

Marshland South Division Report

Norfolk County Council

2021-22

Cllr. Chris Dawson

Dear all,

The first 12 months as my tenure as your representative at Norfolk County Council seems to have passed so quickly, it only feels like yesterday when all those leaflets were being pushed hopefully through doors across the division.

In making this first year report, I would firstly like to give thanks, and pay due acknowledgement to all Parish Council Members, past and present, who have not only made me feel both most welcome and respected, but who have been kind enough to embrace my personal approach to matters – for this I am most grateful, thank you.

Furthermore, I have been fortunate to enjoy the support of all Parish Council Chairs, all have whom have been receptive & engaging, and keen to support my efforts, again I thank you.

In fairness, I have to save particular praise for our clerks, they have been magnificent, sometimes when things had become particularly challenging... always available at the end of the phone, providing regular updates and insights, and displaying great patience when under pressure – something which has greatly assisted me in developing relationships with the authority's officers. A special thank you.

During my initial period there have been one or two 'ups and downs', Parish Council wise, and I'm pleased that we have some great volunteers, who have displayed great stoicism at times, and we've come through these trials stronger and better equipped, very well done, you know who you are.

A final thanks to all for indulging and embracing my experiments to change the way in which previous incumbents may have approached the role, and for appreciating my reasons why. Without this support I would not have been able to become involved in so many projects, local issues, and County Council life in general, whilst retaining a degree of sanity.

Despite Covid restricting contact in the early months, my committee roles at NCC have enabled me to both develop my understanding of council process, and make contacts, and build relationships – something which I had set out to do, in order to better inform and support my actions within the division.

I'm still getting the grips with the myriad of County Council responsibilities and roles, and the mechanism employed to manage these. One thing which has become evident is the fine balancing act in respect of funding, and the growing demands upon the authority – it really is a matter of more of one thing leads to less of another.

Without doubt, being a part of the Conservative administration has also helped; officers well understand the direction of travel at County Hall and appreciate that County Councillors benefit from carrying the collective support of numbers. Although all officers I have come whom I have come into contact with have been refreshingly supportive, efficient and effective, I do feel that being part of the controlling Group at County Hall has a significant impact.

In the future I would like to take advantage of the opportunities presented to me to expand my committee experience, for a wider understanding of council operations, however a combination of personal, business, and large divisional issues current preclude this – there are only so many hours in the day.

It is worth noting that Marshland South division is one of the largest in Norfolk, with 9 Parish Councils and 12 villages, prior to the proposed boundary changes.

In common with colleagues across the county, highways matters are the most frequently raised for attention. I have found it relatively easy to develop a relationship with the officers in both King 's Lynn and County Hall and feel that we have a good appreciation of each other, which has lead to issues being rectified, and proposals being brought forwards, sooner than would have been expected. I hope to continue to build on this, and the quarterly clerk/officer meetings should aid this further. In addition, we are still working on a format for recording/accessing updates to proposed works, in order that aa better understanding may be provided as to why a particular issue has not been resolved, saving all time. Communication!

As perhaps should be expected different villages experiences differing levels of requirement for support, and this I appreciate will ebb and flow over the years. Prior to getting elected, I had initiated an investigation of the age-old Wash Rd closure issue at Welney, which fortunately drew that support of the Council

Leader, Andrew Proctor. So, in this instance, I did hit the ground running on becoming the representative for the village. As an update on this, and other matters:

Welney Wash Road

Countless meetings over the past 12 months have lead us to a point where an appraisal and feasibility study have taken place, resulting in 3 suggested schemes coming forwards, all to ensure that, post-delivery, the road would remain open year-round, and be 'future-proofed against Climate Change.

Last Friday I met with our local MP, Liz Truss, who took time out of a hectic schedule to meet with me to discuss the way forwards. Thus far the work has been funded by NCC and via Lord Dannatt's Strategic Flood Alliance – even tho' it isn't technically a flood defence issue.

To take matters to the point of a Business Case to present to government, in respect of the battle for project funding, we need climate modelling information. Unfortunately, the E.A. will not be in a position to provide this for at least 5 years, and perhaps 10, so we need to commission a private report, but who's to pay? This, and the final funding source is now in the hands of Liz.

Please bear in mind that this project is to protect the A1101 over the next 20.30 years+, and the works needs to be pursued now, to even get close to delivering a built-out solution by 2032.

Liz also agreed to speak to Lord Dannatt, in respect of a recent meeting with Michael Gove on the matter, and to press Mr. Gove on the Levelling Up agenda, something which I am also undertaking personally.

Regular reports go through to the Working Group at Welney Parish Council, and I would like to especially thank them for their efforts and support.

Proposed Incinerator - Wisbech

Matters are moving apace in respect of our understanding of the process, protocols, and involvement of NCC in this matter. Throughout, my personal position has been one of no objection to incineration, but objection to the location of the proposal, on infrastructure grounds. I have also suggested a more suitable site adjacent to the mothballed Gas Turbine Powers Station at Sutton Bridge.

As this is a National Infrastructure Project the only official and formal input that the NCC will have is in respect of preparing a Local Impact Report, as consultees. Even then, 'impact' may only relate to the development within that local authority's area – this means that they can only report on any impact which the installation of the cabling will have, as it passes through Norfolk to Walpole Sub-station. This is the only 'development' relating to the proposal, within the boundary of Norfolk. There is no facility here to address highways impact, as this comes under the remit of National Highways, and air quality etc. will fall under the Local Impact Report of BCKLWN.

Notwithstanding, I have continued to pursue a statement from the County Council, reflecting concerns for the A47 in this part of Norfolk - one which reflects the statements and press-releases issued over the last 12 months, some of which referencing this as being the gateway to Norfolk, and a vital business link access route. As an update, I am now advised that NCC have agreed to issue a statement in early June – I will keep all informed.

I do appreciate their reasons for not jumping the gun on this, particularly as much final detail of any application was unavailable and would be clearly necessary for calm and sound judgement.

At my meeting with Liz we also discussed the current situation, and a plan going forwards and I expect a statement from her office soon – an application is expected in May.

Marshland St James

We have been successful in securing funding for a speed reduction through the village, and agreed improvements to the Smeeth Road/School Road junction, including additional speed control during school times. I would like to thank members, and the clerk Neil for their support in this.

We were also fortunate to achieve a resolution to an issue at Rungay's Bridge, and secure further support in monitoring/improving this important link over the Middle Level.

Welney

Apart from the obvious we have had other matters to focus on in the village, and I have been pleased with the way that highway improvements have progressed, particularly the signage. Still works to do, however we're moving in the right direction. Trees, it was a pleasure to assist with trees!

Walsoken

Some minor highways issues for me, however most have been managed wonderfully by the respective clerks. We did see a new bus shelter progress, and a tree miraculously trimmed itself over night – thanks extend to Cllr Kirk for his assistance in that.

Stow Bridge & Barroway Drove

For the most part I have only been able to assist in advice and guidance, however the obvious issue here has been one of potholes & road damage. I do hope residents feel that I am working on this issue, personally I feel that the NCC Highways response to date has been good – however I do appreciate that some may differ from that view! Work still to be done here, and I am closely monitoring.

Downham West

I feel that the members of Downham West have given more to me than I have them, so far – always a warm welcome, and often a chuckle, or two. It was so very disappointing that we could not progress with renovations to the bus shelter, however, let's have another crack over the next 12 months.

Nordelph

Again, there hasn't been a great deal which I have been able to assist with thus far (apart from trees!) However, we do have an old and complicated Right of Way issue here which I have started preliminary work on – something for me to report on next year, I hope. We also need to try again in respect of the bus shelter; it troubles me every time I pass schoolchildren standing out in the Fen elements, feeling miserable, even before they've even got to school!

Upwell, Three Holes, Lakesend.

Following on with the PROW theme, there has been an interesting challenge at Dodd's Stile in the village. Direct action is currently in process, and I am expecting NCC to resolve this in court, in due course. I'm appreciative of the time and patience offices have shown me in fielding all my questions on this matter.

I was pleased to assist in resolving a messy outstanding problem at the playing field, and to respond to villagers concerns in respect of the signage at Tointons Drove.

It was also a pleasure to attend the Parish's first 'surgery' at Lakesend; I found this really useful, and hopefully results will follow, particularly in respect of the bus shelter and signage.

The hedging opposite the Academy has been managed, for the time-being, and work is still continuous in the background to establish and agree who will be responsible for managing this land in the future.

Having inspected the slippage issue along parts of Well Creek with the NCC Director of Highways and Waste, it was agreed that an action plan should be put in place. To date it has proved difficult in getting the E.A. to the table, and I will need to increase my input to advance this matter.

Outwell

Apart from monitoring some minor highways issues, members have worked well with their clerk to manage, although I did feel the need to secure some additional, safety, works along Hall Road – something which I am still monitoring.

I have sought to support & encourage the industry of members in terms of their search for new burial space, and in addressing walking access issues. To date I have secured funding towards a feasibility study for crossings over the A1101 & A1122, and have managed to get this onto the list of proposed county schemes, albeit a considerable way down. I will continue to support the parish in this goal, and have recently handed a letter from the council to Liz Truss.

In addition to this, I am keen to support villagers' ambitions to deliver a new footbridge over Well Creek.

Emneth

Not a great deal to report on my home patch, it must be a case of Parish Council members kindly giving me an easy ride though my first year, for which I'm grateful. It could also be a case of not wanting to be seen to favour the village, so having got that out of the way in the first year....

If I had one wish for the village, however, it would be that some resolution could be found for the school parking issue – it does strike me that only ambitious (and costly) thinking will ever resolve this.

Finally, I must thank our Borough Councillors, Vivienne, Colin, Chris, Harry, and Brian for their encouragement and support, and for always being available – greatly appreciated.

If I have missed anyone, or anything, then please do accept my apologies; I've wracked what's left of my brain, and this is all I could think of!

Best wishes for 2022/23.

Chris.