

## **County Councillors Report March 2024**

### **Council agrees £528m budget**

Councillors have backed a budget that "delivers for Norfolk", in the face of major challenges facing local government.

Deputy council leader Councillor Andrew Jamieson, cabinet member for finance, told today's full council meeting that the budget would deliver for Norfolk. This is despite major cost and demand pressures facing all councils.

He said: "Our priorities are stable and sustainable finances, well delivered public services, economic growth and protecting and enhancing Norfolk's heritage and environment."

Cllr Jamieson said it was a budget for the future, with an additional £60m for adult social services and £35m extra for children's services, and savings from transforming how the council operates.

Cllr Jamieson pledged to continue to lobby the next Government for multi-year settlements, fair funding and reform of adult social care funding.

County Council leader, Councillor Kay Mason Billig, said the council would continue to be ambitious for Norfolk and had achieved many successes - against a tough economic backdrop.

She said: "We know that our residents will be concerned about the decisions we make and how that may affect them. This year's budget has been one of the toughest to determine but we have a statutory duty to provide a balanced position, and that is what we are presenting to you."

The key headlines from the budget agreed today are:

- £122m of investment to meet demand and cost pressures next year - including £34.6m for inflation, £38m for legislative requirements, £39.7m for demand and demographic issues and £9.6m for policy decisions.
- £41.5m of new savings, including £9.6m from transforming how the council operates.
- A proposed 4.99% increase in the County Council's share of Council Tax, in line with the Government's capping level (2.99% for general Council Tax and 2% for adult social care). This would increase the Council's share of band D bills to £1,672.11. A 4.99% rise would generate £24.9m.
- A small number of the budget proposals have been identified as requiring consultation, as they may relate to a policy or service change. Cabinet will take decisions on these proposals in the summer, after considering the consultation results.

Background:

Norfolk County Council's share of Council Tax bands, 2024-2025:

- A £1,114.74
- B £1,300.53
- C £1,486.32
- D £1,672.11
- E £2,043.69
- F £2,415.27
- G £2,786.85
- H £3,344.22

Proposals that will be consulted on:

- Charging an admin fee for brokering on behalf of people who self-fund their adult social care
- Review of the adult social care non-residential charging policy - including the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG)
- Recommissioning of social isolation and loneliness contracts
- Norfolk Record Office - pre-booking of visits and new paid services to increase income generation
- Switching off 2% of streetlights
- Recycling centres: Reduction of opening hours at some recycling centres to deliver a more consistent approach, in line with neighbouring authorities

### **Have your say on Norfolk savings proposals**

Norfolk County Council is seeking views on a number of savings proposals within the council's Community and Environmental Services department.

These proposals are part of £41.5m of savings that Norfolk County Council needs to make to balance its budget for 2024/25. The Council faces difficult decisions to deliver on its ambitions for the people of Norfolk against a difficult economic climate and more than a decade of reduced funding.

These proposals fall within the councils' Community and Environmental Services department, which includes Norfolk Highways, Libraries, Museums, Waste Management and the Norfolk Record Office.

The three proposals being launched today are:

- **Street lighting:** To switch off some streetlights across Norfolk in areas where it is considered safe and appropriate to do so.
- **Norfolk Record Office (NRO):** To introduce pre-booking of visits and change opening hours.
- **Recycling centres:** To reduce opening hours at some recycling centres to deliver a more consistent approach, in line with neighbouring authorities.

Between them these proposals could save around £457,000 a year.

The council is consulting the public on these proposals until midnight on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2024. The consultation survey is available on the council's Citizen Space platform at: [www.norfolk.gov.uk/savingsproposals](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/savingsproposals)

Proposals on streetlighting involve switching off 2% of streetlights across the county to save money and reduce carbon emissions. Norfolk County Council has identified 34 locations where the council plans to switch off some street lights. This represents 1.35% of the Council's target of 2%. Further locations will be identified at a later date. Approximately 1,000 of the 54,000 street lights that the county council manages across the county would be switched off under these plans. It is expected that this could save up to £200,000 per year and cut carbon emissions annually by 76 tonnes, providing an environmental benefit and significantly contributing towards the council's Climate Strategy.

The proposal for introducing pre-booking and changing the opening hours of the Norfolk Record Office would extend the current limited Friday service to a Thursday with the same 10am to 4pm opening hours and maintains a full service on Tuesday and Wednesday from 9.30am until 5pm.

However, compressing the NRO's full searchroom service to two days runs the risk of excessive levels of demand in the searchroom. Therefore, the NRO is proposing to introduce a booking system on those days. People who turn up without booking will still be admitted, providing there is sufficient capacity, but cannot be guaranteed a place. People will be able to book an appointment via email, over the phone or in person at the NRO. These changes could save a total of £57,000 in 2024/25.

Finally, proposals to reduce the opening hours at some recycling centres in Norfolk would see 13 recycling centres close on a Wednesday, in line with the centres in neighbouring Suffolk. The additional six recycling centres in Norfolk operate part time and are already closed on Wednesdays. This proposal could save around £200,000 a year.

The results of the consultation will be reported to Cabinet in June 2024.

People can share their views in a number of ways:

- Online at [www.norfolk.gov.uk/savingsproposals](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/savingsproposals)
- By email at [haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk)
- By post, writing to:  
SAVING PROPOSALS CONSULTATION 2024/25  
Freepost Plus RTCL-XSTT-JZSK  
Norfolk County Council, Ground floor - south wing  
County Hall  
Martineau Lane  
Norwich NR1 2DH

The consultations close at midnight on 22 March 2024.

### **Norfolk flood protection takes centre stage in Westminster**

The threat posed by flooding and coastal erosion in Norfolk has been laid out starkly for MPs as Norfolk County Council has taken their case for change to the heart of Westminster.

The delegation from Norfolk, led by Norfolk County Council Leader Cllr Kay Mason Billig and the Chair of the Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance (NSFA), Henry Cator, met with MPs, on the 71st anniversary of the 1953 North Sea Flood, to explain the risks Norfolk faces and how those risks could be addressed.

As demonstrated over this winter, our county faces regular risks of flooding, with Norfolk ranked tenth most at risk of surface water flooding out of 149 local authority areas. In addition, the county's position on the North Sea exposes it to tidal threats as well as significant coastal erosion: without action, it's estimated that in North Norfolk

alone approximately 1,030 residential and commercial properties could be lost to erosion by 2100. That number could be up to 10,000 in all of Norfolk.

These risks threaten both Norfolk residents and the contribution Norfolk makes to the wider country, as home to 54% of the offshore wind generation capacity in the UK and a major producer of food.

In a presentation delivered in Portcullis House, part of the Parliamentary Estate in Westminster, Norfolk's delegation made the case for MPs to:

- Push for legislative permission to build reservoirs designed to capture excess water in times of flood, for use in times of drought
- Advocate for Property Flood Protection measures to be granted directly to the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) for faster allocation for those who need it
- Reduce bureaucracy by granting greater autonomy in funding allocation for surface water flood mitigation schemes
- Combine enforcement and maintenance powers and responsibilities for LLFA's
- Support the creation of a dedicated Minister for the Coast

### **Challenges of coastal erosion and flooding discussed by councillors**

Norfolk councillors are being invited to renew their call for a dedicated Minister for the Coast, as well as funding from central government for flood defences for Norfolk.

Norfolk County Council's Infrastructure and Development Select Committee considered a report on Coastal Erosion and Flooding in the county at their meeting in February, forming an update to the previous examination of the issue by the council's Scrutiny Committee in November last year.

The report recommends that councillors support the lobbying of central government for more funding for coastal erosion schemes, as well as support the appointment of a Minister for the Coast to give coastal communities a champion sitting within government who can take a holistic view of the challenges and opportunities that such communities face, especially coastal erosion and flooding.

Securing a commitment to such an appointment would give confidence that coastal issues are recognised at the heart of government and that solutions to the threats these communities face will be addressed.

The report spells out the challenge posted by coastal erosion along Norfolk's 90 miles of coastline, including the predictions of possible sea level rises of up to 1.15m by the end of the century. To compound the challenge, Norfolk has part of the fastest eroding coastline in North-West Europe.

Without action, it's estimated that in North Norfolk alone approximately 1,030 residential and commercial properties could be lost to erosion by 2105.

The Infrastructure and Development Select Committee meeting was held just over three weeks after the Leader of Norfolk County Council, Cllr Kay Mason Billig, visited Westminster to lay out the need for a new Minister for the Coast to MPs.

### **£150k funding secured for Attleborough Flood Management**

£150,000 has been awarded to Norfolk County Council to reduce flooding in north Attleborough by using Natural Flood Management to reduce flood risk in the area by holding storm-water upstream.

The funding, provided by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), will allow the county council to work with local landowners and the wider community as a first step to reducing flood risk in the area.

Natural Flood Management uses sustainable materials and soft engineering techniques to replicate natural processes in river catchments that slow, store and filter excess water during peak flows. This form of water management has grown in popularity in the UK over the last decade due the benefits it brings for the natural environment and its ability to help mitigate flood risk to homes and businesses downstream.

The scheme will focus on the upper headwaters of the Besthorpe Stream, in a 6.2km<sup>2</sup> watershed south east of Besthorpe.

The funding will be spent over the next three years; firstly on installing flow gauges to monitor the flow of water across the watershed before and after the installation of Natural Flood Management measures. The measures will be delivered in partnership with local landowners who work this catchment on a day to day basis and may include techniques such as field corner bunds, 'leaky' or woody debris dams and others as appropriate. The intention is to allow everyday base-flows to pass through but obstruct higher flows.

The funding is part of £25 million announced by DEFRA to increase the nation's flood resilience, natural flood management processes protect, restore, and mimic the natural functions of catchments, floodplains and the coast to slow and store water. Among the 39 other projects to receive funding is the Diss Natural Flood Management project run by the River Waveney Trust.

The Environment Agency is overseeing the release of new £25 million programme with work taking place from now until March 2027. Norfolk County Council's Floods team will be further engaging with local landowners over the rest of 2024 to agree plans whilst other measures across North Attleborough related to managing and mitigating flood risk are also being investigated with other authorities to complement the project.

### **24/7 free travel to all disabled bus pass holders in Norfolk**

From 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024 all Norfolk residents who hold a disabled concessionary travel pass will be eligible for free bus travel 24 hours a day, seven days a week when travelling within the county.

The decision, which was published today by Norfolk County Council, means that more than 14,500 people across the county who hold a concessionary bus pass due to disability, and their eligible companions, will now be able to travel on any bus at any time free of charge across Norfolk.

Previously concessionary pass holders with a disability were only able to travel for free on buses off-peak (all day on Saturdays and Sundays but only from 09:30 Monday to Friday) except for those registered blind or visually impaired.

Offering free travel at all times is over and above the minimum requirement set by government, and is something that a local authority can choose to do but doesn't have to do. The change was recommended following an updated equality impact assessment of the scheme which concluded that it is now unfair to offer a discretionary enhancement to just one group of disabled people (i.e. those who are blind or visually impaired).

The recommendation agreed by the individual cabinet member was to 'extend the concessionary travel discretion of free travel at all times to all eligible disabled passholders and eligible companions, from 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024.'

The cost of providing this enhancement is estimated at £50,000 which will be funded by the Council's ring-fenced public transport budget provided by the Department for Transport.

### **Hundreds gather to witness historic moment as Herring Bridge is opened**

Hundreds of residents joined local dignitaries and special guests to assist the grand opening of Herring Bridge in Great Yarmouth on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> February.

The milestone ceremony began with a blessing of the bridge by Revd Canon Simon Ward, Rector of Great Yarmouth, before MP Brandon Lewis unveiled a commemorative plaque.

A convey of vehicles, including classic cars from East Coast Pirates, emergency services, local hauliers and contractors involved in the project's delivery, along with residents with winning tickets to ride the famous Great Yarmouth road train, then made the first trip across Herring Bridge.

Following the procession was including motorbikes and members from local scooter and cycling clubs, as well as local running club and pupils from nearby schools.

Printed copies of the souvenir programme are available for free from Great Yarmouth Town Hall.

'Herring Bridge' takes its name from the herring industry which once dominated Great Yarmouth in this area of the port. The name was put forward multiple times by local residents in a competition held in Autumn 2022 which attracted over 300 suggestions. A naming committee consisting of local political and community leaders discussed the suggestions at length and selected five possible options for a public vote in early 2023, with Herring Bridge being voted the favourite.

### **New Rural Business Awards**

Norfolk County Council and the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association have joined forces to launch the new Norfolk Rural Business Awards. The awards were launched on 6<sup>th</sup> February at the annual Norfolk Farming Conference and are designed to recognise the essential nature and huge importance of Norfolk's rural communities and businesses to the region.

Farmers, young farmers, winemakers, brewers, food producers, agri-tech companies, businesses with close rural connections, and rural community groups are all part of the rural community. With more than 9 different categories from best emerging talent to best farming innovation adopter, it is anticipated these new awards will celebrate exceptional talent and businesses.

Agriculture, forestry and fishing is the fourth largest sector in Norfolk, accounting of 8% of all businesses. And many other businesses across the county are closely linked to the sector including businesses in the accommodation, food, retail, and food science sectors as well as technology and engineering businesses.

The entry form for nominations to each category can be found online at [www.norfolk.gov.uk/norfolk-rural-business-awards](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/norfolk-rural-business-awards). The entry deadline is 19 April 2024. Judging will include a visit to all shortlisted businesses, and each finalist will be asked to participate in a short film.

Award categories include:

- Best Rural Community Initiative - sponsored by Aviva
- Best Farming Innovation Adopter - sponsored by Lovewell Blake
- Best Food Producer - sponsored by Fountain Fresh Imports
- Norfolk's Unsung Hero - sponsored by Breckland District Council
- Best Drink Maker - sponsored by Woodforde's Brewery
- Best Farming Champion - sponsored by CLG Norfolk Ltd
- Best Emerging Talent - sponsored by Plant Grow
- Best High Growth Business - sponsored by Growth Hub
- Best Sustainable Land Use / Farming Exemplar - sponsored by Birketts LLP

### **New film office opens Norfolk up to filming possibilities**

Norfolk County Council has awarded Norfolk Screen a 2-year contract to represent the county as its official Film Office. The combined spend by film and high-end television production (HETV) in the UK reached £6.27 billion in 2022, the highest ever reported.

The two-year Norfolk Film Office pilot programme will proactively promote Norfolk and its assets as a location for TV and film productions, as well as act as the front door for any location enquiries to ensure Norfolk capitalises on the growth of the sector. Any increase in economic activity for the county via additional filming activity will confirm the viability of a stand-alone Film Office.

Large-scale TV or film productions generate an increase in business for a wide range of companies surrounding a filming location, from cafés to taxi companies, accommodation businesses and retail. They also provide opportunities for local film companies to loan equipment or hire out studio space, and for local freelance film professionals from make-up artists to camera and sound technicians to have the opportunity to work closer to home. The new film office will support a dynamic and growing screen sector cluster within Norfolk.

### **Norfolk families set to gain more support thanks to a new volunteer service**

Families in Norfolk will benefit from a new practical service launched by Norfolk County Council and Home-Start Norfolk.

The County Council has awarded a one-year contract, starting in April 2024, to deliver a new volunteer peer support service to Home-Start Norfolk, as part of its innovative family hub programme.

The service will be accessible for families in Norfolk who are expecting a baby, or have a child up to the age of two-years-old. It is for those who require practical support to make sure they have the tools and resources they need to give their children the best start in life.

Many families need a little extra support during pregnancy and in the early years of their child's development, including practical support such as with understanding which crib or cot to purchase within their budget. Peer support volunteers can help families feel less isolated and to develop networks in their local communities. Many families have shared that they value the support from family, friends, and others with similar lived experiences, often above, and in addition, to support from professionals.

In recognition of the needs of families, Home-Start Norfolk will recruit, train and support volunteers to connect and build relationships with individual families in the comfort of their own homes or local community venues. The service will also include community-based groups and activities, supporting individuals to access wider social activities within their local area and accessing guided self-help resources.

The support will empower parents to have capacity and confidence to ensure their child's needs are met, including help to discover and navigate their local community, access professional support and support identified needs.

This peer support offer is being delivered as part of Norfolk's Start for Life and Family Hub approach, which is funded through the national Government Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme.

The Start for Life and Family Hubs approach supports Norfolk's vision for every child and young person to flourish. It helps strengthen Norfolk's prevention and early help offer for families with children up to age of 19, or 25 if they have special educational needs and disabilities.

### **Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service forms partnership to help people involved in serious road traffic collisions**

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service is the first fire service to partner with a charity to help those affected by serious road traffic collisions.

Chief Fire Officer, Ceri Sumner, has signed a 'Memorandum of Understanding' with the Road Victims Trust, so fire fighters at the scene of an accident can signpost people to get ongoing help from the charity.

The Road Victims Trust (RVT) works to help people impacted by grief or trauma following a road death, serious injury or life-changing collision. It offers emotional and practical help, as well as a specialist counselling service to people across the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

The charity, which started offering its support services in this county last summer after receiving funding from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk, provides free and confidential support for as long as it is needed to those affected by serious collisions - including witnesses.

This partnership builds on Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service's continued work with other key agencies to help reduce the number and impact of serious and fatal collisions in the county.

### **Free electrical fire safety events being held by Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service**

Three electrical fire safety events will be held at different locations in the county in early March, delivered by Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service.

Members of the public are invited to bring along their electric blankets and portable heaters to be tested and will also be able to speak to the fire service about fire safety in the home.

The events will also be attended by Trading Standards and Healthwatch Norfolk. This will give people the chance to find out about product safety and advice, and accessing help with health and social care.

The electrical safety days will take place from 10.30am to 4pm each day at:

- North Earlham Fire Station on Tuesday 5 March
- Great Yarmouth Fire Station on Wednesday 6 March
- King's Lynn North Fire Station on Thursday 7 March

There is no need to book - just turn up with your electrical items.

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service was successful in bidding for funding from national campaigning charity Electrical Safety First to hold these events, which aim to help people stay safe in their homes.

There are things everyone can be doing in their home to reduce the risk of fire. Some of these are:

- Testing your smoke alarm regularly
- Staying at least one metre from any portable heaters
- Charging devices when you are awake, alert and around
- Keeping tea towels and oven gloves away from gas hobs

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service offer free Home Fire Safety visits for people over 65 or anyone who has a disability which could make it more difficult to react to a fire.

To book a visit for yourself, a friend or family member or to refer someone as part of your work or volunteering role, [visit the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service web pages](#).

### **£1 million boost for Highway Parish Partnership Schemes**

Schemes totalling over £1m will be distributed across Norfolk to deliver the wants and needs of local parishes and residents as part of the Highway Parish Partnership.

The Parish Partnership scheme began in September 2011, when Parish and Town Councils were invited to submit bids for local highway improvements, with the County Council funding up to 50% of bid costs. The key benefits of the scheme are that it:

- Delivers local priorities identified by local people.
- Draws in additional funding for small scale highway improvements, enabling us to collectively deliver more schemes.
- Gives local communities an opportunity to directly influence the improvements in their local area. The programme continues to be well received by Parish/Town Councils, Local Members, and communities. Information about the number of bids received through the scheme over the past twelve years demonstrates there is a good spread across Norfolk.

A County Council contribution £467,884 and a Safety Camera Partnership contribution of £43,760 along with funding from Town and Parish Councils, will enable a programme of local works totalling £1,040,586 to be delivered.

For information on current schemes and if there are Parish Councils who wish to apply for future schemes then contact your County Councillor in the first instance. For further information please see <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/parishpartnerships>