

Hockering Parish Council

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REPORT of the **Annual Parish Meeting** held on Tuesday 13th May 2024 at the Village Hall, Hockering.

Cllrs Present at the Meeting: Cllrs J Blackwell (Chair), G Bambridge, P Cocker, P McIntee and R Neave.

Also Present: Parish Clerk and 2 members of the public.

1. **Welcome and apologies for absence** - Cllr B Higgins sent his apologies.
2. **To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 14th May 2024** - The minutes of this meeting were reviewed at the July 2024 meeting and signed.
3. **To receive reports from:**
 - a) **Hockering Parish Council – Chairman, Jonty Blackwell**, mentioned that 2024/25 has been a mixed year for Hockering which included the sad loss of one active council, Lynn Parker, and a former chairman, Tom McMahon and thoughts go out to both their families. Both were keen advocates of the village and contributed in many ways. He also spoke about keeping Hockering looking good by grass cutting and thanked Cllr Higgins and Dean Clarke for their efforts. Thanks, too, to the people who maintain the planters in the village bringing a welcome burst of colour. The bus shelter has been cleaned and repainted with help from the Community Payback Team. Work on improving the A47 has finally begun and this is welcomed, as ultimately it will mean a reduction of traffic through the village. The Council supported the Friends of Hockering School's Village Fete which raised over £2,100 for the school and look forward to this year's event on the 17th August. He also thanked the Clerk and all the councillors for their support throughout the year and welcomed Paul McIntee and Gordon Bambridge as councillors. This still leaves a vacant position and applications would be welcomed.
 - b) **Parochial Church Council** – Heather Flint, Parochial Church Council Secretary's report is attached to these minutes, but in brief she mentioned the popularity of the Coffee Mornings, the dwindling regular congregations, services held in Church for the School and that they are still awaiting the appointment of a new Rector to replace Revd Sally Thurgill who is retiring in August.
 - c) **Hockering Primary Academy** – a report was received from the school and is attached to these minutes. The school currently has 31 pupils on roll and they enjoyed many outings and enrichment activities during the year. The Friends of Hockering School have taken a disused, overgrown garden area of the school grounds and turned it into a useable gardening and nature area. Following the sad passing of Lynn Parker, who had been a volunteer at the school for several years, a 'Pink Day' fundraising event was held and £146 was raised for the Priscilla Bacon Hospice. In November last year the school was inspected by Ofsted and were graded as 'Good'. The school is part of the Eden Federation which runs schools in Easton, Great Witching and Cawston and they would welcome enquiries from anyone interested in joining the Governing Body as they have a vacancy for a Governor.
 - d) **Friends of Hockering School** – a full report is attached to these minutes which gives details of their progress since starting two years ago.

- e) **Poor and Townlands Charity** – it was reported that the Charity is solvent at the moment and anyone needing help can get in touch with Cllr Rosemary Neave. The Charity has agreed to fully fund a trip for all the Primary School children and staff to go on a trip to Cromer.
- f) **Village Hall Committee** – The Village Hall has been repainted, thanks to the Community Payback Scheme and is now waiting for new LED lighting and new electrical sockets to be fitted.
- g) **Hockering Woods** – Matthew Hutton’s full report is attached to the minutes but he said he was pleased to hear of the experiences of those who have been able to visit the wood. He emphasised the importance of restricting access to the Wood only through the gate off Stone Road and that access could only be granted at a particular time of year and specified hours on each day. This is necessary for the purposes of woodland management. He said that sadly vandalism continues to be an unwelcome problem – and even occasional overnight camping – and any help which can be given to deter this would be much appreciated. He said that people are encouraged to have a look at the website: www.hockeringwood.com. Cllr Bambridge asked if it would be possible over the summer months to allow access at dawn or dusk and whether a small number of days over the winter could allow access, perhaps between Christmas Day and New Year’s Day. Mr Hutton agreed to consult with his management team and any additional days or times would be posted on the Hockering Facebook page.
- h) **Breckland District Councillor** — Gordon Bambridge had sent in a full report which is attached to these minutes. In brief he reported that the most often raised issues concern planning, housing, fly-tipping, benefits and grants. He spoke about the challenges relating to the prospect of a change in government systems in Norfolk, with a Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk and either a one, two or three Unitary system for Norfolk. Breckland are pressing ahead with the Local Plan and he confirmed that they are committed to give the best service possible over the coming two years, or for as long as it takes for this Local Government Reorganisation to take place.
- i) **Norfolk County Councillor** – Bill Borrett sent a full report which is attached to these minutes. Topics covered included Devolution and Local Government Update, opposition to the National Grid Pylon scheme, Highways maintenance allocation, Parish Partnership scheme, £1million committed to keeping people warm last winter, Norfolk’s Local Growth Plan, Family Farms, Scenic Trails in Norfolk, energy-efficient street lighting, delivering a balanced budget, helping people with long-term health issues to keep working, and, finally, Norfolk signed an historic agreement with the Ukrainian region of Lviv.

4. **Open Forum for Public Participation** – A resident expressed concerns that the current road closure onto the A47 at the eastern end of the village was causing road safety issues for motorists turning onto the A47 at the western junction and is a considerable hazard for bus users having to cross the A47 to pick up a bus as the buses were unable to come through the village. He was disappointed that the Parish Council had not insisted on a consultation period with National Highways or Galliford Try, the A47 management contractor, to enable their views on the road closure to be taken into account. It was pointed out that there is no statutory obligation for National Highways or Galliford Try to give more than 15 days’ notice or to ask for local views. The Chairman agreed to contact both bodies and the local MP to ask that in future if possible more consultation time is given when roadworks are planned which affect Hockering residents.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and invited them to stay for the Annual Parish Council Meeting.

Signed

Date

Reports are attached from:

Parish Council

St Michael's Parochial Church Council

Hockering Primary Academy,

Friends of Hockering School

Hockering Woods

Breckland District Councillor

Norfolk County Councillor

Report from Hockering Parish Council

2024/2025 has been a mixed year for Hockering. It's been a year to reflect on the past and look forward to the future.

This year, we have mourned the loss of one active councillor and one former chairman, Lyn Parker and Tom McMahon. Our thoughts go out to both their families. Both were keen advocates of the village and contributed in many ways.

Hockering Parish Council and parishioners have been making the effort to keep Hockering looking good. Last year the Council purchased a ride on lawn mower with the intention of maintaining the green spaces within the village. Brian Higgins has taken responsibility for the mower and has been keeping on top of the grass cutting. Brian has also been very active in cleaning the roadside verges where possible and further work is planned to push the grass verges back off the paths. We also wish to thank Dean Clarke for his efforts in cutting the grass and verges and generally helping to maintain the village. The Parish Council will also be looking to arrange another village clean-up day later in the summer.

A big thank you also goes out to all the people maintaining the planters near the bus stop and at the pub. I apologise for not having everyone's names, but thanks go to you all including Liz, Ann, Michael, Hailey, Carolyn, Carsten and Sue. It's great to see a bit of colour in the village.

With the help of the Community Payback Programme, the brick bus stop has been refreshed with a new coat of paint, and new bargeboards thanks to the efforts of Brian Higgins and Dave Saunder. The cost of the paint has been covered thanks to the Wickes Community fund. The Community Payback team have also repainted the village hall.

Work has finally begun on the A47, and we welcome the improvements and ultimately the reduction of traffic through the village and associated improvements to road safety.

The council was proud to support the Friends of Hockering School in their effort to put on a very successful Village Fete that raised over £2,100. We will be looking forward to this year's event.

Lastly, I'd like to thank our clerk Margaret Ridgwell for all her hard work, and all the councillors for their support through the year. We have also recently welcomed Paul McIntee and Gordon Bambridge to the Council. There is still a vacant position, and we would welcome applications.

Report from St. Michael's Parochial Church Council.

Heather Flint, Parochial Church Council Secretary, confirmed the reappointment of our Churchwarden. The Coffee Mornings are still very popular and well attended, and we are grateful for the continued support of many from the Village community that help us run these events. However, our regular congregation remains very small despite hopes that with the increase of people moving to the village in the new housing some new people might have joined us. The school still holds several important services at the church each year and we always look forward to welcoming them. We are still awaiting the appointment of a new Rector to the Benefice and our Ordained Local Minister, Revd Sally Thurgill, has done a sterling job whilst we await their arrival. However Sally is retiring in August 2025 and a new Rector appointment is unlikely to be before then.

Report from Hockering Primary Academy

Hockering Church of England Primary Academy currently has thirty-one children on roll this school year and what a busy year it has been so far! The children have made visits to a variety of places to enrich their education. They have learnt all about the Stone Age at the Time & Tide Museum in Great Yarmouth. They travelled back in time and made Stone Age shelters using authentic materials. They learned about Stone Age tools and hunting and the challenges of survival.

All the children have attended PE trips around the county, including a dodgeball competition at the UEA, a football festival at Goals, Cross Country events at Langley and a fantastic dance show at The Space in Norwich.

In January Year 5 & 6 attended the Young Voices Concert at the O2 in London and sang as part of the largest children's choir in the world. It was an amazing event enjoyed by pupils and staff.

We are looking forward to our KS2 residential to Eaton Vale in the summer and a whole school trip to Cromer Museum in June. Year 6 are also attending a STEAM event at Greshams School later this month.

On the grounds of Hockering Primary Academy, we had a disused, overgrown garden area. The Friends of Hockering had kindly taken on this school garden project. Together as a school and as a Friends committee, we have created a useable nature area where we can integrate outdoor learning into our curriculum. A lot of thought and effort has gone into the nature area, to create a mosaic of zones to enable fulfilment of a number of beneficial activities, including areas for gardening, for nature, space for building and places for mindful relaxation and connectivity with the natural world. The FOHS have designed the garden, and financed the entire project through fundraising and grants. We have finally reached the point of completion and the official garden opening took place on 01/05/25. The local community were also involved in the creation of the school nature garden, and volunteers have helped to clear the area and construct pathways, raised beds and composting areas.

We try to work closely with our parents and welcome them in to school each week for a Celebration Collective Worship. At these assemblies we recognise achievements from the previous week and award certificates to the children.

Following the sad passing of Lynn Parker, who had been volunteering at our school for several years, the children chose to do some fundraising to honour her memory. We had a 'Pink Day' at school where everyone dressed in pink and we held a bake sale after school to raise money for the Priscilla Bacon Hospice. We raised £146.

Finally, on the 5th and 6th of November, we had an Ofsted inspection. We were graded as 'Good' which we are very proud of. The inspection was a positive experience and here are just some of the strengths highlighted in the report:

- Pupils are settled, happy and safe at Hockering Church of England Primary Academy. Parents comment that it is a lovely school with a strong sense of community. Pupils grow in confidence during their time here. They look forward to what each new school day will bring. The school provides a range of new and exciting opportunities

- Every pupil is known as an individual at this school. Staff carefully tailor their teaching to meet pupils' needs.
- Pupils learn all about being a good friend and treating each other with respect. Staff deliver assemblies that help to further reinforce this. Themes such as kindness and helping others are discussed. Pupils behave kindly and respectfully towards everyone.

Our school is part of the Eden Federation which includes the Primary Schools in Easton, Great Witchingham and Cawston. Anyone who is interested in joining the Governing Body of Eden Federation would be very welcome as we do have a current vacancy.

Report from Friends of Hockering School

FOHS Statement for Hockering Parish Council AGM, May 2025

Friends of Hockering School have been very lucky to receive the support of the Parish Council and the local community during the many events held this last year, and the money raised has been used to improve the facilities and educational opportunities of the children at the school.

Some of the community activities we have undertaken since May 2024 have included the bag2school drop-offs (and our thanks goes to the Village Hall for allowing us use of the porch), seasonal discos, a Christmas wreath workshop, pub quizzes, and of course the summer fete. With the money raised, we have been able to fund a number of school trips, including to museums and the pantomime, as well as purchasing rewards for Year 6 leavers. We've acquired new sports equipment and bought over 100 new books for the library. We also finally finished the new garden at the school and some individuals from the village were truly amazing in giving up their free time to get this established: our special thanks go to Dean, Phil and Dawn for their hard work, as well as to the mums and dads who have been helping us along the way.

New projects we're now looking into include redoing the school toilets which are in poor condition, as well as researching the potential to construct an outdoor classroom within the grounds of the school. Our next big community event will be the Fete, which is booked for August 17th – so save the date and come along to support us! And we can also be supported through use of Easyfundraising for online shopping, as well as a new Amazon Wishlist which can be viewed on our Facebook page.

We are always looking for more ideas and volunteers, so if anyone wanted to send us their thoughts on events we've held in the past, things we can do to improve the variety of events offered, or if they just wanted to come along to a meeting to see what we do, please get in touch.

Report from Gordon Bambridge, District Councillor

Gordon Bambridge -Upper Wensum Ward

As your elected district councillor my job is to represent you to Breckland Council and to represent Breckland Council to you. This covers all of the services Breckland provide, and to do this I try to stay in contact with your parish councils by attending the meetings as often as possible - and to meet with you personally when you have matters of concern.

Within this ward the most often raised issues are with planning, either residents who want to apply for planning permission, or to object to a planning proposal. Sometimes I am approached from both sides at the same time. Whilst planning is an emotive subject, it has clearly defined objectives and procedures so we can often reach satisfactory conclusions and mostly residents can see this. Other Breckland matters include Housing, Dustbins, Fly Tipping, some benefits, some grants, Elections, Community Support, Licensing, I think the list is about 130 subjects long with statutory and non-statutory elements. I do also get involved all the time with County and Parliamentary matters so never be afraid to ask.

Many councillors link Breckland to other bodies working in and for the community, for me this is the Internal Drainage Board so I also regularly attend meetings concerning flooding, or prevention of such in both our urban and to us more local rural settings both in Norfolk and across the country.

This has become particularly relevant in recent years and of course more so in some parts of the ward.

During this year we have been challenged with the prospect of change in government systems for Norfolk, this will eventually mean that both Norfolk CC and Breckland DC will disappear and be replaced by some form of unitary council and an elected mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk jointly. This is entirely a central government proposal which I am doubtful will work well, but as a councillor I can only seek to carry out the policy in a way which provides the greatest benefit for the people of Breckland. Up to now we have still not been fully advised on what will replace these two democratic institutions but I am always happy to update your parish councils as we meet regularly, or of course attend any groups in your communities which have an interest. I am well aware that some parish councils and groups of councils have ambitions.

What we have been told is that County Council elections this May were cancelled. Breckland is likely to end in May 2027. A mayor is likely to be elected in 2026 and a Unitary (either a single or a two or three section alternative for Norfolk with a single for Suffolk) elected by you in 2027. Whilst facts are still scarce, at the moment I believe a three section unitary would be best for Breckland protecting what we most hold dear across all party lines for our communities. It is also likely to be the least costly for our council tax payers overall, although all will involve an increase in our tax burden.

Breckland are pressing ahead with the local plan, we have paused any plan to charge for car parks with some options for future councils. We are still providing grants to parish councils and other bodies within your area. Both the council as a whole and me personally are committed to giving you the best service we can over the coming two years or for as long as this re-ordering takes.

I have deliberately kept this report short, but am happy to answer any questions. I can be contacted through the Council directly or indirectly via your parish clerk.

My emails are: gordon.bambridge@breckland.gov.uk, sgbjays@aol.com

My telephones are: 07788381761 and 07540973229

Report from Bill Borrett, County Councillor - Member for the Elmham and Mattishall Division

Devolution and Local Government Reform Update

The Government's plan to impose one Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk continues apace. They organised one face to face consultation event, which unbelievably was held in Ipswich and understandably there was hardly anyone from Norfolk in attendance.

The Government wants to hold the Mayoral election in May 2026 and the new Mayor will then need to charge a "mayoral precept" to cover the costs of the new Strategic Authority which they will run. This will be added to your Council Tax Bill in future years.

Even though it is being described as Devolution, it is taking powers from Breckland and the County Council rather than handing them down. For example: Strategic Planning will go up to the Mayor from Breckland. This is the call for sites and Local Plan that you may have been involved in.

Here in Norfolk we have launched a consultation independent of the Government, and if you have an opinion please take the time to go to <https://www.future-east.co.uk>. Your responses are important and will shape our response to the Government's plans.

Norfolk County Council opposes National Grid pylon scheme

I and my fellow County Councillors have objected to a National Grid proposal to construct an electricity transmission line across the county.

National Grid has launched a statutory consultation on plans for a 114 mile overhead power line between Norwich in Norfolk, Bramford in Suffolk and Tilbury in Essex.

In non-statutory consultations, Norfolk County Council has urged National Grid to reconsider the scheme, but the project will be determined by the secretary of state for energy security and net zero as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project.

Norfolk County Council's planning and highways delegations committee have agreed to object to the proposal, arguing that alternative options, including an offshore or underground scheme, had not been adequately considered.

At a recent full council meeting, councillors backed a motion expressing concerns over the proposals.

That motion called for the Conservative-controlled council to write to National Grid with several requests, including further consideration of an offshore alternative and of putting more of the power line underground.

Norfolk County Council set to receive highest highways maintenance allocation in the region

Norfolk is set to receive more than £56 million for highways maintenance this year. Funding for every local authority across England today can be used throughout 2025/6 on the roads that are in most need of repair, and to deliver immediate fixes for communities across Norfolk.

This comes just a few weeks after Norfolk took the top spot for the second year in a row in the National Highways and Transport (NHT) survey on roads and transport. People from across the county gave Norfolk the highest (above average) score in satisfaction with the condition of the highways.

More than 5,300 potholes have been fixed across Norfolk since April this year and of those 99% were repaired by our contractors within the agreed response times. If you see a pothole - don't assume someone else has reported it. Let us know by completing our online form: www.norfolk.gov.uk/potholes

Biggest yet Parish Partnership Scheme

This month Norfolk County Council has reviewed a series of investments and improvements to the county's highways infrastructure.

I'm really pleased that 97 parishes, from Antingham to Worstead, will benefit from projects funded through the Council's Parish Partnership scheme. The 2025/26 programme is designed to deliver what local communities have requested, including trods (footways), village gateways, bus shelters, and vehicle-activated signs.

The programme is jointly funded by Norfolk County Council and contributions from Town and Parish Councils. This year, Norfolk County Council plans to contribute £425,476, enabling a total investment of £848,702 for local projects.

We have also reviewed the highways Capital Programme, which highlights successes from the previous year and outlines how highways maintenance funding will be allocated for the coming 12 months. This includes an additional £15 million from the Department for Transport (DfT).

With this extra funding, an additional 100 miles of roads in Norfolk will be resurfaced this year, supporting the Council's proactive approach to highway maintenance that helps prevent potholes. The funding will also provide additional resources for local repairs and patching across the county.

Norfolk County Council committed over £1m to keep people warm last winter

Proposals to support some of Norfolk's most vulnerable people this winter have been agreed.

Norfolk County Council is looking to use £1.15m of the £6.7m allocated to the county through the Household Support Fund to keep people warm and help them make ends meet.

The county council will use £0.75m to partner with local organisations, including Age UK and Citizens Advice Bureau, to reach some of those most affected by the changes to the Winter Fuel Payments. They will also

put £400k into the 'warm spaces' scheme which provides vital respite in community spaces across the county.

The proposals also include £3.6m to continue providing cost-of-living vouchers for families eligible for means tested free school meals. This is in addition to:

- £1.00m to Norfolk Assistance Scheme. Delivered by the Norfolk County Council, the scheme includes direct award of assistance, the provision of household items and emergency help, alongside a range of support and guidance
- £0.70m to local councils across Norfolk to provide proactive and crisis support
- £0.25m to Adult Learning to continue free access to a range of courses to help with cooking at home, budgeting, and digital skills.

New strategy puts Norfolk at the forefront of the UK economy

Norfolk's Economic Strategy, also known as a Local Growth Plan, sets out an overview of the local economy and key priority areas for economic growth.

Norfolk is already at the forefront of some of the UK's most strategically important sectors.

Norfolk is a global leader for offshore wind with £39bn of clean energy investment forecasted over the next 20 years. In Great Yarmouth, the new Operations and Maintenance Campus is expected to create 650 new jobs and new commercial space for the offshore renewable energy sector. This £24.8m partnership project is a collaboration with Great Yarmouth Borough Council, with enabling works well underway.

Work is also underway to examine how to decarbonise the gas supply through the development of a 'Bacton Energy Hub', reusing existing North Sea assets for carbon storage, and blue/green hydrogen production.

The local Agri-Food and Agri-Tech economy puts Norfolk at the epicentre of addressing challenges around food security and climate change. Norwich Research Park is a world-leading research base at the forefront of global food and health research. It is Europe's largest single site hub of research, training, education, and enterprise in food and health.

Norfolk is already well known for a visitor economy which accounts for nearly 20% of all employment. The county was recently successful in bidding to become a Local Visitor Economy Partnership, alongside Visit East of England and Suffolk County Council. This put them on an even footing with the likes of Cornwall, the Peak District, and the Cotswolds who have the same level of Visit England accreditation.

Major infrastructure projects continue to transform how residents and businesses get around. The completion of the Herring Bridge and the start of construction on the long-awaited Long Stratton Bypass will bring a major boost for the local economy. Norfolk has also seen year-on-year growth in bus passenger numbers and the introduction of a major electric bus fleet.

The county council continues to push for improvements along the A47, with an ongoing campaign to improve connectivity and safety through further dualling in key areas.

Norfolk has built an increasingly enterprising culture, supporting residents to start up their own business, and for new start-ups to survive and thrive. Norfolk has a better than UK average for survival of new businesses at 63% after 3 years, compared to the UK average of 56%.

New Anglia Growth Hub acts as the 'front door' for local businesses looking for support. Over the past 10 years, the Growth Hub has supported over 14,000 businesses with free, impartial support and advice.

Norfolk County Council supports Norfolk's Family Farms

We are 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 agreed a motion aimed at ensuring that Norfolk's farmers are well-supported as they navigate the challenges brought on by these new policies.

The motion agreed 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 County Council is committed to creating a future where local farmers can thrive, ensuring a sustainable and prosperous agricultural sector for generations to come.

Discover the Best of Norfolk: Explore 1,500 Miles of Scenic Trails for Walking, Cycling, and Horse-Riding

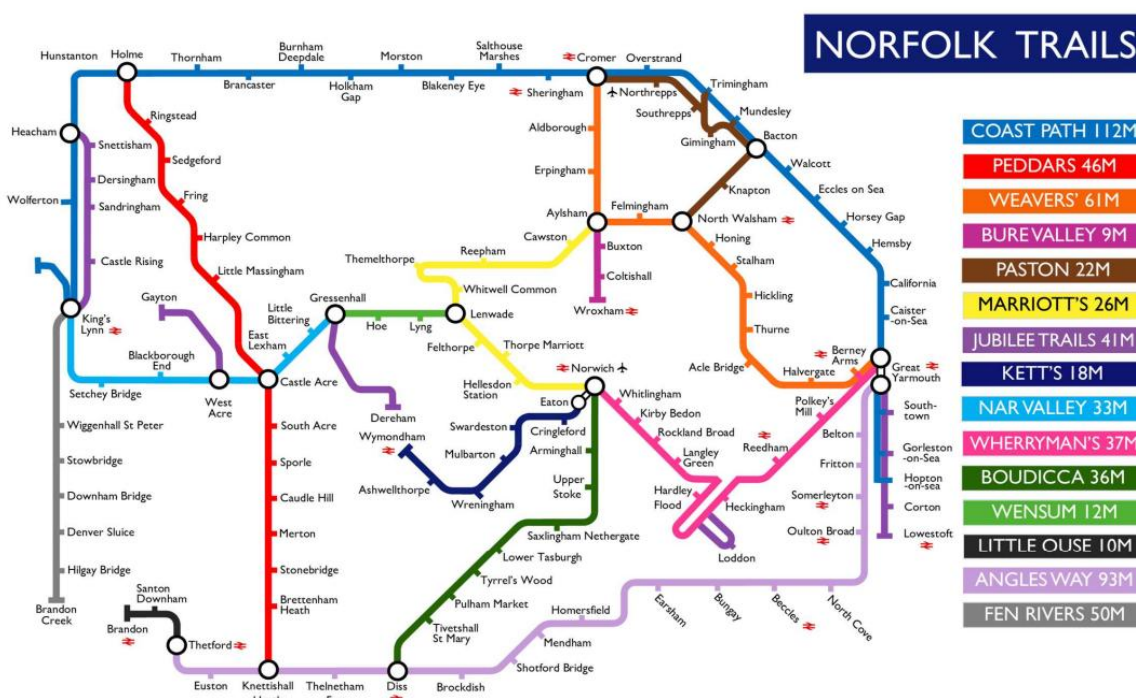
We have now established one of the best long distance footpath networks in the whole country. Norfolk offers over 1,500 miles of beautiful walking, cycling, and horse-riding routes, each showcasing the county's unique nature and rich cultural heritage. Whether you're exploring tranquil river valleys, historic landscapes, or scenic coastal paths, Norfolk's trails offer something for every adventurer.

Highlights include the **Angles Way**, a 93-mile walking route through woodlands and heathland, and the **Boudicca Way**, a 36-mile journey through ancient Roman and Iceni heritage sites. For those seeking to explore the Broads, the **Bure Valley Path** offers a 9-mile route along a heritage railway. History buffs will enjoy the **Kett's Country Trail**, which follows the story of Kett's Rebellion, while the **Peddars Way** takes you along an ancient Roman road.

Other stunning routes include the **Norfolk Coast Path** (a 112-mile National Trail), the **Marriott's Way** (26 miles of scenic walking, cycling, and horse-riding), and the **Wherryman's Way**, a 40-mile trek through the beautiful Broads National Park.

Whether you're interested in history, nature, or simply exploring the countryside, Norfolk's extensive network of trails provides the perfect way to experience this beautiful region.

For more information please visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/article/42852/Norfolk-Trails



Norfolk street lighting goes green

We are leading the way in energy efficiency with the successful completion of a 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.

Council Delivers Balanced Budget and calls for cost-saving local government reorganisation

As I have mentioned in previous Reports Norfolk County Council has approved a balanced budget for the 2025/26 fiscal year, despite facing considerable financial challenges.

Key Details from the Norfolk County Council Budget:

Gross Budget: The council has a gross expenditure budget of £2.2 billion (£1.7 billion excluding schools). This includes: £700 million for Adult Social Care, £367 million for Children's Services (non-schools), £283 million for Infrastructure, £44 million for Communities and Environment, £46 million for Fire Services

Budget Growth: The 2025/26 budget includes an increase of £121 million, which included: £31 million for inflationary pressures, £35 million for legislative pressures (including the increase in the National Living Wage and higher Employers National Insurance contributions), £15 million for demand and demographic pressures.

Council Tax: For 2025/26, Council Tax will increase by 4.99%, which includes a 3% rise for general Council Tax and a 2% increase for the Adult Social Care precept.

Working Well Norfolk helping people with long-term health issues to keep working

A scheme to support people in Norfolk with long-term health issues get back into employment or continue in their jobs has already helped more than 1,100 participants.

The Working Well Norfolk programme, launched in October 2023, supports individuals with long-term health issues to return to, or stay, in work. It has already helped over 1,100 participants, with 200 moving into work and 150 staying employed despite health challenges. The programme has received 1,600 referrals and will continue for another 18 months, with additional funding to help 730 more people, totalling 1,830 participants by September 2026. The £5.2m project is managed by Norfolk County Council and delivered by Seetec Pluss and Standguide Ltd. For more info or to refer, visit [Working Well Norfolk - Seetec Pluss](#) or call 01603 561054.

Norfolk signs historic agreement with Ukrainian region of Lviv

A cooperation agreement has been signed between Norfolk County Council and the Ukrainian region of Lviv which is designed to explore knowledge transfer, educational exchange and trade opportunities.

The historic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on Thursday 2 May at the Ukrainian Embassy in London by Leader of Norfolk County Council Kay Mason Billig and in Lviv via video link by Maksym Kozytskyi, Head of the Lviv Regional Military Administration. It is the first such agreement to be signed with Lviv by any part of the UK.

Cllr Mason Billig was joined at the ceremony by Liz Truss MP, as the MP for South West Norfolk, Cllr Fabian Eagle, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Cllr Chris Dawson, Rural Champion, Chris Starkie, Director of Growth and Investment, and Roberta Willner, Head of Economic Development. Also there to witness the signing of the agreement was Nataliya Klymko, Programmes Coordinator for Growth and Investment.

Both Norwich and Lviv have links to UNESCO: Norwich is a UNESCO City of Literature, and the historic part of Lviv city (300-acre historic centre) is included in the UNESCO World Heritage list. In 2022, Lviv was granted Freedom of the City of Norwich in solidarity with Ukraine, and the MoU - similar to a twinning arrangement - will further celebrate and build on these links.

Norfolk and Lviv have identified several key opportunities for collaborative working, including the TechBridge programme, a strategic partnership between the UK Government, Ukraine Ministry of Digital Transformation and Ukraine Ministry of Foreign Affairs to forge connections between our tech ecosystems.

This partnership currently runs to 2025 but may be extended, providing businesses in both locations access to expert advice and support in navigating the barriers to UK-Ukraine trade. There are also specialist investment accelerator programmes for Ukraine tech SMEs looking to expand overseas.

The skills and knowledge the local Lviv tech sector offers are recognised on the international level. For example, Lviv IT specialists developed the Skype app and special effects for films such as Harry Potter and Spider-Man. Norfolk also has a strong growing ICT/Digital sector with several individual clusters, and the MoU will encourage collaboration within the sector between our regions by participating in mutual events of interest.

This not only benefits cluster growth in a key sector for Norwich and Norfolk's digital services and would benefit Lviv through the contribution to the recovery efforts.

Other opportunities for collaboration include an incoming visit to the Theatre Royal Norwich in October by the Lviv National Philharmonic Orchestra of Ukraine, led by leading conductor, Theodore Kuchar.

Herring Bridge receives further national awards

The new Herring Bridge in Great Yarmouth, which opened in February, received further national recognition at a Highway Awards ceremony in London last night.

Norfolk County Council's nationally significant infrastructure project won the Major Project of the Year award and was also later announced as winner for the Highways Special Merit award across all shortlisted finalists.

This follows the bridge already receiving Major Project of the Year at the New Civil Engineer awards early this summer.

The Highway Awards were held on Tuesday 24th September at Park Plaza, Westminster Bridge in London, with shortlisted entries decided by an expert panel of twelve judges.

Norfolk's entry was a joint submission with consultants WSP who worked with the council and partners to take the project, constructed by BAM Farrans joint venture, from its inception through to delivery.

Thank you for your interest. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to email me on:
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Best Wishes

Bill

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