

Barry Stone - County Councillor for the Loddon Division

Parish Council Report – March 2021



Key Issues

Budget Approved Council Tax 2021-22

At its meeting on 22 February 2021, **Norfolk County Council agreed to increase the council tax for 2021-22 by 3.99%.**

The financial climate in which local government operates continues to be challenging, with significant pressures of £46m across front line services. The agreed council tax increase of 3.99% for 2021-22, is within the referendum threshold set by government of 5%. The council agreed that the remaining 1% increase in the Adult Social Care precept available within the referendum limit would be deferred to 2022-23. This balanced approach recognises the financial pressures faced by local taxpayers while enabling the council to protect vital services and will help to ensure a robust and sustainable financial position in future years.

- Norfolk County Council has agreed a net budget of £439.094m for 2021-22.
- The increase in council tax amounts to £56.43 per year for a Band D property (equivalent to about £1.08 per week), and increases the County Council's share of a Band D bill to £1,472.94.
- The council has absorbed significant and ongoing cuts in central government funding, a total of £220m between 2010-11 and 2019-20, while continuing to protect social care services.
- The council is receiving additional funding in 2020-21 and 2021-22 to address the impact of COVID-19. The maximum possible resources are being provided within the 2021-22 budget, including £18.8m set aside within the revenue budget to respond to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 pressures on costs, income, and savings delivery.
- Key cost pressures in Adults and Children's social care are being driven by:
 - £28m for adult social care, including £6m for demographic pressures, £7.5m for inflation and £7m for pay and price pressures.
 - £7m for children's services, including £2m for inflation and £5m in demand and demographic pressures.
- The council is continuing to deliver savings and has plans in place to deliver £48m of savings by 2024-25. This includes £41m of savings for 2021-22.
- The council faces a remaining forecast budget gap of £92m to be closed over the period to 2022-25.
- Norfolk County Council also agreed a £538m capital budget, which pays for investment in infrastructure, property and equipment.

Museums in Norfolk. Re-opening in May following Government road map

The May date is very helpful in terms of our forward planning and, whilst we look ahead to that date with optimism, the Service will continue to offer a strong programme and a full range of services for our communities, including online support for schools and families. Our major projects, including the Norwich Castle development project and our *Kick the Dust* programme for young people, also continue very positively.

Whilst we are sadly unable to welcome visitors back physically to most of our museums until at least 17 May, we will be able to open at least part of the Gressenhall site to the public in April under the Government rules relating to outdoor attractions. Wedding ceremonies with small numbers of guests will also be resuming at Norwich Castle from the end of March:

Parish Partnership matched funding will continue 2021

2021 marks a decade for the ever-popular Parish Partnership scheme. The match funding we provide for bids from parish and town councils will see more than £715,000 spent this year on 113 locally important schemes such as new footpaths, bus shelters and speed awareness signs

Councillors annual Highway fund for their Division increased

County Councillor individual Highways fund to help local highways projects in their Division

Increased from £6,000 to £10,000 per Division

Projects to plant more trees in your area are certainly top of list of possible uses of this funding

National Census will take place the end of March

This is done every 10 years and ensures that population figures are accurate and the demographics so that the country can plan schools, housing, social care needs and infrastructure etc etc

Both online and hard copies of forms will be in place and more publicity will highlight when and what we are all required to do.

Covid 19

We are at last on the road to recovery with the roll out of vaccines continuing at rapid pace.

800 in one day at my local centre in Poringland. Despite comments that people are being invited to centres outside their area, this is an option but all will be offered a centre near them if they do not want to travel. I was offered a choice of 4 including Long Melford! That is one way of seeing the area outside our lockdown locality!! We were then offered Poringland or Norwich.

It is working and numbers of case and hospital admissions rapidly reducing

Well done Great Britain

Housing boost for people with disabilities

Investment

181 supported housing units are set to be developed in Norfolk, to help people with disabilities live more independent lives.

The county council is proposing to invest £9 million - £18 million of capital to develop supported, adapted and specialist housing over the next 10 years, to improve people's lives, reduce hospital admissions and reduce care costs by £1.9 million per year.

The council is proposing the investment as the current care market is not developing this kind of housing, without support.

The types of housing required are:

- Housing for those with complex needs. Suitable housing will be bespoke and built to a very high specification to meet those needs.
- Short term accommodation for those who may need support to adjust to independent living. This may include young people with care and support needs who require a training or enablement environment in order to prepare to live more independently
- Long term supported accommodation for those who may require dedicated, supported or adapted accommodation, with long term support, in order to live as independently as possible in the long term

Norfolk libraries to scrap late fees for children as part of post-pandemic reading push

Alongside the removal of late fees, Norfolk's children will also be offered free and easy to use membership to the county's e-library. The library service will work with schools to give each child the opportunity to access a wide range of e-books, audio books, magazines and comics.

This follows a successful pilot in 5 schools in the county and a significant growth in the usage through 2020/21 which has seen children's e-book use grow by 166%.

Later in 2021 the library service will also launch a '1,000 books before school' reading challenge that will be aimed children aged 0-5.

The reading challenge will also mark key achievement milestones by awarding certificates as each family reaches at set number of books.

This will build on the book start scheme that already offers free books and information about the benefits of reading for each parent and the opportunity to sign up to the library.

Flooding Resilience Committee - Chaired by Lord Dannatt

The first meeting has established the main agencies involved and plans are developing at pace to look at causes and co-ordinated responses and prevention

My Division lies predominantly along the Waveney Valley and has experienced significant flooding and damage to property, roads and caused distress and deep anxiety. Many have worked hard together to help those who have suffered damage with strong commitment and co-ordination between Parishes on both sides of the County Boundary.

We have to work together, both sides of the County divide. He has listened and will do just that. As a military man I know he will do as he says and they have already bid for £6m of government funding to identify sites across Norfolk and Suffolk for flood resilience projects.

The four steps for easing restrictions are:

- Step 1 – the priority is to ensure that all children and students return safely to face-to-face education in schools and colleges from 8 March.
- Step 2 – which will be no earlier than 12 April, will see the opening of non-essential retail; personal care premises such as hairdressers and nail salons; and public buildings, including libraries and community centres.
- Step 3 – which will be no earlier than 17 May, the Government will look to continue easing limits on seeing friends and family wherever possible, allowing people to decide on the appropriate level of risk for their circumstances.
- Step 4 – which will take place no earlier than 21 June, the Government hopes to be in a position to remove all legal limits on social contact. Before Step 4 begins, the Government will complete a review of social distancing and other long-term measures that have been put in place to cut transmission.

Don't miss your chance to spend some time on you

Monday is the start of March and Winter is finally coming to an end. With this comes the final month of our Wellbeing Over Winter workshops. They've gone down a storm, so don't miss your last chance to take part before the clocks spring forward at the end of the month. Click the links to find out more and book onto a session:

- [Yoga morning and evening](#)
- [Meditation and relaxation](#)
- [Introduction to family history](#)
- [Tracing the history of your house](#)
- [Observational drawing](#)
- [Creative writing](#)

I hope this information is helpful and please do share it with local residents and members of your community who would find it helpful.