

Devolution Update

We are still waiting for the English Devolution Bill that is due to set out what sort of devolution the new government prefers and give more detail of how local government reorganisation is due to proceed.

Norfolk County Council supports Norfolk's Family Farms

The County Council is taking proactive steps to support the county's hard-working family farms in response to recent budget announcements from the Labour Government. Recognizing the essential role that farming plays in the local economy, the Council is submitting and debating a motion on 10 December aimed at ensuring that Norfolk's farmers are well-supported as they navigate the challenges brought on by these new policies.

The motion reflects the Council's strong commitment to championing local businesses, with a particular focus on protecting the livelihoods of those who sustain Norfolk's agricultural heritage. Norfolk's family farms are the backbone of rural communities, and the Conservative-led Council is dedicated to ensuring that their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed.

Understanding the issues that local farmers face, ranging from financial pressures to complex regulatory changes, the motion highlights the importance of offering practical support.

Norfolk takes the top spot in national highways survey for second year in a row

Norfolk has been ranked number one for the second consecutive year in the National Highways and Transport (NHT) survey, reinforcing the county's commitment to delivering excellent roads and transport services. With an impressive overall score of 49, Norfolk once again outperformed 29 other UK counties and authorities, surpassing the average score of 44.

This year, Norfolk residents have expressed high levels of satisfaction across several key transport areas, including the condition of highways, local bus services, and traffic levels. The county scored at or above the national average in 24 out of 27 Key Benchmark Indicators, showcasing the continued improvements being made in Norfolk's transport infrastructure.

Notable highlights from this year's survey include:

- **Public Transport:** Norfolk scored above the national average in nearly all public transport categories, reflecting the positive impact of the county's Bus Service Improvement Plan.
- **Electric Vehicle Charging Points:** Norfolk saw a remarkable 31.3% improvement in electric vehicle charging provision, highlighting the success of the county's Electric Vehicle Strategy.

- **Cycle Lanes:** Satisfaction with the provision of cycle lanes has soared, with Norfolk ranking first this year, up from fourth place last year. This reflects the county's dedication to active travel, including projects like the Heartsease roundabout improvements.
- **Children's Cycling Safety:** Norfolk now ranks first for the safety of children cycling to school, a significant improvement from seventh place last year.
- **Potholes and Damaged Roads:** Satisfaction with how Norfolk addresses potholes and road repairs has risen, with the county moving up to third place, up from sixth last year.

These outstanding results underscore the County Council's ongoing commitment to creating a safer, more sustainable, and user-friendly transport network for everyone. For more information, the full survey report is available on [the NHT website](#).

Norfolk Winter is here - gritters move out across the county

Norfolk's gritting fleet is currently hitting the roads for the first gritting runs of the season, ensuring the county is ready for the icy conditions forecasted. This year, for the first time ever, all 58 of Norfolk's gritters are equipped with cutting-edge auto-salting technology, which uses satellite navigation to deliver precise, efficient salting. This innovative system reduces manual intervention, ensuring better accuracy, saving time, and cutting down on waste—making the gritting process even more effective.

As winter weather sets in, Norfolk County Council is launching its annual #NorfolkWinter campaign, providing vital information and tips to help people travel safely across the county. Whether you're driving, walking, cycling, or using public transport, the Council's expert highway team will be monitoring weather forecasts and sensors to make sure the right roads are treated at the right time to keep Norfolk moving.

With over 2,200 miles of road treated during each 3-hour gritting run, Norfolk's gritting operation covers all A and B-class roads, key commuter and bus routes, and even one route into every village. Additionally, the County Council ensures around 2,000 grit bins are stocked across the county for public use on pavements, cycle paths, and local roads, helping everyone stay safe.

Stay up-to-date with gritting schedules and winter travel advice by following #NorfolkWinter on Facebook, Nextdoor, and X. You can also check out gritting routes and the location of grit bins on the interactive map at www.norfolk.gov.uk/gritting. For more details on how to stay safe this winter, visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/winter

Norfolk County Council strives to resolve Norwich Western Link issue

The Leader of Norfolk County Council Cllr Kay Mason Billig has written to government Ministers to tell them their assistance is needed to positively resolve an "impossible position" the council finds itself in on its priority Norwich Western Link project.

This vital 3.9-mile dual carriageway, which will significantly improve transport connections to the west of Norwich, has encountered an unexpected obstacle. In March, just before the planning application for the project was set to be submitted, Natural England issued updated guidance on barbastelle bats, which are found in the area around the proposed route. This new guidance has created a challenge for the council in moving forward with the project as planned.

At a Cabinet meeting on December 2nd, Norfolk County Council reviewed the current status of the project, including ongoing discussions with Natural England. While progress is being made, the council continues to work closely with all parties involved to find a positive resolution.

This collaboration underscores the council's commitment to delivering the Norwich Western Link, a crucial infrastructure project that will bring long-term benefits to the region.

Accelerator fund gives boost to rural transport in Norfolk

A groundbreaking project supporting sustainable travel in rural Norfolk has received a significant boost, with more than £144,000 in funding from the Connected Places Catapult and the Department for Transport (DfT). This funding, secured through Norfolk County Council's support for Alchera Technologies' application to the Rural Transport Accelerator Programme, will enhance rural transport options, providing more choice and better connections for local communities.

Alchera Technologies will develop a "Rural Travel Behaviour Model," using data to gain deeper insights into the travel patterns of Norfolk's rural population. This innovative approach will help the County Council make more informed, strategic transport decisions that align with community needs. The anticipated benefits include increased economic growth for the region, greater adoption of public transport, and strong progress toward Norfolk's ambitious net-zero goals.

In addition, a second exciting project backed by Norfolk County Council has also been successful. This initiative, led by Norwich-based commuting emissions reduction specialist, Mobilityways, is supported by Transport East and Norfolk County Council. The IVORA (Increasing Vehicle Occupancy in Rural Areas) project aims to tackle the challenge of detecting car-sharing, enabling employers and local transport authorities to incentivize and boost lift-sharing in rural areas.

The trial, which is taking place at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Kings Lynn, will target the 75% of staff who currently drive alone to work. Many of these employees commute from rural areas, with 40% lacking active or public transport options. With 93% of staff open to car-sharing, IVORA will use cutting-edge camera sensor AI technologies and the Mobilityways app to monitor car occupancy. The app's new incentive tool, CommuteBoost, will reward shared journeys, and innovative VMS signage will raise awareness to encourage more staff to embrace car-sharing.

These forward-thinking projects demonstrate Norfolk County Council's commitment to sustainable transport, reducing emissions, and improving connectivity across the county, creating a brighter, greener future for rural communities.

£1.5 million funding agreed for dentistry school

The Greater Norwich Growth Board has approved moving forward with an exciting new project, recommending the allocation of £1.5 million to help establish a new School of Oral Health at the University of East Anglia (UEA). Pending final approval, this funding, from the Infrastructure Investment Fund, will be used to extend the Edith Cavell Building on the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital Campus. Construction is already underway on a ground floor extension that will house UEA's new Anatomy Suite, and this additional funding will enable the creation of a first-floor extension for the School of Oral Health.

The new space will be fully equipped with state-of-the-art dental chairs, clinical-grade fittings, and specialized teaching facilities, including phantom heads, a teaching laboratory, and seminar rooms. Once completed, the school will have the capacity to train 40 undergraduate students each year. With training expected to begin in September 2026, the first cohort of dental students will be fully qualified as dentists by June 2031, with the opportunity to start providing basic treatment much earlier.

UEA's extensive experience managing a successful medical school will play a key role in retaining graduates in the region. Currently, one-third of UEA Medical School graduates remain in the area long-term after qualification.

This development marks a major milestone in tackling the shortage of NHS dentists in Norfolk and promises to make a lasting impact on healthcare in the region.

Health and Wellbeing Partnership celebrates achievements

Leaders from Norfolk's Health and Wellbeing Partnerships came together to celebrate the fantastic progress made so far and to explore exciting new opportunities for the future. The event brought together a diverse group of attendees, including representatives from District Councils, Norfolk County Council, the Integrated Care Board (ICB), Primary Care Networks, and a wide range of voluntary, community, and social enterprises.

One standout initiative is North Norfolk District Council's PositiviTea drop-in events, which offer a warm, welcoming space for people to connect, relax, and receive

valuable support on various issues, including financial advice, physical and mental health, care needs, and tackling loneliness and isolation.

Additionally, the Safe and Habitable Homes project is making a real difference in Norwich by providing vital support to people facing self-neglect and hoarding challenges. This initiative helps individuals who may be struggling with self-care, hygiene, health, and safety, while also addressing the impacts of hoarding, where excessive accumulation of items can create unsafe living conditions.

These efforts highlight Norfolk's commitment to improving the wellbeing of its residents and demonstrate the powerful impact of community collaboration in creating a healthier, happier future for all.

Norfolk Public health encourages people to think about their drinking habits

As we head towards the festive season, Norfolk Public Health is encouraging people to reflect on their drinking habits. Understanding what a unit of alcohol looks like and knowing how to avoid harm can help people make healthier and safer choices.

Health professionals recommend a limit of 14 units of alcohol per week. In Norfolk, although there's an overall decrease in the average amount people drink, men over 40 remain more likely to drink above this limit.

For example, a single pint of beer is generally 2 units and a medium glass of standard wine (175ml) is just over 2 units, though these can vary with the strength of the drink.

Regularly drinking more than 14 units a week can seriously affect people's health. Drinking less brings longer-term benefits, such as reducing the risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, stroke, liver damage and certain types of cancer.

Information and support to make lifestyle changes to improve health and wellbeing is available at www.norfolk.gov.uk/readytochange.

East Anglian counties partner with US city of Virginia Beach for mutual business and economic growth

Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex Councils are excited to announce a new partnership with Virginia Beach, a dynamic US city known for its thriving technology and renewable energy sectors, aimed at boosting transatlantic trade and collaboration. Virginia Beach, the largest city in Virginia, is located on the US East Coast, and the partnership marks a significant milestone in fostering international growth and innovation.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was officially signed on November 12 at the US Embassy in London by the leaders of the three counties—Kay Mason Billig from Norfolk, Matthew Hicks from Suffolk, and Kevin Bentley from Essex—alongside Virginia Beach's Deputy City Manager, Amanda Jarratt.

This enhanced partnership will span a wide range of areas, including business development, research, academia, and training. It builds on a previous 2021 MOU between the now-defunct New Anglia LEP and Virginia Beach, which facilitated joint participation in conferences, business webinars, and offshore wind training opportunities through East Coast College in Lowestoft.

With several offshore wind farms under development along the US East Coast, including the Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind project near Virginia Beach, the partnership is well-timed. This project has already attracted UK-based Cadelar (formerly Seajacks) to expand its presence in the US. Discussions are already underway for several exciting initiatives for 2025 and beyond, including providing support for US investors and exporters interested in exploring opportunities in East Anglia.

This MOU represents a promising new chapter in transatlantic collaboration, unlocking new opportunities for innovation, business, and renewable energy development between the UK and the US.

More on-street charging points set to be installed in Norwich

The expansion of on-street electric vehicle (EV) charging points is progressing smoothly, with the next phase of installations starting on November 25. Over the coming months, 12 new locations will see 22 additional charge points installed, bringing the total to 46 across the Norwich area by February next year.

Following a successful contract win in early 2023, Blink Charging UK has been leading the way in providing accessible on-street EV charging infrastructure across Norwich, making it easier for residents to embrace sustainable transportation. So far, 24 Blink EV chargers have been installed in residential areas, offering convenient charging options for those without private driveways or off-street parking. This initiative is a key part of the Council's broader strategy to promote EV adoption and reduce emissions in the region.

Residents in areas where new chargers are being added will receive advance notice of installation dates, and a formal public information notice will be published before any work begins. To ensure the new chargers are easily accessible, the Council may review some parking restrictions near the charging points, with any proposed changes undergoing a consultation process with local residents.

The new chargers will include advanced 22kW fast chargers (Alfen Twins) and 50-100kW rapid chargers (Delta Slimlines), both designed to be ideal for residential on-street locations. The full installation of EV chargers is expected to be completed by Spring 2025, further supporting Norfolk's transition to cleaner, greener transport options.

Norfolk street lighting goes green

Norfolk is leading the way in energy efficiency with the successful completion of its street lighting upgrade project, finishing almost a year ahead of schedule. This major initiative will cut CO2 emissions by over 200 tonnes annually, helping the county make significant strides toward a greener, more sustainable future.

The upgrade, carried out by Amey on behalf of Norfolk County Council, involved replacing 16,800 traditional High-Intensity Discharge (HID) lights with 15,531 state-of-the-art LED lanterns. This transition, which began in August 2023, will ensure that, starting in November 2024, 100% of Norfolk County Council's street lighting will use low-energy LEDs.

The final phase of this project will save approximately 1,099,032 kWh of energy each year, translating to an estimated £380,000 in savings based on current electricity prices.

Since the first LED streetlights were installed in 2008, the county has saved around 71 million kWh of energy, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by over 22,200 tonnes, equivalent to the carbon savings of 6.7 million litres of diesel. This project marks another significant achievement in Norfolk's ongoing commitment to reducing its environmental impact and promoting energy sustainability.

Life-saving emergency services partnership in Norfolk shortlisted for award

A collaboration between Norfolk's ambulance and fire services, designed to provide faster medical assistance, has been nominated for a national award.

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) has seven fire stations across the county that respond to medical emergencies. Firefighters, trained by the ambulance service, can be sent to life-threatening medical emergencies in their communities.

This partnership is in the running for the Collaboration of the Year at the Excellence in Fire & Emergency Awards. The winner will be announced on 6 December.

Since January, NFRS co-responders have been sent to 48 cardiac arrest calls, and in 40% of cases fire crews arrived ahead of paramedics. Firefighters arrived on average three minutes before an ambulance in those incidents.

In a life-threatening emergency such as a cardiac arrest, getting medical help on scene as quickly as possible increases the chances of survival.

New poetry project launches across Norfolk libraries to celebrate Norfolk as a county of welcome

Norfolk Library and Information Service has teamed up with Creative Arts East on a multi-lingual Words of Welcome Poetry Exchange, launching this month in all 47 libraries across the county. The project aims to celebrate Norfolk's cultural diversity and showcase it as a place of welcome, by inviting library visitors to read specially commissioned poems on the themes of welcome and sanctuary, and respond with their own 'words of welcome'.

National Centre for Writing have selected and commissioned acclaimed poets George Szirtes and Marjorie Lotfi to write two original poems. These have been translated into Arabic, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese and Ukrainian - some of the most widely-spoken languages in Norfolk. Beautifully designed postcards with these poems and their translations can be found in each of Norfolk's 47 libraries, for visitors to read and take home.

Library visitors are invited to respond to these poems on blank postcards with their own words of welcome and post them in the collection boxes provided. Whether it's a poem, short anecdote, simple reflection or even a picture, any contributions will be added to a growing collection that celebrates Norfolk as a place of inclusivity, belonging, and community.

Celebrating success and dedication at the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service Awards

There was lots to be proud of at this year's Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service Awards - from thousands raised for charity, volunteers making a difference in the community, to over 700 years of service acknowledged.

The annual awards recognise the efforts of fire fighters, fire staff, Trading Standards staff, their friends and families and community partners and volunteers in Norfolk.

Norfolk team wins national awards

Norfolk County Council's People from Abroad Team has won the Overall Social Worker of the Year award and gold Team of the Year award in the Children's Services category (including MDTs), after beating competition from across the country.

Friday's Social Worker of the Year Awards saw people from across England gather to celebrate positive stories of outstanding social work, creative and compassionate practitioners, and exemplary practice.

The team, which has helped more than 500 people to date, supports children and families in need, as well as adults who struggle to access traditional services due to their immigration status; resettled refugee families; and families who have no recourse to public funds.