

Updates on what I'm doing

Heating oil

The price rise for heating oil is seriously affecting a lot of our rural households, some of them very urgently. Adrian Ramsay has done some work at Parliament to ensure that short term help is quickly put in place for those affected. The good news now is that the government is finally considering decoupling electricity prices from gas prices, in line with Green Party policy, which would be transformative, especially because people would see the savings that come from having cheap homegrown renewables by contrast with the expensive high risk fossil fuels.

Recent research from Oxford University has shown that drilling for more oil or gas in the North Sea would yield very small tax benefits (only about £16 to £82 per household to the UK treasury which would nowhere near cover the subsidies needed to make oil affordable) and would deliver no reduction in energy costs, while benefits to householders from shifting instead to renewables would be between £105 and £441 per annum per household (and much more if the renewables were public or community owned instead of taking profits offshore). So we'll be massively much better off from increasing investing in renewables instead (besides the fact that climate breakdown is a serious threat to national security generally and farming in particular).

Norfolk Heating Oil Crisis Fund



Thanks to funding received from the government, Norfolk County Council has set up a £3 million crisis fund to support residents affected by the rise in heating-oil prices.

Who can access support?

Help is available to those who are on low incomes, typically households with less than £35k coming in each year. Priority will be given to those who are due to run out of oil and are at imminent risk of losing access to heating and hot water. Once eligibility is confirmed, the council will offer grants of around £350 per household. There is also support available around setting up payment plans with oil suppliers.

Residents can apply to the Norfolk Heating Oil Crisis Fund through the council's website at www.norfolk.gov.uk/HeatingOil

Longer term we need to be building energy security and resilience by helping households to access the support for household renewable energy schemes (see below).

Those who are in financial hardship can also access a range of support through the council's Crisis and Resilience Fund (Further details [here](#)) which offers crisis payments for unexpected financial

shocks and support to build financial resilience, including budgeting advice, grant applications, and debt referrals.

Full Council on 24th March

The Full Council meeting was an embarrassment. Despite the chair insisting that there was to be no electioneering, the Conservative leader gave several party political broadcasts and election manifestos, including in her opening statement. The Reform councillors are usually silent throughout and leave before the debate on motions, but this time Councillor David Bick (Reform councillor from Thetford) gave an election address making out that the council was encumbered with debt (apparently having no notion of fiscal responsibility or investing to save). The Liberal Democrats presented a manifesto outlining their commitment to protecting the environment. It was almost as if everyone was afraid of the Green Party and needed to use the Chamber as a performance space. The chair did not intervene to stop any of it.

Because of the time spent on these performances I did not get to ask the question that I was intending to ask of the cabinet member for economic growth about the uneven playing field for local businesses, which is the effect of cheating by businesses that flout planning law and get away with retrospective planning applications or resisting enforcement. Nor did we get time for the motion that we were proposing.

However, we did debate a motion about food labelling (brought by the Conservatives). In our amendment to that motion we sought to tell the truth about the damage caused to farming by both the Conservative government (including the Brexit-related red tape and trade barriers), the Labour government, climate change, oil prices and other preventable catastrophes; and we sought to defend hard-pressed farmers from attack by their neighbours, and encourage them to contribute to local energy schemes by hosting small solar farms for the benefit of Norfolk communities (something which the Conservatives seemed keen to outlaw). It is worth noting that much land is currently used for biofuels, which produce energy at less than a tenth of what you can produce from the same hectare used for wind or solar generation. We support farmers who need to put a small area of land to solar panels or a wind turbine, alongside nature recovery or agriculture, to ensure a consistent income, so that they can farm the rest of their land in harmony with nature, while also supporting the local community by supplying very cheap community energy (especially for homes where it is less easy to install solar panels).

Cabinet questions

Because I didn't get to ask my question at Full Council, I put the question about the uneven playing field for businesses due to organisations and individuals who flout planning rules and run illegal businesses in rural areas as a question to cabinet on 7th April. Unfortunately the question was meant to be for the cabinet member for economy and growth (and was about the problems for businesses that comply with the rules) but the cabinet perversely misconstrued it and I got a reply from the cabinet member for environment and waste, because my question was partly about unauthorised waste disposal on rural land. So I have still not had any response from the cabinet about how to address the lawlessness of certain rural landowners (which blights the lives of local residents who have to devote energy to campaigning for enforcement, as well as disadvantaging decent law-abiding businesses).

I also asked a question about the adequacy of the County's provision of domestic abuse refuges, to which the answer was satisfactory.

Could you benefit from a community energy scheme (and stop the industrialisation of our countryside)?

On 13th March I attended an excellent conference organised by Adrian Ramsay for organisations interested in nature recovery and community energy etc in Waveney Valley area and there were some inspiring examples of the good stuff that's going on.

The government has announced new funding for community energy projects. Some of our parishes and district councils are working with Community Climate Action to devise a scheme to benefit local people and get clean cheap energy: <https://www.communityclimateaction.uk>. If you haven't already, do join up to the *Norfolk Environmental Collaboration* (organised by the NALC).

Road and green spaces improvements

I've now exhausted this year's local member fund and have allocated funds to the following works from it, or contributed to the projects:

Dickleburgh Dove Meadow nature conservation work: £3,000

Carleton Rode: initial safety measures for Upgate Street, including signs, white paint etc. £6,000

Winfarthing: towards the parish's share of the PP bid for SAM3 equipment, £1,000

Carleton Rode: towards the parish's share of the bus shelter improvements, £420

Tibenham/Bunwell: two horse riding signs near the stables on Cargate Common, £1,500

From next year's fund we are planning to undertake a feasibility study towards a reduced speed limit on part of Upgate Street.

Parish Partnership results

99 schemes across Norfolk have won support for their proposals under the parish partnership scheme. Of my parishes, we've won these:

Traffic calming chicanes, £25,000, Ashwellthorpe

Village Gateways: Aslacton £8421; Bressingham, £4548

SAM cameras/equipment: Great Moulton (£3928), Winfarthing (£4685).

Footpaths

I'm chasing some information relating to the impassable footpaths in Bressingham and Fersfield, some of which are on the official rota for cutting by the County Council, but seem not to be clear at all.

Better buses

I'm seeking a second conversation with the buses officer to ask him for a regular bus service for villages such as Ashwellthorpe and Tacolneston, travelling towards Wymondham. The good news is that Norfolk County Council has received a multi-year settlement of money for public transport.

Sewage and fly tipping

It's not new, but we do have a problem of commercial fly tipping in the countryside. Please report incidents to the District Council. You can also ask your district councillor for "No Fly Tipping" notices (these help with securing a conviction for offenders).

I've been in touch with the Environment Agency about the outflow of sewage near Dickleburgh Moor. I believe Anglian Water has made promises....

Updates from County Council and the Health Board

Local Government reorganisation

We have now had the announcement from the government, saying they have opted for the plan for 3 councils for Norfolk (and three for Suffolk). The effect is that these parts of South Norfolk will be in the East Norfolk council, but parts of South Norfolk and Broadland that are suburbs and commuter belt for Norwich will be incorporated into the Norwich area. It is doubtful that this arrangement will be financially sustainable since the East Norfolk council will include deprived areas with high social needs, coastal erosion areas with high costs from climate issues, and

coastal areas with a high proportion of retired people and second homes. As yet, also, there is no provision towards the huge costs of reorganising, with this scheme being the most expensive of the recommended options to implement, since it will involve disaggregating services that are currently run as a single service across the whole of Norfolk.

Five for a fiver on Norwich Park & Ride

Norfolk County Council has reduced the price of group tickets on all Norwich Park & Ride services from 29th March. Groups of up to five people can now enjoy all-day travel on Park & Ride services for just £5 making it even better value for families and cheaper than parking for more than 3 hours in most city centre car parks. For one person, the price is £3 (for concessions £2); for two people £4.

Nine new Specialist Resource Bases to open this year

Nine new bases providing 110 specialist places are opening at mainstream primary schools this year as part of Norfolk's Local First Inclusion programme to increase capacity for children who need additional support. This includes one Specialist Hub of Inclusive Practice (SHIP) now open at Roydon Primary School near Diss (16 places) and several others.

Household Hazardous waste disposal events

👉 Booking is now open for Norfolk County Council's free disposal event at Thetford Recycling Centre. There is also a later event in June at Norwich South recycling centre.

♻️ Accepted items: aerosols, anti-freeze, drain cleaners, fertilisers, paint, and weed killer.

🚗 Booking required – reserve your spot early!

Friday 17th and Saturday 18th April, 8am - 4pm at [Thetford Recycling Centre](#)

Friday 5th and Saturday 6th June, 8am - 4pm at [Norwich South Recycling Centre](#) (Booking will be available online and by phone from 9am on Thursday 28th May)

Norfolk Rural Business Awards

The closing date for applications for the Norfolk Rural Business Awards is Tuesday 21st April. There are nine category areas aimed at showcasing a wide range of our best businesses, community groups and people. The awards ceremony takes place at the Royal Norfolk Show. You can nominate yourself! Submit nominations here:
<https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/article/65893/Apply-for-Norfolk-Rural-Business-Awards>.

National Information

County Councils Network (CCN) response to the National Planning Framework

The CCN has [published its consultation response](#) to the Government's revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), warning that the reforms would weaken local communities' voice and increase the risk of speculative, unsustainable development in rural areas.

Additionally mandatory housing targets introduced last year mean county areas face, on average, a 56% increase in expected delivery: 64,000 homes a year (around 1,245 a week) which is over seven times the increase for councils in England's major cities. But houses in rural places are not selling, and developers aren't completing the plans that have already been approved. It's no solution to a housing crisis that's about existing housing being unaffordable and stock piled by the wealthy investors in lucrative and high-demand areas.

Land use framework

The Government's new [land use framework](#) has now been published. This is guidance on how land is used across England, to balance farmland with valuing nature and pressures such as housing and industry. It has three parts:

- A vision for England's future landscapes, informed by land-use change analysis
- Principles to guide land-use decision-making
- Actions to support land-use change, delivered with partners

The full framework is available [here](#). It commits to maintaining overall food production in England, and to support food security and economic growth. It also sets out how the Government will protect the most productive land and give farmers (owners and tenants) greater rights, data and certainty to invest. This is all excellent but directly conflicts with everything in the two items I listed above (about housing targets in rural areas and the threats in the new planning framework). You couldn't make it up.

Children and parents to pilot social media bans, time limits and digital curfews at home.

Social media bans, digital curfews, and time limits on apps will be piloted in the homes of 300 teenagers in a first of its kind trial by the UK government. This runs alongside the [digital wellbeing consultation](#), which is closing on 26 May 2026. The pilot studies will last 6 weeks and test how different restrictions affect young people's day-to-day lives.

Both the children and the parents taking part will be interviewed at the beginning and end of the pilots to understand the impacts on family life, sleep and schoolwork that come from limiting social media.

County Council Elections on 7th May

Please encourage residents to check that they are registered to vote. More information here:

<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

Voters who will be away on holiday, on business, in hospital or looking after a relative may need a proxy vote (if you will be away when the postal vote arrives). See more here

<https://www.gov.uk/how-to-vote/voting-by-proxy>

If someone you know has no photo ID they should either apply for a postal vote, or apply for a voter authority certificate (which is free): <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate>

Students who will be away at University can register at both addresses. Please encourage them to get a postal vote if they want to vote at the home address, or they can vote at their college address providing they have registered there. For local elections **it is legal to vote in both places.**

Contact me

Catherine.rowett.cllr@norfolk.gov.uk. See also my Facebook page [here](#).

Catherine Rowett

12th April 2026