

DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT FOR MELTON CONSTABLE PARISH COUNCIL – MARCH 2024

Waste Collection Changes

From 8th April 2024 there will be day/week changes to refuse collections for most residents. There will also be changes to the garden and trade waste collection rounds. There are several reasons why this is being done. The first, is that the location in Aylsham where the recycling waste is deposited is changing. The garden waste collections have not been reviewed for some years and have grown substantially to the point we have added a new freighter and round for this. Residents will be notified of any changes throughout March. If there are any missed collections then please report these in the normal way after waiting 24 hours. <https://forms.north-norfolk.gov.uk/outreach/missedbin.ofml> or call Serco direct 0330 109 9220.

Food Waste Plans

There has been some media attention lately around the introduction of food waste collections. The government had announced that it would fund the start-up costs for this; for food caddies and vehicles, however their valuation of this is significantly lower than we require and could leave us with a shortfall of over £1m. We have gone back to DEFRA with evidence that their sums don't add up and hopefully we will be able to introduce the service without having to burden our ratepayers with the costs of its introduction. More on this to follow as it develops.

Council Tax Changes

The annual budget Full Council on 21 February set the rates for next financial year. It is unfortunately necessary to use some Council reserves and to increase discretionary charges to balance the books which is a legal requirement. District council tax will need to increase by 2.99% and County Council tax by 4.99% (the maximum permitted). Several discretionary services have been withdrawn as a result like the former Big Society Fund, Repairs Grants have been suspended and public toilets sold or closed due to the financial pressures on Councils nationally.

Flood Protection Reduction

The Government's Environment Agency (EA) has announced 20% cuts in funding for river flood defences meaning tree planting and wetland habitats will be hardest hit. In times of dire need to manage the defences against the climate change challenge to our habitats this is a real concern for conservation across our district. The EA national target was to protect 336,000 homes by 2027 but due to the cuts this has been reduced to 200,000. Small developments in rural villages are particularly vulnerable with new build development still being allowed on flood plains.

Holt Bank Hub

Pleased to announce that the Council are supporting the Banking agency, Link, to source premises to install a bank hub so each bank can visit on different days in the same premises to deliver a full range of banking services. We will expedite any full planning application for this purpose.

Planning Appeal Delays

The Council continues to be afflicted by a worsening delay in appeals by written representations being decided by the Planning Inspectorate taking 58 weeks (up from 55) against the recommended

target of 16-20 weeks. The recent change to withdraw a free re-submission of a refused application will lead to more appeals and worsening delay.

Biodiversity Net Gain

All planning permissions for housing, industrial and commercial development with a few exceptions will have to deliver at least 10% net gain in diversity from 12 February. It will also be required for small sites from 2 April. After Brexit rules on nature protection, water quality, clean air and environmental protections were at risk, so the Environment Act 2021 is intended to fill that gap. In future there will be a section assessing the need in every Council planning report on applications.

Unspent Housebuilding Fund

The Government £4.2 bn Housing Infrastructure Funding intended to boost local council housebuilding remains 69% unspent 6 years on from its creation in 2017. When pressed, Government admitted that work had started on fewer than 1 in 10 of the promised homes and the annual new homes target with all its implications for house prices affordability reduced from 340,000 to 270,000 nationally.

Hornsea 3 Community Fund

An annual £700k fund for the next decade has been launched this week. Details can be accessed online at grantscape.org.uk/fund/hornsea-3-community-fund. Edgefield PC can submit applications for funding as one of the parishes impacted by the construction scheme. There are 2 closing dates each year on the 8 May and 27 November with decisions announced on mid-August and mid-February respectively. A further Skills Fund of £100k and Legacy Fund of a further £100k will also be available. Carbon reducing improvement schemes for village halls and environmental community projects like the current re-wilding scheme would be eligible with no match funding required. Grants from £500 to £75,000 are on offer subject to conditions which need to be carefully considered.

Local Government Funding Crisis

As more and more councils warn that they will be unable to balance their books, many people feel a lack of trust in local government largely due to inadequate funding. However, the pending change in government of whatever persuasion presents an opportunity to reset the relationship between local and central government. We need to stop the wasteful and inefficient system of competitive funding bids and go back to multi-year funding settlements as recommended by the independent Local Government Association. If central government doesn't trust local councils to deliver, no one wins.

Local Plan Examinations

Two of the three arranged hearings have been held to examine the policies proposed in the draft Local Plan by the Planning Inspector. The classification of settlements and criteria for determining which villages are small or large growth ones, the strategy to expand the market towns for delivery of the Government housing target, suitability of site allocations, population growth predictions, industrial and brownfield sites have all been considered in some detail. One further session is scheduled for early March and then the Inspector will submit his findings and ask questions to amend the plan in April or May. The final decision will be announced during the summer.

Thank you for reading this report.

