

LOCAL PLAN SUBMISSION

The new North Norfolk Local Plan has been formally submitted to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for independent examination. The Inspector will identify various modifications for discussion and will invite interested parties to participate and have their say. The Plan sets out updated planning policies to govern how land is used and what can be built and where. It is a significant milestone towards ensuring the Council leads on where and how development takes place. The new Plan will assist the Council to maintain its exceptional record in defending appeals and support sustainable decision making across all types of planning applications.

The relevant documents are viewable on the Council's website www.north-norfolk.gov.uk/localplan.

BACTON ENERGY HUB

Proposals have been announced through the Capital Hydrogen and Hydrogen Valley projects which would see the Bacton Energy Hub being developed as a production site for processing hydrogen and the capture and storage of carbon. The Council has commissioned a report into possible new job opportunities and projects to support UK energy security and Net Zero carbon targets.

COASTAL EROSION PREVENTION

Further rounds of public consultation and engagement were undertaken for the Cromer Phase 2 and Mundesley Coast Protection Schemes due to be commenced this year and the Council has undertaken work to deliver its new Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme to set out how coastal local authorities, partners and communities will enable communities and business to move away from coastal risk areas in the long term.

PLANNING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Elements of the new improved service are being implemented and this will allow greater self-service in understanding the progress and status of applications at any given time. It will provide more engagement with town and parish councils and also with planning agents. Planning performance against national performance indicators and neighbouring Norfolk authorities remains comparable and competitive at this time.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

The new refuse and recycling collection service model introduced by Serco created problems which highlighted shortcomings in how complaints from residents were handled by our telephone service. High call volumes and low levels of response times were recorded. Since this time there has been a necessary marked improvement in our customer contact response and a new service level dashboard has been introduced and is being monitored weekly.

GLAVEN VALLEY RURAL CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Thanks to the quality of responses to our extended public consultation earlier this year the Conservation and Design Team have engaged Purcell Consultants to revise the Draft Appraisal in time for the Working Party to consider probably in either August or September. The Council are consider a further three week consultation only with responders to the last consultation. Details will be released as soon as the final draft is prepared for publication.

COMPLAINTS TO THE OMBUDSMAN

Complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman against the Council in 2022/23 totalled 11 with one outstanding decision and the other 10 closed with no action compared to 2021/22 when there were 10 referrals and one in which the Council was found to be at fault.

APPEAL DECISION RE ARCADY AT CLEY

The Planning Inspector delivered the decision last month following a 3-day hearing in January and ruled that the main residence had been constructed in breach of the original planning conditions. The property must be demolished by no later than October 2024. The decision grants permission for an annex building and swimming pool to remain. The Council will endeavour to work with the owners to deliver the required outcome from this decision. This has been a long-running and challenging process for all concerned but in particular it vindicates the judgement of our Legal, Planning and Enforcement teams on the Council to pursue this matter to such a conclusive outcome.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH

Council tax bills have been issued on 55,000 accounts following the adoption of the 2023/24 budget in February which introduced a modest 3% rise in the District Council Charge ring-fenced for cost of living support programmes. Another strong performance by the Revenues Team achieving a Council Tax collection rate for 2022/23 of 98.26% against a target of 92% and an NNDR collection rate of 99.25% against a target of 99.2%.

Continued strong performance in areas of core service delivery and in key Corporate Plan objectives and projects despite greater focus by the People Services Team on the Council's response to the cost of living pressure because of increased demand for advice and support and from the homelessness service. The Council has coped well with cost and contract inflation in the delivery of some services and projects namely the refuse and recycling contract, North Walsham Heritage Action Zone programme and also remuneration increases for Council staff.

PURCHASE OF WASTE COLLECTION VEHICLES

The Council own the fleet of refuse collection vehicles and Serco have a contract to operate them to collect our domestic and trade waste. At the time of writing the Council are looking at ordering 2 new vehicles at a cost of £450,000. The alternatives of hiring vehicles or purchasing pre-owned vehicles do not represent good value for money. The Council will decide next week on whether to borrow £335,000 and using a revenue contribution of £50,000. Both commercial and garden waste services have seen significant increases in customers and income growth over the last few years giving a £700,000 increase in income in the last 4-5 years. The extra vehicles will enable Serco to manage collection rounds more effectively and to complete rounds in a timely manner and improve missed bin performance in the longer term.

TEMPORARY LETTING ACCOMMODATION - GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

As the Planning Service portfolio holder, I have instigated a response to two separate but related consultations firstly on the introduction of a new national registration scheme for homes used as temporary letting accommodation. The Council supports the proposal which would help bring Air B&B safety standards into line with traditional guest houses. The second consultation outlines options for introducing new planning controls to create a new use class. This means a separate use class for temporary letting accommodation which would be classed as a different use from a permanently occupied dwelling and as such would be a material change of use for which planning permission would be required. None of the provisions would apply retrospectively so would have no impact on current owners using properties for various types of letting accommodation.

Thank you for reading this report.

Councillor Andrew Brown