org.uk.

If you can find ways to encourage residents to consider fostering that would be helpful. To find out more about fostering for Norfolk County Council, visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/fostering.

National Information

National planning policy framework consultation

The Government has launched a major consultation on a revamped National Planning Policy Framework. It's part of their policy of plonking infrastructure and housing all over the countryside and removing protections from nature and human communities. Data centres are eating up our energy and our countryside: they are not the solution to our problems as the government seems to think! Have your say. The consultation (open till 10th March) is here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-proposed-reforms-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system>

Consultation on Electric Vehicle Excise Duty

The Government announced back in 2025 that Electric Vehicles would have a mileage charge from 2028, to replicate the mileage charge that internal combustion engines pay in the form of fuel duty. They have now launched a consultation on how that will work for Electric Vehicles, so that it can be collected from drivers with their annual vehicle tax. The consultation is open until 18th March. Find it here: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/eVEDconsultation/>

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