

Divisional Report Marshland South Division

May 2025

If I thought that the role couldn't become any more demanding then I was wrong, however with the demands have come the rewards!

A very complicated and varied 6 months, with Local Government Reorganisation & Devolution both featuring significantly.

In terms of my county roles, I have continued to support the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, in addition to my roles at Deputy Cabinet Member Highways & Deputy Cabinet Member. Environment.

From this blend my county focus has been on the plight of agriculture and industry in respect of the future supply of water, particularly against a backdrop of an ever-challenging extraction environment. In addition to this I have been instrumental in supporting the drive for an energy strategy for Norfolk, both in terms of monitoring of the ever-increasing infrastructure proposed to deliver solar energy etc, along with the associated grid development, whilst looking to balance this against the future needs of the county & new technologies.

Other detailed conversations have encompassed the 'wasted' waters of the Ouse Washes each year, and the potential for the production of Green Hydrogen in the west of the county.

I have been writing this report throughout April constantly amending it as new projects are coming forwards. Some of these have been years in the making, and just like buses they all seem to be arriving at the same time.

A note which I feel it is important to add to this report involves the funding required to deliver various projects around the division. Whilst it is entirely understandable for a resident to question the delivery of, say, a new bus shelter, when the highway all around it requires resurfacing, it is important to understand the mechanisms behind the funding streams delivering new infrastructure and infrastructure improvements. When money is made available under various bidding processes by the prevailing government, staff at Norfolk County Council set to work to prepare a case for this funding to come into the county.

There are strict and stringent requirements on how this money is spent, and therefore we often are in a situation we're we are not necessarily spending money in an area which we, as a local authority, would wish to prioritise; however, we must pursue every opportunity to make any form of improvement.

In essence, we look to attract as much funding into the county as possible, whereupon I then work to attract as much of that funding into Marshland South Division, and the west of the county more widely.

Following on from this point, I have been pressing for some time for contracts for local works to be awarded to local companies (subject to best value) employing local staff. I'm very pleased to say that a number of projects referred to in this report will be supporting local business.

A colleague and I had been promoting improved focus for funding dedicated to 'Loneliness & Isolation', in order that local members of NCC have more control over its allocation. I am hopeful that a new initiative will launch soon, but with a wider scope to support clubs & organisations in the community – I will eagerly keep all updated.

Report by parish:

Downham West

The smallest of the parishes within the division, and always a joy to attend their meetings. The highlight of the most recent period has been the members throwing their support behind the bird and bat box initiative. Earlier this year they were presented with a bat box, which we then took a long to a local cemetery which has a designated nature area. With wood supplied via the initiative, the local Men's Shed had made a variety of bird boxes and bug houses which were then installed within the woodlands of the cemetery. Thanks to the council for the great support of this project, it was very pleasing to visit again within a few weeks to observe much interest in the new homes. On this note, thanks too to all of the parish councils which have engaged in this project – one to pick up again on in the future.

A resident recently raised the subject of highway speed through Salter's Lode, and the condition of the highway surface, this has been a subject which was previously visited by the parish council, and I explained that the best course of action would be to request that the matter be added to the P.C. agenda once again, whereupon I would be happy to support the council in any decisions which were subsequently taken.

Parish councils are always willing to consider adding matters to their agendas for wider & open discussion.

Nordelph

It has been a great pleasure to support the activities within the village, which appear to be ever increasing, particularly due to a loyal and determined band.

The parish has also erected a donated bat box and continues to put energy into a number of other projects in the village - the Christmas event was particularly moving, and so very successful.

Since presenting to the parish council the only possible solution to repairing the railings alongside Well Creek they have embraced the idea with enthusiasm and undertaken the work necessary to deliver this. With funding from Norfolk County Council, and much work by the Parish Clerk, we should shortly see these works underway. Clearly this will have a significant impact on both the appearance of the village and the enjoyment of the waterway.

After so many years we are now so very close to reinstating the link on Footpath 7. A new culvert is scheduled, and all matters are now in line for delivery. Significant funding will be provided by NCC, just as soon as all necessary approvals have been signed off, and it is hoped that we could see action by the end of the year. Thanks to all for your patience in this – I appreciate that my updates have at times may have appeared contradictorily.

Another long-standing issue being the hedging adjacent the A1122 coming into the village from Outwell. Action will shortly be taken, with a further proposal for the delivery of signage warning drivers of the likely hazard of vehicles waiting to turn right on to Silt Road, over the bridge.

Welney

Another village with so many active residents and parish council members. The outcome of the Hurn Drove resurfacing to access the William Marshall Centre is impressive indeed & a further ambition is now to link this to a footway/running track around the playing field. I am currently exploring funding opportunities.

It has been very pleasing to be able to support clubs and events being established and growing healthily in the village, just as it has equally been my pleasure to witness the continued and increasing support for the coffee morning at St Mary's Church, along with the wide variety of other events there, thanks to energy of the organising team.

With regards to the longstanding issue of flooding of The Causeway across the Ouse Washes, I recently revisited this issue to examine another way of addressing.

I approached a local company, which I knew to have relevant in-house skills, to ask if they would assist in preparing engineering drawings to assist me with the promotion of this idea - basically a proposal to install precast concrete culverts which could be manufactured off site, placed over the existing highway, and then a new road laid over the top.

The additional benefits would be a foot way on one side of the carriageway and as cycleway on the other. Within the last few days, I have secured funding for this initial scoping work. Updates to follow via WPC reporting & social media.

Upwell

The parish council have also taken up the initiative to take responsibility for repairing & managing the Creek railings through the village. An excellent case was prepared to attract funding from Norfolk County Council, which presented a relatively straightforward task to support and reach agreement on. I understand a contractor and has now been engaged, the funds have formally been offered, and I look forward to seeing the works completed this year.

I continue to work with officers with a view to delivering improvements at the Tointons Road and A1101 junction. Unfortunately, opportunities are at a minimum, and we have looked at 'pilot projects', however the issues on this stretch of road didn't meet the required criteria. Currently officers are examining the potential for improvement to curb radii, and a modification to the signage -one concern being sign each overload.

The issue of 'slippage' of the creek bank adjacent the A1101 has never gone away, however there are differing views regarding its urgency. I shall be working with the parish council to undertake our own monitoring of the question, which I shall look to provide funding for.

It has been rewarding to assist the organisers of the new Upwell & Outwell Youth Club (in only a small way) however I will look for opportunities to provide support going forwards.

Outwell

The parish council members have continued to pursue a number of projects, which I have been most happy to support them in delivering. A significant matter among them being their willingness to embrace my proposal to take responsibility for the improvement of the creek railings. The highways team at the parish council have successfully attracted significant funding, appointed a professional project manager, and engaged a local contractor for delivery – at the time of writing we are waiting for 'road space' to, become available in order to complete a project.

The works adjacent to Swan Bridge have now been successfully & swiftly delivered by a local contractor, with the minimum of disturbance.

We are currently working on a link from the new bus stop on Isle Road to connect with the old phone box/ Buck's Bridge. I believe that we have secured sufficient funding from Norfolk County Council to deliver a comprehensive and attractive outcome for this project. If not already fully funded, then we must be close, and I will continue to work with O.P.C. to deliver this.

The unsightly area of the infield canal opposite the old Methodist Church has been something which I have been working with the parish council on for some months. As so often in these cases it is rather complicated, however progress is slowly being made.

It is hoped that we can clear the scrub and dead trees towards the end of the year, and the project undertaken to better expose the old sluice gate winding gear, along with an information board setting out its former use and its historical position in the village.

Saving the best till last; perhaps as long as three years ago the parish council pressed me on a long-standing concern and wish for the village - namely safe crossing over the A1101 and A 1122. At the time I explained that very few crossings were delivered in Norfolk each year however I would do my utmost to press the case. As it transpired significant investment was required to prepare a feasibility study in order to prioritise any future government funding which may become available. This required a significant investment from the parish council. Members undertook due deliberation, and with what financial support that I was able muster, the decision was made to proceed - at this stage our project was 192nd on the list!

Eventually the feasibility study was completed and presented and was examined in great detail. There were elements which we either challenged or sought to add stronger detail to, which county council officers excepted and agreed. The result being that the investment made by the parish council meant we now had a project which could immediately be submitted to apply for any new monies which were released - such funding is always ring fenced for designated projects, with very specific criteria and a high deliverability score.

I kept a close eye on the 'funding pulse', and as a result an early opportunity to lobby for support of the project arrived. As a result, we are now in train to secure the new Active Travel funding to be delivered 2025/26, which will support this project through to completion. This funding still requires 'sign-off' at NCC Cabinet, and then formal approval of the recommendation from government, however I really do not see how we can fail now.

I must acknowledge the officers at NCC, who have once again provided me with full and detailed support, and I would like to pay particular thanks to the highways team members at Outwell Parish Council for working so closely and diligently with me to get to this point.

Emneth

Whilst not the resolution to every problem on the footway along the Church Road it was pleasing to secure the improvements recently made, both from an access and an aesthetic point of view. However this left us with a problem of the footpath crossing over the access to Cake Lane, a problem which has existed since I was a boy!

The issue does not just often leave a huge water obstacles for pedestrians, but recently significant water has drained back to the path, often freezing. As many will be aware the principal problem over the years has been that the lane is a private, and thus nobody has been willing to take responsibility to resolve this problem. However, by the time this report is issued I am hopeful that extensive repair will be about to be delivered. including drainage provision, to resolve this problem once and for all.

This summer we will see improvements to the road surface on Hollycroft Road, part of wider highway works in the area; however I have managed to secure more extensive works outside of the planned schedule, which will extend to actual resurfacing from Hungate Road to just past the access to the playing field. This should significantly improve this stretch of highway and certainly create a better impression when entering the village from this direction.

The passing place which I had installed on Lady's Drove, close to Chequers Corner, raised one or two issues with the I.D.B. The posts have now been removed, and the passing space will soon be extended towards the village.

Last year it struck me just how many children were waiting to catch the school bus in all weathers, and that we ought to look to try and improve the situation. When I presented this to the parish council members immediately responded positively and were keen to work to deliver a better outcome for the children.

They quickly agreed to provide a new bus shelter at the Gaultree Sq. stop, and there will be further improvements supporting this bus stop.

First up were improvements to the Fendyke stop, which members had got in train, and quickly delivered a new shelter – there will be some further improvement works at this location.

Through funding secured from a Norfolk County Council programme a new formal bus stop will be constructed on the junction of Scarfield Lane with Church Road. The ambition will then be to provide the children (or any other users) with a new bus shelter at this location too.

A further ambition for this provision for our children will be to look to establish a bus stop and shelter on Hungate Rd, this will be rather more complicated as there is limited land available to provide an adequate siting – I've opened a conversation with a neighbouring landowner, who is keen to support, where possible.

During the conversations with the parish council on the provision of bus stops for children I asked that we look to increase the size of the bus shelter in the centre of the village, which is wholly inadequate for the number of children catching the bus at this location.

Again, this idea was warmly & positively received, and members immediately commenced investigating the possibilities, recently meeting with a supplier to determine the best option available for this site. I am hopeful that this can be delivered in time for the forthcoming winter.

An additional element to the new Gaultree Square shelter will be to look to place benches on the adjacent grassed areas, and the parish council have initiated their own programme to deliver this.

Walsoken

Rather a quiet few months for my part of the parish, however the Broad End Road junction with the A47 continues at the top of the list of attention. At the time of writing, I was engaging with Norfolk County Council officers to obtain a full understanding of the residential proposals in the likely impacting the highway. My appreciation of this is that a roundabout will be required on the A47 to accommodate this; in the last few days I have been made aware that this will not now be the case. I intend to prepare a separate, detailed, update on this.

I have recently supported the Parish Council in delivering a traffic survey for the old Lynn Road. Considerable development has taken place along these highways over the last two years, and it is suggested that a reduction in the speed limit should be considered. I will continue to support the community in this.

Marshland St James

The major project for the village this year has been to explore the possibilities of delivering a footway adjacent Smeeth Road, from St John's Fen End to Trinity Rd junction.

I managed to secure the bulk of the funding required to deliver the initial feasibility study, something which is necessary in order to bid for the project. The Parish Council committed funds of their own as we talk this project forwards jointly.

The contribution from the Parish Council was non-refundable, however the principle was that once the feasibility study had been completed it would then be available to bid from the government, as and when relevant initiatives were released. After the initial work of the study was complete it was evident to me that, due to the extent of the funding required, land being unavailable and requiring compulsory purchase, accessibility to drainage meaning escalating cost imposition upon residents, that this project would be unlikely to attract funding within the timescales, and certainly not without considerable disruption within the village.

I suggested to the parish council that I may make a case to return the village contribution to the study if we acted immediately – I felt that I could lobby on the basis that the full £20k cost had not yet been spent, and ceasing the project now would be financially prudent for the community. Members of the parish council agreed and determined that I should look to recover these costs, which I am hopeful will be returned in the forthcoming weeks.

It is disappointing that we came so close to delivering this much-needed infrastructure improvement, and I will continue to support the Parish Council in achieving its ambitions for the village.

I feel that I must mention the hall, tearoom, and playing field. It is refreshing to follow the progress of the ambitions to deliver ever improved facilities for the village, the achievements really are a beacon. I particularly enjoy supporting the tearoom.

Stow Bardolph.

The proposed works to the bridge over the Relief Channel appear to be held in abeyance, which must only indicate that the temporary repair is a very satisfactory one. It remains the case that community engagement will take place prior to any future planned works.

A meeting was held with the Parish Council & NCC Highways – attended by the Director of Highways, to discuss the degree, volume & management of the diversions affecting the village. Some outcomes were agreed upon; however, it is a slow process. We can be certain that the location is now a very sensitive one as far as NCC are concerned and will be monitored & responded to as top priority.

Finally, engagement has progressed well with connecting the Stow Bridge with the Woodlakes complex; parish councillors have met with the site manager, and the operators have committed to linking the facilities by way of an internal footway, joining the village at the threshold to the playing field access. I'm hoping that these works will commence shortly. Not only will this provide a safe link to access the hospitality areas but also facilitates the invitation from the owners to the community to walk and enjoy the amenity.

Apologies, if I may have missed anything (or anyone) out.

CLlr Chris Dawson, Marshland South Division, Norfolk County Council