

Parish Report – Sent on behalf of Cllr Andrew Jamieson

6th December 2024

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 guidance marks a substantial shift from those made as recently as July 2023. 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 the council continues to work closely with all parties involved to find a positive resolution, we believe that it is up to the two relevant Secretaries of State, for Transport and the Environment, one of whom is releasing funds for the road while the other is issuing notices to stop it.

This collaboration underscores the council's commitment to delivering the Norwich Western Link, a crucial infrastructure project that will bring immediate benefits to residents living or working in the north and West of the city and long-term economic benefits to the region. 'Economic benefits' are not some vague aspiration: without hard infrastructure to get people, goods and services about, Norfolk is already losing as new businesses shy away from our poor transport links while successful businesses move away, unable to scale up locally.

Norfolk Coast Path (Charles III English Coast Path- Works between Hunstanton and Wells:

Since being appointed chair of Norfolk Trails in 2020, I have focussed on funding and upgrading this important stretch of the Coastal Path. This is what we have done and what is scheduled next:

Hunstanton: Beach Huts (January 2025) – we will be re-establishing the width of the path behind the beach huts near the RNLI launch site. This will involve supporting the banks behind the beach huts and adding 'post and rope' between the trail and the huts, providing a safer route for walkers and protecting the heritage features of the area. The work will start mid-January.

Holme (January/February 2025): a short stretch of boardwalk is starting to deteriorate along the Coast Path and we will be aiming to close the path to enable its removal in

January 2025. We need ecological assessments before continuing with this work, which are being progressed. Further along the trail, there has been additional coastal erosion and we would like to create an amended diversion in collaboration with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust. We are requesting that the landowner cuts back the vegetation where it is encroaching on the trail.

Holme/Thornham (completed November 2022): The Holme boardwalk was completed in 2022, improving access for a wider range of people, with an updated boardwalk, increased width, passing places and viewing platforms which include sleeper benches. The Carstone path on the floodbank between the new boardwalk and Thornham has been repaired by our partners in the Environment Agency where it had become rutted and difficult to travel on for wheelchair users and pushchairs. This was funded through Natural England's underspend for that financial year.

Brancaster (completed May 2024): an upgraded 2km stretch between Brancaster and Brancaster Staithe was officially opened in September 2024. The old, deteriorating boardwalk was replaced with a much wider structure with benefits for both people and nature. With equity of access at its heart, design features included a 1.5 metres width, viewing platforms, regular and predictable seating, handrails, colour contrasting bumper strips and improved surface grip. Importantly, as it is made from Glass Reinforced Plastic, the structure will last 80+ years, reducing future maintenance and closures. The team successfully secured £1.3 million to fund the work.

Brancaster Staithe-Burnham Deepdale (completed early 2022): The trail was upgraded in 2022 with a Carstone path, to re-establish the width and improve the walked surface for a wider range of users.

Holkham boardwalk (scheduled January-March 2025): Holkham FP1 is to be replaced with a much wider structure (1.8 metres). The existing structure from Lady Anne's Drive to the beach will be upgraded with additional access features, such as colour contrasting bumper strips and grip strips. This will enable people to pass one another with ease and prevent 'step-off' into the surrounding landscape. Funding from Farming in Protected Landscapes and Defra's Access Fund has been secured to deliver the work, which will be completed by 31 March 2025.

Holkham to Wells (completed 2020): the section of the Norfolk Coast Path between Holkham and Wells was upgraded in 2020, with a new surface and accessibility improvements, as well as a new 6.75 mile circular walk. The surface was upgraded to protect tree roots and prevent puddling, opening it up to a much wider range of users. In addition, **'Stretch 4, between Hunstanton and Kings Lynn** and beyond to Lincolnshire is now open. There will be further work on 'Stretch 4' interpretation –

Snettisham to Hunstanton (late January/early February 2025): 7 creative interpretation panels will be installed in early 2025, to provide important information regarding the sensitive nature of the area. The installations have been designed to reach a wider range of people, including access features such as braille, tactile surfaces, interesting colours and shapes to reflect the local landscape and including a much more user-friendly language than traditional information panels. The installations will be funded by the Rural England Prosperity Fund (via BCKLWN), Ramble Worldwide, Natural England and Norfolk County Council.

As well as the 112 mile Coast Path, discover the Best of Norfolk: Explore 1,500 Miles of Scenic Trails for Walking, Cycling, and Horse-Riding

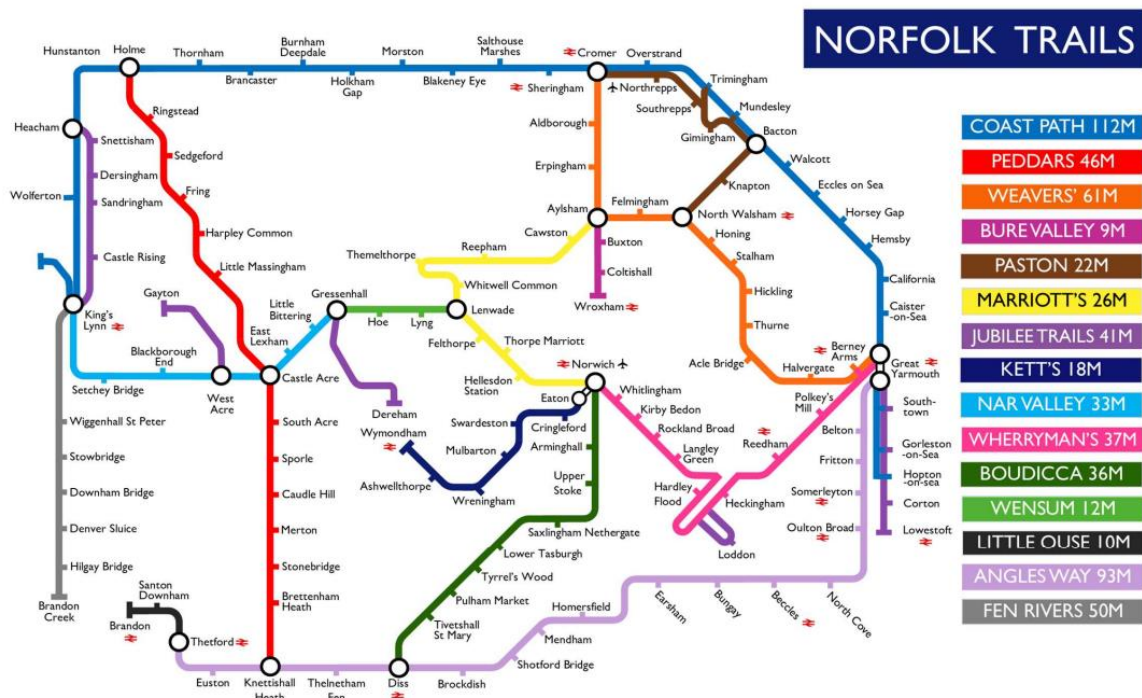
Norfolk offers over 1,500 miles of beautiful walking, cycling, and horse-riding routes, each showcasing the county's unique nature and rich cultural heritage. Whether you're exploring tranquil river valleys, historic landscapes, or scenic coastal paths, Norfolk's trails offer something for every adventurer.

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

Residents might be surprised to know that Norfolk has been ranked number one for the second consecutive year in the National Highways and Transport (NHT) survey! Yet another reason to be glad not to live in Suffolk or Cambridgeshire!

Seriously, it does reinforce our commitment to delivering the best possible roads and transport services that we can for the money.

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](#).

Winter is here - gritters move out across the county

Norfolk's gritting fleet is 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 set to lose over £5,000,000 Rural Services Delivery Grant

The Government has announced that Local Authorities are set to lose the Rural Services Delivery Grant. This, along with other cancelled grants such as Services Grant, was set up to compensate rural counties for the increased costs of providing services, such as waste disposal or school transport, across a wide area. There is no word as to how Norfolk would be compensated by alternative funding to offset / compensate for the loss of Rural Services Delivery Grant and other funding changes. Nor is there any indication Norfolk will receive compensation for pressures flowing from other Budget decisions including NLW and NI increases: these are set to cost NCC up to an additional £15 million. If very restrictive decisions around targeting new funding are made by Ministers, any additional funding for Shire Counties could be very limited. To remind you, £5 million is nearly 1% on Council tax: rural taxes are historically far higher than metropolitan as it is.....

Brancaster School

News that Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust intended to close Brancaster primary, after an extremely short consultation period, ending 3rd November, has been met with an exemplary, vocal and articulate response. While I would definitely advise vigilance, the fact is I am confident that DNEAT will re-evaluate their decision. Following the 'consultation' but more meaningfully following the opposition by everyone locally to the closure, particularly by NCC's Children's Services to closure, with support from the local MP. The next step now is that a decision is to be made by DfE, ultimately by the SoS, Bridget Phillipson.

In the meantime, NCC is continuing to speak with DNEAT. I have asked them to focus as follows: while a schools' ongoing economics is clearly a consideration, of primary concern is the quality of education. In addition, acknowledgement that this is a school that creates social cohesion for the local villages should be taken into account.

Docking will require, in NCC's view, additional capital expenditure (by DNEAT). We will also have to consider the additional expense incurred with higher transport costs.

Have your say on Norfolk savings proposals

As it seeks to agree a balanced budget for 2025/26, Norfolk County Council is asking for your views on a number of proposals to save money or raise revenue in the next financial year.

As part of the council's work to find £44.722m of savings, public consultations are now open on three of the proposals under consideration:

- Raising Council Tax
- Reducing Street Light usage
- Review of our Housing Related Support Services

Full detail of these proposals, as well as information on how residents can have their say, can be [found online](#).

To receive a hard copy of the consultation document, or request it in a different format, residents can call 0344 800 8020 or Text Relay on 18001 0344 800 8020, or email haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk.

The consultation is now open and will close on Monday 16 December 2024.

The full list of 94 proposals currently being considered is [available online](#).