

DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT FOR MELTON CONSTABLE PARISH COUNCIL – JANUARY 2024

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The Government have issued the new 2023 NPPF which allows councils to reduce the numbers of new properties where meeting target figures from government would change the character of a given area or result in homes built on prime agricultural land. This follows a shift in emphasis to make the 300,000 national housebuilding no longer mandatory as a target. Council must aspire to deliver these numbers but will not be penalized if they fail. It will also be more difficult for planning committees to block developments which are approved in principle by planning officers.

Affordable Rural Housing

Rural homelessness has increased by 40% since 2018-19. It's surprising that half of all parish councils are not covered by rules preventing resale of affordable housing at market prices or as second homes (referred to as section 157 restrictions). Redefinition of "affordable housing" is long overdue. Governments need to link new affordable homes for sale or rent to local average incomes to improve delivery of truly affordable homes. Resale restrictions need to apply to parishes with less than 3,000 population as well as larger rural villages and towns.

Holt Planning Forum Event

The Planning Authority are staging a public evening event at The Venue Community Centre on the 2nd February following on from similar events in Stalham and Wells. It will inform about the different processes in planning with senior officers followed by an opportunity to ask questions.

Planning Skills Delivery Fund

The Council have successfully bid for grant funding of £100,000 from government to appoint additional staff to tackle historical backlog cases and bring them to a conclusion. Many cases have been delayed by the severe impact of nutrient neutrality restrictions which continue to delay new developments.

Call for Affordable Housing Sites

The Housing enabling team are circulating requests to all parish councils to identify sites for affordable housing either owned by parish or town councils, privately owned land available, potential landlords and whether setting up Community Land Trusts for affordable housing. More information is available from Anna Clarke NNDC Housing Enabling Officer on 01263 516428 or anna.clarke@north-norfolk.gov.uk.

Bank Hub

Government is proposing to create 350 bank hubs nationally to replace the swinging branch closures (6000 since 2015). They are intended to take the place of the last bank branch closing in communities to support businesses handling cash and provide in person banking for members of the public who need it. Cash Access UK is planning to open 2 hubs from next year to meet a target of 300-350 nationwide. Rest assured I will be lobbying for a bank hub in Holt in future.

Fakenham Sports Centre

Full Council welcomed the Government funding of £9.856million awarded towards the cost of the new Fakenham Leisure and Sports Hub project. The funding will allow plans for the new facility to be taken forward in the coming months. Council approved the establishment of a Capital Budget of £11million for the Fakenham Leisure and Sports Hub project within the Capital Programme.

Briston Ward By Election

The Liberal Democrats successfully retained the Briston seat on 7 December with 342 votes versus Conservatives 274, Green Party 64 and Labour 15 with 695 votes cast on a 33.6% turnout. This maintains 24 Lib Dems, 12 Tories and 4 Independents on the Council decided in the May elections. An election was called due to the ill health of the Lib Dem councillor leading to her resigning for medical reasons.

Waste Recycling Charges

In January the Council will abolish charges to recycle small items of household waste following the announcement by government last June that some charges introduced 5 years ago to which the Lib Dems objected would be ended. This will hopefully reduce the incidents of fly-tipping by rogue cowboy waste collectors. Sadly, this will mean a reduction in revenue to the Council in very challenging financial circumstances.

Local Government Funding Settlement

December 19: Government announced the central rate support grant will be capped at 6.5% for the 2024-25 financial year which means cuts in real terms and will put some pressure on NNDC to increase council tax rates from next April. As you will be aware, more than a decade of savage funding cuts has left all councils under severe financial pressure. NNDC will be forced to make cuts to discretionary services (ones which councils whether to provide or not) whilst preserving mandatory statutory services (like planning, housing homeless). Nowadays funding is delivered via ad hoc single year settlements instead of 3-year funding tranches as used to be the case which makes forward financial planning virtually impossible.

Homelessness Crisis

The leader of the Council Tim Adams has cross-party support in writing to Government to highlight the immense pressure on the Council's finances caused by the 40% upturn in demand in the last 3 years for temporary accommodation. It costs £700 per week to put people in bed and breakfast accommodation and only £98 can be claimed back from the Government.

The net cost of the Council meeting its statutory requirement to provide temporary accommodation has consequently risen from **£713,000** in 2022 to 2023 to a projected figure of **£1 million** in 2023 to 2024.

Some relevant figures to demonstrate the extent of the problem are 2488 families on the housing list, 572 are either already homeless or about to be (182 under threat, 157 in unsuitable or unfit housing and 236 in need of moving on medical or disability grounds) 65 families currently in temporary accommodation.

Local Plan Progress

The dates for consultation with the public have been released and are scheduled for hearings in 3 separate weeks between 21 January and 6 March. The Planning Inspector has identified various matters, issues and questions for more detailed consideration at the hearings.

Thank you for reading this Report.

All the best for New Year.

CLLR ANDREW BROWN

1/1/24