**Norwich Western Link and Long Stratton Bypass to be prioritised by Government**

The Norwich Western Link and the Long Stratton bypass have been named among road schemes the government wants to "accelerate" - with an ambition for work to start next year.

The Norwich Western Link public consultation period closed on Sunday 9 October and the planning application for the project is due to be submitted next year. Subject to gaining necessary statutory approvals, construction of the Norwich Western Link is scheduled to get underway in late 2024 with the road open for use in late 2026.

**Investment Zones announced by Government**

The Government announced Investment Zones as part of its [Growth Plan for 2022](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-growth-plan-2022-factsheet-on-investment-zones/the-growth-plan-2022-investment-zones-factsheet) on 23 September. All Upper Tier Authorities and Mayoral Combined Authorities were invited to express an interest in establishing investment zones in England.

An Investment Zone is a designated site which offers lower taxes, accelerated development, and wider support for local growth. The policy is similar in principle to [Freeports which have been trialled](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/freeports) throughout the UK.

Norfolk County Council (NCC) submitted an Expression of Interest on 14 October 2022, as per the guidance published on the Government’s website. Although a single application, it contains a number of sites across the county. Due to some of the information being commercially sensitive (We mean by this it could affect commercial behaviour on part of developers or land owners and that in turn might lessen value to the taxpayer) we cannot reveal specific sites at this stage.

Based on information from government, Norfolk County Council expects to hear the outcome of the Expression of Interest in 2-3 weeks from submission.

**Norfolk’s Bus Service Improvement Plan**

In March 2021 the government announced a new National Bus Strategy called Bus Back Better (BBB). As part of this, and to receive any funding, Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) had to publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) by 31 October 2021 and form an Enhanced Partnership (EP) with bus operators by 31 March 2022, which we did. In April 2022 Norfolk was one of just 31 LTAs to receive an indicative funding allowance for their BSIP which was one of the highest allocations in the country. The allocation is £49.55m over 3 years (April 2022 – March 2025), split between £30.9m for capital measures and £18.6m for revenue interventions. To receive confirmation of this funding we had to outline to the DfT by the beginning of May 2022 what we would spend this funding on and what would be achieved as a result. We also had to submit to the DfT, by the end of June 2022, a proposed revision to our Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan with bus operators that reflected this funding and re-confirmed our commitments to public transport provision and improvements. We did this and in mid-August the DfT confirmed the funding for those proposals.

**Postwick Park and Ride to open for the festive season**

Norfolk County Council will open Postwick Park and Ride from Monday 21 November until Christmas, giving residents another travel option for getting to Norwich during the festive season.

A decision was made last month to keep the Postwick Park and Ride site closed until passenger numbers across other Norwich Park and Ride services are back up to 75% of pre-covid levels. However, it is expected that during the four weeks before Christmas passenger numbers will be high enough to make opening the site for this short period financially viable.

Buses will run every 20 minutes starting from 8.30am Monday to Saturday with the last bus back from the bus station at 18.10. People will be able to benefit from the great value tickets available across all Park and Ride services including the group saver ticket at just £5.50 for up to five people.

**Advice for bird keepers in Norfolk amid avian influenza (Bird Flu) outbreaks**

There have been several outbreaks of the highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 virus in Norfolk. Mandatory housing measures for all poultry and captive birds in Norfolk, Suffolk and parts of Essex were introduced from 00:01 on 12 October 2022, following a decision by the UKs Chief Veterinary Officer.  
  
The housing order legally requires all bird keepers in these hotspots to keep their birds indoors and to follow stringent biosecurity measures to help protect their flocks from the disease, regardless of type or size.

Norfolk Trading Standards will be working with the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) to support businesses and minimise the risk of disease spreading further.

The UK Health Security Agency has said that avian influenza is primarily a disease of birds and the risk to the general public’s health is very low.

The Food Standards Agency has said that avian influenza poses a very low food safety risk, and that properly cooked poultry and poultry products, such as eggs, are safe to eat.

The measures that APHA require people keeping birds to take to reduce the risk of spreading the disease are:

* Housing all poultry and captive birds (including birds kept as pets)
* Cleanse and disinfect clothing, footwear, equipment, and vehicles before and after contact with poultry and captive birds – if practical, use disposable protective clothing
* Reduce the movement of people, vehicles, or equipment to and from areas where poultry and captive birds are kept, to minimise contamination from litter, manure, slurry, and other products, and use effective vermin control
* Keep records of all deaths, movement of poultry and poultry products and any changes in production
* Thoroughly cleanse and disinfect housing on a regular basis
* Keep fresh disinfectant at the right concentration at all farm and poultry housing entry and exit points. Foot dips should be covered to stop disinfectant getting diluted
* Minimise direct and indirect contact between poultry and captive birds and wild birds, including making sure all feed and water is not accessible to wild birds
* Prevent access by poultry to ponds and watercourses and ensure that birds are kept in fenced or enclosed areas

The public are advised to keep to designated footpaths, not to feed wild birds, and keep dogs on leads. Don’t touch sick or dead birds, their feathers, or their droppings. If you see a dead bird, please report it to Defra’s helpline on 03459 335577. Sick birds should be reported RSPCA (0300 1234 999) who, dependent on the situation, may be able to offer assistance.

**How to stay warm safely this winter**

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service is reminding residents to heat their homes safely this winter. With the recent rise in energy prices, residents may turn to alternative methods of heating, such as electric heaters and blankets.

Both items can be effective ways of staying warm if used correctly.

If someone choses to use an electric heater to keep warm, first ensure that any heater purchased carries the mark of the British Electrotechnical Approvals Board which means it is has been properly tested. When you are using it, place the heater one metre away from any people or clothing in the room to reduce the risk of accidental clothing fires. Additionally, heaters must never be used to dry clothes because again, this is a fire risk and could lead to serious injury.

Fire crews have attended 14 electrical heater fires since the start of the decade.

**Norfolk County Council undergoes Strategic Review**

The Strategic Review has been designed as a whole organisation exercise to enable the County Council to meet the financial and organisational challenges that we are currently facing and will continue to face in the coming years.

It incorporates a number of complementary themes that will lead us to bring about a leaner organisational structure, which in turn should aid engagement and communication, internally and externally.

It should lead to the Council being one that can recognise, analyse and respond to change in a positive manner – for the benefit of staff, the wider organisation and the communities that we serve.