COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT SEPTEMBER 2024

Norfolk (& Suffolk) County Deals scrapped

More than £600m of investment to create jobs, homes and infrastructure has been scrapped, after the Government halted Norfolk's devolution deal. It would have enabled Norfolk to invest in areas such as transport, skills and job opportunities, housing and regeneration, tailored to the needs of local people.

Norfolk County Council had secured an in-principle devolution deal in December 2022, to bring more powers and funding to the county - including a £20m investment fund for 30 years.

The Government has now informed the council that the current deal has been halted.

County council leader Councillor Kay Mason Billig said: "I am bitterly disappointed that the new Government has halted our deal.

"Ministers don't support the idea of a Norfolk-only deal, or the idea of a county council leader, elected by the public - even though this would not have involved additional bureaucracy.

"For a Government that is keen on economic growth, this is a shortsighted and damaging decision.

"The Government says it supports devolution, yet it has killed off a deal that was ready to go: a deal that was going to improve lives in Norfolk, and grow our economy and start to address decades of historic under investment in our county.

"Norfolk deserves better than this. I intend to press the Government for talks on how we can salvage as many benefits as possible from our current deal - and ensure we don't go to the back of the queue for new powers and funding."

Norfolk County Council on track to meet net zero targets by 2030

Norfolk County Council is on course to hit its 2030 carbon emissions savings target, according to the latest data.

The council has reduced its emissions by 61% compared to the baseline from 2016/17. This has been achieved by implementing a range of measures, such as improving energy efficiency in its buildings, switching from gas to electric heating, and installing energy-efficient LED street lighting.

The council's project to replace Norfolk's streetlights with energy-efficient LEDs has saved £16.5 million, 88.75 million kWh in energy and more than 26,000 tonnes of carbon. The project is now in its final phases, with the remaining 5% of streetlights to be converted by April 2025.

Championing Norfolk’s market towns

Norfolk County Council wants to highlight the crucial role market towns such as Aylsham, Downham Market, and Fakenham play as service centres for local communities and bring together people to share best practice around revitalising them, encouraging pride in place and increasing footfall.

Champions of Norfolk's market towns will come together at a conference on 1 October aimed at showcasing their strengths and developing plans to maximise their future potential. The conference will build on the engagement work the county council has completed through its Norfolk Economic Strategy workshops and Love Your Market Town initiative.

Norfolk Rail Prospectus - have your say

Norfolk County Council’s rail prospectus sets out is required to make sure that rail can serve the needs and expectations of passengers, to ensure that it continues to support Norfolk's economy and helps deliver the housing and jobs growth planned. The prospectus is currently being updated so it can reflect the views of local people and stakeholders.

Ambitions for improvements on routes to London and Cambridge, new stations, decarbonisation of the network, and making stations accessible for all, are part the new rail prospectus that people who live, work and study in Norfolk can now help to shape.

Although the county council does not have any direct say in how the railways are run and invested in, having an up-to-date prospectus in place, that’s aligned with Norfolk’s Local Transport Plan and Better Together for Norfolk strategy, means Norfolk will be well placed to secure improvements for the county.

The prospectus will be used in the county council’s dealings with the government, and organisations including train companies and Network Rail, to get the best for the people and businesses of Norfolk.The consultation will close on 21 October 2024.

Bus franchising

The Government plans to return control of bus franchising services to local transport authorities allowing bus franchising to be available to local authorities to choose the model of how it will operate

Bus franchising involves local authorities granting private companies the right to operate in a specific area but retaining control over key aspects of the service such as routes, timetables and fares. It may not be a suitable model for all authorities or rural areas. Officers are drawing up a report into how this could work in Norfolk.

Norfolk residents encouraged to take up free NHS Health Checks

Norfolk County Council has launched a campaign highlighting to residents that the NHS Health Check is a great opportunity to get their blood pressure checked and receive advice on how to lower their risk of cardiovascular disease and other long-term conditions. The campaign coincides with the national Know Your Numbers blood pressure testing and awareness campaign. It is targeting specific households in the Gt Yarmouth, Norwich, Thetford and Kings Lynn areas where there is a lower take up rate of the NHS Health Check.

Anyone aged 40-74 without a long-term health condition is eligible for an NHS Health Check every 5 years. NHS Health Checks assess your risk of serious illness such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, kidney disease and dementia.

Norfolk residents will now be able to carry out an NHS Health Check primarily via their mobile phone, tablet or computer, as part of a pilot scheme by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) that will operate alongside the in-person service.

Norfolk, alongside two other local authorities, was selected to test the digital NHS Health Check as part of a national pilot following a competitive expression of interest process.

People who complete the digital NHS Health Check will receive their results and personalised advice on ways to reduce their cardiovascular risk depending on these results. Those with results that fall outside of the normal range will be advised to follow up with their GP.

Work to begin on new Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital roundabout

Improvements are due to be made on the main Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital roundabout through an upcoming developer-led scheme.

Work on the £1 million-plus scheme started on Monday 9 September and will last for around six months. The work will see improved pedestrian and cycle access to the hospital and nearby research park, alongside the installation of a new Toucan crossing.

The developer is leading the project, with certain elements delivered in partnership with Norfolk County Council and South Norfolk Council. This partnership approach has enabled the improvements to be delivered as a single scheme, reducing disruption to road users during the work.

The roundabout will remain open during the majority of the scheme. Colney Lane East - which leads to the hospital from Round House Way - will be closed to traffic for four weeks in early 2025. During this closure, alternative access to the hospital will be via Hethersett Lane and Rosalind Franklin Road, which provides a direct route to the multi-storey car park and the hospital access road.

Delivery of Long Stratton Bypass is on track

Preliminary works have been underway since the start of this year, with the main construction commencing in late May, following the final approval of the council's full business case from government.

The current estimated overall cost of the bypass is approx. £46.9m with funding primarily sourced from The Department for Transport, a £14.5m commitment from the Greater Norwich Growth Board, plus local developer contributions.

The project is expected to be complete by late 2025.

Household support fund extended by 6 months

The Household Support Fund has again been extended for another 6 months, the Government’s work and pensions Secretary has confirmed.

The extension will cost the Government £421 million and will go to councils to help them support the most vulnerable who are struggling with household bill costs, such as food and energy.

With over 60% of local authorities considering ending the support they provide to vulnerable households, the funding has allowed for an extra six months of support.