

**Cabinet**  
**8 April 2024**  
**Public & Local Member Questions**

	<b>Public Question Time</b>
6.1	<p><b>Question from Robert Johnson</b></p> <p>People driving dangerously on Quebec Road, Norwich are resorting to violence and assaulting one another in the street. This includes brawling, throwing bottles and verbal aggression and abuse. They mount the pavements aggressively, even when children are walking to school. What will be done to improve the safety and lives of pedestrians and residents on Quebec Road. Can I ask that this isn't dismissed as 'wokery' or 'war on motorists' or other right wing culture war distraction techniques. It's a serious issue and needs addressing with urgency.</p> <p><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</b></p> <p>I am sorry to hear of the incidents described. I will ask officers to review the location to establish whether there are highways related aspects that are negatively impacting on how Quebec Road is operating. In the meantime, instances of poor driving or aggression should be reported to Norfolk Constabulary.</p>
6.2	<p><b>Question from Dave Evans</b></p> <p>Duncan Baker MP, North Norfolk, stated in Parliament (Hansard, 5/3/24) that "Norfolk County Council is the first council in the country to ban glyphosate". Can Norfolk CC confirm that this is correct?</p> <p><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</b></p> <p>Brighton and Hove were the first Council to ban glyphosate. The County Council has not banned glyphosate.</p> <p><b>Supplementary question from Dave Evans</b></p> <p>If incorrect, what is Norfolk CC's justification for the continued use of glyphosate?</p> <p><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</b></p> <p>I understand the concerns about the use of this type of product, and we have carefully and fully considered our approach, which is set out in our Glyphosate policy here <a href="#">Glyphosate policy - Norfolk County Council</a>. Our use of glyphosate has significantly reduced over recent years.</p> <p>We are committed to minimising the use of herbicides, including those containing glyphosate, to control weeds or other undesirable plant species on our managed land, whilst still maintaining safe and healthy spaces fit for purpose and appropriate use by our communities. As set out in our policy, we will always take an integrated approach and ensure, especially where glyphosate products are used, that use is minimised and targeted to achieve agreed levels of weed management for given situations.</p> <p>We will regularly review new methods of weed management as they become available, with a view to trialling these where they offer a viable alternative to glyphosate use but do not compromise other objectives in terms of health and safety, the environment and our commitment to meeting carbon targets. Wherever possible we will not use Glyphosate</p>

based products and we will clearly state areas where glyphosate products should not be used.

It is worth noting that in areas where authorities have banned the use of glyphosate, a number are now reversing those bans because they have found that alternative products or processes are not viable or effective. For example, Brighton and Hove Council, the first local authority to introduce a ban, has now reversed this, and Cambridge County Council is reintroducing chemical weed control a year after making changes that removed it.

**6.3 Question from Paula Evans**

In February one of the biggest council pension funds in the country, West Yorkshire Pension Fund, declared that it will halt all new investments in oil and gas companies. The Norfolk Pension fund invests £81.8M in fossil fuels. What actions will Norfolk CC take to persuade the Norfolk Pension Fund to divest from fossil fuels?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance**

We cannot comment specifically on the actions of another Pension Fund and unfortunately, we do not recognise the number quoted in the question relating to the Norfolk Pension Fund. The Fund has published a clear statement on Disinvestment/Exclusion & ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance) Aspects of Investment Strategy, which sets out the approach on these issues. The Statement is available on the Fund's website [www.norfolkpensionfund.org](http://www.norfolkpensionfund.org)

**Supplementary question from Paula Evans**

Can Norfolk CC confirm that they are satisfied that the Norfolk Pension Fund is showing financial prudence and acting on its fiduciary duty?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance**

The Fund's Statement on Disinvestment/Exclusion & ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance) Aspects of Investment Strategy sets out the primary importance of its fiduciary duty when the Fund makes any investment decision.

**6.4 Question from Elizabeth Traverse**

Council tax bills for people in Norfolk will go up by 4.9%, while £42M of cuts and savings will be made as agreed by Council. How can the ongoing expenses related to the proposed Norwich Western link be justified under such circumstances?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

We know a lot of people and businesses in Norfolk are being badly affected by traffic congestion to the west of Norwich every day, and the Norwich Western Link (NWL) is the best solution to these problems. The benefits the NWL will create for Norfolk's residents, businesses and economy, and the national funding the project will bring into Norfolk, means this project remains a good investment and a priority infrastructure project for Norfolk.

**Supplementary question from Elizabeth Traverse**

Should the government contribute only 80% of the cost of construction if the NWL goes ahead, how will the shortfall be met?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

We are optimistic that government will contribute 100% of the Outline Business Case

(OBC) scheme cost and are awaiting guidance to be published by DfT (Department for Transport). If 100% of the OBC funding from DfT was not secured, the Council would fund the project in the manner detailed in the 4 December Cabinet report. The overall borrowing capacity of the Council is managed alongside the capital programme and is managed at a level that is deemed affordable.

**6.5 Question from Pollina Cant**

The Norfolk County Council's Climate Policy 2024 states "Norfolk County Council will lead by example through making its own estate net zero by 2030." 2030 is only six years away, is there sufficient urgency in the Council's plans to attain this goal?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

The council has reduced the carbon footprint of its estate by nearly 60% since 2016/17, but you are right to point out that there is much still to be done. A range of initiatives are under way to keep momentum towards reaching our 2030 target which demonstrate our seriousness in getting there. Over the past two years we have installed over 50 electric vehicle charging points across our estate – with more still to be installed - to enable the transition of the council's vehicle fleet to electric cars and vans over the coming years. We have earmarked over £20 million in our Future Ready building improvement programme that will see many of our freehold buildings become more energy efficient as well as replace gas or oil heating systems with low carbon electric heat pumps. Furthermore, by the end of 2025 we will have converted nearly our entire streetlight stock to energy efficient LED bulbs. These will help us towards hitting our stepping stone targets towards net zero by 2030, which are: a 66% reduction in our estate emissions by 2024/25, 85% reduction by 2028/29 and 90% reduction by 2030/31 with the remaining 10% offset.

**Supplementary question from Pollina Cant**

It is stated that for the 10% remaining carbon footprint in 2030/31 that suitable certified offsets will be utilised. What are the certified offsets?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

There are a growing number of certification standards being set up that give quality assurance to offsetting credits by validating the projects underpinning them as genuine and offering a real offset benefit that isn't double counted through use by another organisations. When the council looks to obtain offsetting credits, it will source credits that are appropriately certified in this way.

**6.6 Question from Becky Aro**

The Council is intent to promote green skill development to support the domestic building retrofit agenda. What specifically are the Council's plans to address the skills development?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

'Following the commissioning and production of the Green Skills Market Analysis, establishing projected/statistical skills demand of the future Norfolk workforce, the Employment & Skills Service are currently implementing the INCREEES project (Improving Norfolk Carbon Reduction and Energy Efficiency in existing Stock), funded through the Norfolk Investment Framework fund. The project work themes include the commissioning of a feasibility study for a fully costed Norfolk Net-Zero Academy and/or Norfolk training provider network. Consequential intervention will complement accelerating local training

provider provision and alternatively funded projects including the Local Skills Improvement Fund ('LSIF').

Within our collaborative regional Skills Hub arrangement with Suffolk County Council, working closely with the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), which includes the central theme of Net-zero/Green skills, we have established new sector skills groups (including Green Skills and Construction), working with the private sector to identify and articulate current and emerging skills gaps and shape local provider curriculum planning, with potential to inform Adult Education Budget delivery. Aligned to LSIP priorities and economic strategy, an example of new curriculum intent is the inclusion of retrofit assessors, advisors, and co-ordinators in the next wave of Skills Bootcamp tender specification.

In the advent of the devolved Adult Education Budget (AEB) from August 2025, E&S continue to collaborate with the AEB/Adult Skills funding programme, ensuring that Green Skills provision is prioritised with future AEB commissioning and delivery plans.'

**6.7 Question from Sarah Burston**

It is widely recognised that we are in a nature emergency. The latest State of Nature report shows how stark the problem is, with one in six species across the UK now at risk of extinction. What actions are Norfolk CC taking in our county to address this serious issue?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

There are a number of things that we are doing focussed on and around nature recovery restoring, enhancing, or protecting natural habitats, ecosystems and biodiversity.

This includes working in partnership with Suffolk County Council and the Norfolk and Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership to develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Within the Strategy we will consider how to address species recovery within Norfolk. You can read more about the work that we are doing here [Space for nature to recover and grow - Norfolk County Council](#)

**Supplementary question from Sarah Burston**

Does Norfolk CC have any specific plans to address species recovery in Norfolk?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

As well as developing a draft Norfolk Pollinator Action Plan we are working in partnership with Suffolk County Council and the Norfolk and Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership to develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Within the Strategy we will consider how to address species recovery within Norfolk.

**6.8 Question from Sarah Eglington**

January and February 2024 continued the trend of record-breaking temperatures, both in the UK and globally. What are Norfolk County Council going to do to prepare for probable heatwaves this summer, including supporting our health services and the vulnerable, but also our transport infrastructure, farmers and firefighters?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships**

Norfolk County Council has an environmental policy <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/environmentpolicy>. Within it we commit to working with key partners to ensure an adequate water supply, including exploring water harvesting

initiatives. We are in a partnership to scale up investment in nature-based solutions to tackle Norfolk's water security challenges. [Norfolk Water Strategy Programme - Water Resources East \(wre.org.uk\)](https://www.wre.org.uk)

#### Norfolk Fire and Rescue:

Following the wildfires of Summer 2022, Norfolk Fire and Rescue undertook a review and have strengthened both their prevention and response capability, NFRS have rolled out specific wildfire incident command training, reviewed resource models and have invested in wildfire PPE for all firefighters to reduce the chance of heat exhaustion. New equipment such as misting branches have also been added to new fire appliance to improve fire-fighting techniques. Collaborations with NFU and local farmers to identify water sources in rural farm locations has also been undertaken, along with engagement sessions on prevention advice.

Prevention messaging to the general public was also changed from last year to include advice on how to protect your property, as well as the usual safety messages around high risk items such as disposable barbecues and Chinese lanterns

#### Public Health

As in previous years Public Health will issue, if required, advice to people in Norfolk on how to stay safe during hot weather, based on national guidance which was updated in March 2024. [Beat the heat: staying safe in hot weather - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

#### Highways

We review data provided to us from our weather provider (similar to our winter services) with regard to road surface temperatures throughout the summer period and set up operatives to deal with particular locations identified or reported with high-temperature impacts. Our contractors will also monitor surface dressing sites delivered each year and will treat accordingly where there are any high-temperature impacts.

In addition, we constantly review new innovations in surfacing treatments, such as the use of polymer modified binders which have a greater scope to address higher temperatures.

#### **6.9 Question from Tina Johnson**

Norfolk County Council has declared that it will establish a "Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Norfolk that prioritises areas for action focusing on species, habitats, landscapes and land use of importance to Norfolk". Is there sufficient expertise within the Council to develop such a strategy?

#### **Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

We are working in partnership with Suffolk County Council and the Norfolk and Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership to develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. As well as having a dedicated project team to deliver the strategy we will use expertise from across the Environment Service in NCC, as well as experts from across the Norfolk and Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership which includes over 40 organisations.

#### **Supplementary question from Tina Johnson**

With which expert, interest, community and other groups will the Council engage with when developing the strategy?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

As well as working with the Norfolk and Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership we will be engaging with organisations, individuals and communities throughout 2024 to develop the strategy. For example, landowners and managers, Nature Conservation Organisations, Statutory Bodies, Business, Tourism, Health and Wellbeing and Access organisations. For more information, please visit [What a Local Nature Recovery Strategy is - Norfolk County Council](#)

**6.10 Question from Willem Buttinger**

Nature is in crisis: 18 local authorities have emerging Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) policies above 10%, what is the council doing to provide leadership in driving a higher ambition for BNG targets across Local Planning Authorities in Norfolk?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

Currently Norfolk County Council will be delivering the statutory minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain, but we have committed to considering a higher ambition within our new Environment Strategy which we are developing in 2024.

**Supplementary question from Willem Buttinger**

How is the council prioritising its creation of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

We are already working in partnership with Suffolk County Council and the Norfolk and Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership to develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. We are prioritising this within the Environment Service and have a dedicated project team to deliver the strategy.

**6.11 Question from Mary Curson**

As a step toward net zero, what influence can Norfolk CC have on the District Council's planning committees to ensure installation of gas boilers is prohibited in new-build housing?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

In addition to determining planning applications the District Authorities also have responsibility for setting policy standards. The opportunity for the County Council to directly affect district planning decisions on these matters is therefore extremely limited. There are opportunities for the County council to indirectly influence decision making through achieving high standards on its own development.

**Supplementary question from Mary Curson**

Can Norfolk CC put pressure on District Council planning committees to ensure solar panels are fitted to all new-build housing?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

There are no direct mechanisms for the County Council to exercise that would impact upon the level of solar panels required by the district council's planning policies.

**6.12 Question from David Curson**

With a question mark now hanging over the proposed Norwich Western Link, will the council continue to spend more of the taxpayers' money on pursuing this mis-guided adventure or will money now be spent on preparing the county for extreme weather conditions that will occur in the near future?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

The Norwich Western Link is a priority infrastructure project for Norfolk County Council and we are keen to try to find an acceptable solution to the issues that may impact the project approvals that enable us to deliver it. We are taking a balanced approach to the latest developments and will continue to review the activity that is planned on the project with a view to keeping project costs as low as possible.

**Supplementary question from David Curson**

Will the council now focus on adding to Norfolk's biodiversity rather than destroying it?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

The council's work is informed by the need to support the county's biodiversity, both as part of the Norwich Western Link and our wider work, as set out in our Environmental Policy. Projects such as 1 Million Trees for Norfolk are underway to provide better habitats for wildlife and more green spaces.

**6.13 Question from Elizabeth Hacker**

Plastic (fake) grass is environmentally damaging, a source of microplastic pollution in our waterways and contributes to biodiversity loss - nothing can live under it or on it. Will the Council remove plastic grass from schools and other areas under its control?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

We are unaware of the use of plastic grass in any property under the direct control of NCC.

**Supplementary question from Elizabeth Hacker**

Plastic grass has a lifespan of 8-10 years, at most, before being sent to landfill. What is the Council's strategy to dispose of plastic grass from their properties in an environmentally friendly manner?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

We are unaware of the use of plastic grass in any property under the direct control of NCC.

**6.14 Question from David Pett**

'Given the council leader's stance that the continuation of the project (NWL) is non-negotiable due to its status as a manifesto commitment, does this position inherently place Conservative members of the Planning Committee in a situation of conflict, particularly in terms of their ability to impartially evaluate the project's merits and potential impacts?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

No, we do not agree that this creates a blanket predetermined position. All members sitting on planning or other committees will continue to keep their interests/position with regard to pre determination under review and will take advice as appropriate.



**6.15 Question from Holly Evanbrook**

What is the council doing to screen its investments and treasury management to ensure that Norfolk council tax payers are not contributing to new fossil fuel expansion?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance**

Thank you for your question.

The Council's treasury investments are managed in accordance with the [Treasury Management Strategy](#) approved by the Full Council (see page 359). Treasury investments are only deposited with Banks, Building Societies and Money Market Funds (containing investments with banks), and as such the Council has no direct investments with fossil fuel companies (for treasury purposes, the Council does not invest in shares in the same way as the Pension Fund). It should be noted that the Council does not monitor what stance the counterparties it is investing with may take on any issues including fossil fuels. The primary principle governing the Council's investment criteria is the security of its investments, although the yield or return on the investment is also a key consideration. Please see the earlier answers for details in relation to the Norfolk Pension Fund.

**6.16 Question from Carolyn Martin**

Officers advised the Cabinet before its meeting on 4 December that the DfT reserves the right to seek repayment of any grant made if the NWL is not constructed, including the £25m already paid. But the Cabinet believes that no repayment would be due, should Natural England refuse a bat mitigation licence (if and after planning permission is granted) since this would amount to the Government destroying any chance of the NWL being built. Natural England is not an arm of Government. It is a non-departmental advisory public body accountable only to Parliament. Does the leader have independent legal advice to justify the Cabinet's view?

**Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Governance and Strategy**

No legal advice has been sought regarding funding should the Norwich Western Link not be delivered. Our primary aim is to find an acceptable solution to the bat licence issue. Should we be unsuccessful in this, we would need to discuss the next steps with the Department for Transport. Given the situation we find ourselves in, it is our view that Norfolk should not be financially disadvantaged as a result of changes in Natural England's guidance.

**6.17 Question from Dennis English**

Given that the existence of the barbastelle bat colony has been known for some time, can the Council explain why it has not given at any time any thought to formulating a 'Plan B' to mitigate the eventuality of the NWL project's failure?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

The Norwich Western Link is considered to be the best solution to the traffic problems to the west of Norwich. Engagement with Natural England regarding ecological mitigation has been ongoing over many months and this has informed the development of our mitigation proposals. The project team will continue to discuss our proposals with Natural England as part of the planning process with the aim of finding a solution which would enable the necessary protected species licenses to be granted by Natural England should planning permission be granted for the Scheme.



**Supplementary question from Dennis English**

Why, despite previous warnings, is there no contingency fund available that can be called upon to investigate and bring forward a Plan B?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

There is no contingency fund as the Norwich Western Link is seen as the best solution to address the traffic problems to the west of Norwich and the project team have been focused on getting this scheme delivered.

**6.18 Question from Louise Sheridan**

Given the recent developments and concerns surrounding the Norwich Western Link Road project, particularly regarding the protection of barbastelle bats and their "favourable conservation status," when was legal advice on how these environmental considerations might influence the project's progression sought, and if so, when was this advice obtained?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

Legal advice is provided as an integral part of the development of the scheme and the planning application submission and includes consideration of Favourable Conservation Status for known protected ecological species which has been reported as a risk to the project's delivery.

**6.19 Question from Hanna Lene Schierff**

In relation to update on and discussions of the Council's plans around the Norwich Western Link Road: Is the Council willing to consider plans for implementing more cost-effective and easy-to-implement measures to alleviate congestion and rat running in the villages reportedly affected by the issues and is the Council willing to start working on these with immediate effect to help villagers suffering from the traffic problems?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

There are no easy to implement measures which would be effective at tackling the traffic problems to the west of Norwich. The Norwich Western Link is considered to be the best solution to the traffic problems to the west of Norwich. Our focus is on trying to find a solution which would enable the necessary protected species licences to be granted by Natural England. If this is not possible, we would need to consider if other measures could be implemented but without a higher standard route in place, we would not expect these to significantly improve the existing issues and deliver all the objectives of the Norwich Western Link project.

**6.20 Question from Edward Henderson**

Will the Council leader apologise to the public for the Council submitting an Outline Business Case (OBC) to the Department of Transport whilst ignoring multiple serious warnings from the public and wildlife experts that there were potential legal issues for planning due to the proven presence of rare barbastelle bat colonies directly on the Norwich Western Link road which may now result in Norfolk County Council having wasted the £25million of central government transport funding already received and spent?

**Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance**

The importance of barbastelle bats in the area is recognised and has been a key consideration in the development of the Norwich Western Link. The new guidance was completely unexpected and there had been no indication that it was being published.

**6.21 Question from Milly Reilly**

What is the current level of domestic waste recycling across Norfolk broken down by waste category?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

In 2022/23, Norfolk's households reused, recycled and composted a total of 167,879 tonnes of waste which was 43.1% of all household waste collected. This consisted of:

- 1,497 tonnes of reuse, primarily from shops at the County Council's recycling centres as well as other local authority or community initiatives.
- 89,946 tonnes of recycling collected from the kerbside or recycling centres.
- 76,936 tonnes of composting: the food and garden waste collected directly from householders or at the recycling centre.

**Supplementary question from Milly Reilly**

Have the Council any plans to ban single use plastics from their properties and estate?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

Where possible NCC has sought to reduce waste on their estate and to encourage recycling., for example in providing biodegradable packing. NCC will continue to look at options to minimise the use of single use plastics, where practicable

**6.22 Question from Anna Morgan**

Is it accurate to say that the council leader's scientific statements about barbastelle bats indicate a greater knowledge of their welfare than what is possessed by Natural England?

**Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance**

I am not sure which statements are being referred to in this question, however our proposals for the Norwich Western Link are being informed by ecologists with a specialism in bats as well as through consultation with Natural England over several years.

**Supplementary question from Anna Morgan**

When the council leader, with her apparent great knowledge, talks about the 'will of the people' eg her comments in the EDP, which people's will is she talking about please (because her comments re the proposed Western Link Road are certainly not my will or that of thousands or millions of knowledgeable Norfolk people and expert organisations)?

**Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance**

Early rounds of public consultation demonstrated that there was significant support for a new road to be created between the A47 and Broadland Northway, and this informed the council's decision-making. We are aware that representatives from many of the local communities that are affected by the traffic problems to the west of Norwich are very keen to see the Norwich Western Link delivered. We have also received support for the project from within Norfolk's business community, many of whom rely on good transport infrastructure.

**6.23 Question from Cecilia Rossi**

Why, after the council has allocated a substantial amount of public funds towards hiring

ecologists and consultants, has there been such a delay in recognising the existence of the barbastelle bat colony as a major threat to the continuation of the project (the NWL)?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

The importance of barbastelle bats in the area is recognised and has been a key consideration in the development of the Scheme. The new guidance was completely unexpected and there had been no indication that it was being published.

**Supplementary question from Cecilia Rossi**

What were the underlying reasons for the Council's Risk Assessment failing to identify the presence of the barbastelle bat colony as a significant risk factor that could potentially jeopardise the future of the project?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

Risks around ecological species present in the area have been identified and included in report updates. The project risk register includes a number of risks that relate to ecology including bats. Risks are scored based on what is known at points throughout the development of the project, however the new guidance published by Natural England last month was completely unexpected and there had been no indication that it was due to be published.

**6.24 Question from Amanda Fox**

Considering the Cabinet was seemingly caught off guard by the advice from NE (Natural England), despite previous warnings, and acknowledging that the presence of the barbastelle bat colony has been known to the Council for more than four years, is the leader of the Council considering resignation from her position?

**Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance**

No, I will not resign over this matter. We have known about the presence of barbastelle bats from the survey work we have undertaken over a number of years. Significant mitigation and enhancement measures have been incorporated into the scheme design to minimise impacts on all ecology impacted including barbastelle bats. The new guidance was completely unexpected and there had been no indication that it was being published.

The project team will continue to discuss our proposals with Natural England as part of the planning process.

**Supplementary question from Amanda Fox**

Will the Council leader apologise to the public for the Council submitting an Outline Business Case to the Department of Transport, ignoring multiple serious warnings from the public and wildlife experts about potential legal issues for planning, due to the proven presence of rare barbastelle bat colonies directly on the Norwich Western Link road which may now result in Norfolk County Council having wasted the £25million of central government transport funding already received

**Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance**

No, I will not apologise. We know a lot of people and businesses in Norfolk are being badly affected by traffic congestion to the west of Norwich every day, and the Norwich Western Link is the best solution to these problems. The benefits the NWL will create for Norfolk's residents, businesses and economy, and the national funding the project will

bring into Norfolk, means this project remains a good investment and a priority infrastructure project for Norfolk. The Department for Transport agrees with us, and this is why they approved our Outline Business Case last year.

The importance of the barbastelle bats in the area is recognised and has been a key consideration in the development of the Scheme. The new guidance was completely unexpected and there had been no indication that it was being published. The project team will continue to discuss our proposals with Natural England as part of the planning process.

**6.25 Question from Mireille Heald**

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), stipulates that a 'competent authority' (which includes planning authorities) must have regard for the Regulations in their exercise of their functions i.e. planning permission should only be granted if a proposed development would not breach the offences listed under Regulation 43(1) and/or would be likely to be licensed by Natural England. Therefore why is the council saying it will press ahead with submitting the planning application for the Norwich Western Link when, by the council's own admission, Natural England have made it clear it will be "virtually impossible" to get a licence due to impacts on the barbastelle bat population?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

The Norwich Western Link is considered to be the best solution to the traffic problems to the west of Norwich. Engagement with Natural England regarding ecological mitigation has been ongoing over many months and this has informed the development of our mitigation proposals. The project team will continue to discuss our proposals with Natural England as part of the planning process with the aim of finding a solution which would enable the necessary protected species licenses to be granted by Natural England should planning permission be granted for the Scheme.

**Supplementary question from Mireille Heald**

Surely proceeding with submitting the planning application (when permission would have to be turned down because it would be in breach of the Regulations and a licence from Natural England cannot be granted) will continue to waste funds on this scheme and it should now be abandoned?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

A protected species license would only be granted by Natural England following the granting of planning permission. The project team will continue to discuss our proposals with Natural England as part of the planning process with the aim of finding a solution which would enable the necessary protected species licenses to be granted by Natural England should planning permission be granted for the Scheme. The planning committee will need to consider the likelihood of a license being granted when determining whether or not to grant planning permission for the Scheme.

We are taking a balanced approach to the latest developments and will continue to review the activity that is planned on the project with a view to keeping project costs as low as possible.

**6.26 Question from Hannah Hoechner**

Where can the public access documentation or evidence to substantiate the Council's

claim that if the NWL project is halted, there will be no requirement to refund any of the funds already disbursed by the Government?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

This is no such documentation. Our primary aim is to find an acceptable solution to the bat licence issue. Should we be unsuccessful in this, we would need to discuss the next steps with the Department for Transport. Given the situation we find ourselves in, it is our view that Norfolk should not be financially disadvantaged as a result of changes in Natural England's guidance.

**6.27 Question from the Norwich Council Watch Group 1**

The NCC Climate Policy for Norfolk (draft, 2024) clearly takes the IPCC's alarmingly 'hot' climate MODEL (!) as fact and discarding the cold DATA - see: 'IPCC Pressure Tactics Exposed' (YouTube); the 'World Climate Declaration ([Link](#)) signed by 1860+ climate scientists, and the film, 'Climate - the Movie: the Cold Truth' (YouTube), newly released and with the world's most highly regarded and rewarded climatologists speaking. All NCC councillors ought to visit these sources.

When is the NCC going to review the data and revise the draft?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

Local Authorities are not scientific bodies, and the science behind the causes and impacts of climate change are assessed by other public institutions - such as the Met Office, the Environment Agency, and the Climate Change Committee - to inform the national policy approach to this issue. A useful short guide on the evidence on climate change is published by the government here [[Climate change explained - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)] and another is available from the Met Office here [[What is climate change? - Met Office](#)]

Norfolk County Council's Climate Policy clarifies that it is aligning its county-wide approach with the national trajectory for net zero (not exceeding it). We have not selected one specific data model over another. The policy will be generally reviewed in two years' time.

**Supplementary question from the Norwich Council Watch Group 1**

The data presented in the film, 'Climate - the Movie' proves that our CO2 levels are currently at a record LOW. Last time CO2 was this scarce, humanity nearly perished of starvation. CO2 is necessary nourishment for plants and all other life forms.

How is NCC going to keep us alive if CO2 levels are forced further down the drain?

The public is waking up to this and will turn to YOU in increasing numbers.

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

The Council's approach to supporting Norfolk's low carbon development aligns with the national commitment to reach net zero by 2050. The government's [Net Zero Strategy](#) emphasises that reaching net zero must go hand in hand with building the economy and national resilience: creating new jobs, developing new industries with innovative technologies and becoming a more energy secure nation with clean British energy. These principles of a balanced approach to climate issues that reflects local priorities and with boosting green growth at its heart are reflected in Norfolk County Council's Climate Policy.

**6.28 Question from Ruth Goodall**

If the A47 is dualled between North Tuddenham and Easton but the Norwich Western Link

does not go ahead what will be the consequences for the parish of Weston Longville?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

The Norwich Western Link is considered to be the best solution to the traffic problems to the west of Norwich. A planning application is about to be submitted and the merits of the Scheme will be considered as part of the planning process. Should planning permission for the Scheme not be granted we would need to consider if other measures could be implemented but without a higher standard route in place, we would not expect these to significantly improve the existing issues and deliver all the objectives of the Norwich Western Link project.

**6.29 Question from Denise Carlo**

The Cabinet cited the appointments of competent technical experts and specialist legal advisors in response to a question from Cllr Rowett at December Cabinet seeking assurance of checks and legal advice obtained secures confidence that the Environment statement for the Norwich Western Link, including impacts on biodiversity will comply with all necessary legislation.

We are now being told that without further clarification or change to the recently published Definition of Favourable Conservation Status for barbastelle bat, the ability to obtain a protected species licence is doubtful.

Sustaining populations of protected species is embedded in environmental law. What advice have these appointees given that implies this publication sets a new baseline?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

A technical review of the feedback received from Natural England has taken place. Elements within this information have created the need to seek further engagement with Natural England to understand a greater level of detail on the comments made, and the reasoning behind elements of the feedback received.

A protected species license would only be granted by Natural England following the granting of planning permission. The project team will continue to discuss our proposals with Natural England as part of the planning process with the aim of finding a solution which would enable the necessary protected species licenses to be granted by Natural England should planning permission be granted for the Scheme.

**Supplementary question from Denise Carlo**

In 2018-19, WSP identified presence/proximity of barbastelle bats and their habitats along route options A, B, D. WSP advised C had potential to impact on possible maternity roosts in B, but mitigation measures would be easier/cheaper for C than B. Given level of barbastelle bat presence in Study Area woodlands, how did WSP manage to underestimate the significant presence of bats along C and express high degree of confidence over effectiveness of mitigation?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

The assessment set out in the Option Selection Report 2019 was proportionate to the stage of development of the Scheme at that time. The importance of barbastelle bats in the area is recognised and has been a key consideration in the development of the Scheme. At the time of the OSR 2019 impacts upon barbastelle bat were recognised for

all route options (A, B, C and D), with largest impacts anticipated for routes A and B (western variant) given the known distribution of roosts at the time. Barbastelle targeted radiotracking was completed in 2019 as part of the wider suite of surveys. These surveys in 2019 did not record a barbastelle population within the northern woodland.

The mitigation proposals have been designed based on best practice, industry guidance and in response to the Environmental Impact Assessment carried out informed by surveys between 2019-2023.

**6.30 Question from Cllr Clare Morton on behalf of Weston Longville Parish Council**

Weston Longville Parish Council has always been an advocate for the Norwich Western Link, as this has seemed to be the only way to mitigate the large volumes of traffic that cross the Wensum Valley every day via the centre of our village. If the building of the Western Link is prevented by Natural England, what measures will Norfolk County Council take to protect the residents of Weston Longville from the physical dangers, health risks and loss of amenity that the current, and ever increasing, volumes of traffic represent to our parishioners?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

The Norwich Western Link is considered to be the best solution to the traffic problems to the west of Norwich. A planning application is about to be submitted and the merits of the Scheme will be considered as part of the planning process. Should planning permission for the Scheme not be granted then we would need to consider if other measures could be implemented but without a higher standard route in place, we would not expect these to significantly improve the existing issues and deliver all the objectives of the Norwich Western Link project.



**Cabinet**  
**8 April 2024**  
**Public & Local Member Questions**

	<b>Local Member Question Time</b>
7.1	<p><b>Question from Cllr Steffan Aquarone</b></p> <p>Shared parental leave is an excellent policy which has extended important flexibility to parents of both sexes. However, there are incidents where it impacts on delegated budgets, in particular county-maintained schools. An increasing number of school staff are using shared parental leave. The County Council has already recognised that maternity leave costs have not historically been correctly charged to the maternity budget and is setting up an internal working group to resolve the charging issue. why is the council not willing to consider retrospective adjustment of shared parental leave costs for the 23-24 period?</p> <p><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services</b></p> <p>The Schools Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) provides the funding for mainstream schools and is passed to them in accordance with the agreed funding formula for Norfolk, with the exception of any funds agreed to be held centrally, such as a Growth Fund, or de-delegated under the School and Early Years Finance and Childcare (Provision of Information About Young Children) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2024, all of which require agreement by Schools Forum as a whole or specific Members of Schools Forum in the case of de-delegations or 'buy-back' from the local authority.</p> <p>Schools and academies, therefore, have discretion over their own spending. There are regulations around the elements that mainstream schools can de-delegate funding for, maternity being one of them. Shared Parental leave can also be de-delegated, but this</p>

has not currently been agreed by Schools Forum (i.e. schools effectively retain this responsibility within their own budgets).

Maintained schools that de-delegate monies through Schools Forum into the Maternity Budget each financial year are entitled to charge the costs of an employee on Maternity Leave to the Maternity Budget. In the last year, some employees' Maternity Leave costs have been incorrectly coded and, therefore, not charged to the correct budgets. An internal working group was set up to resolve the charging issue retrospectively and moving forwards. Corrections are being posted and so no school has lost funding as a result, and changes to the process have been implemented from 01/04/2024 to prevent the issue arising again.

As stated, the monies currently de-delegated to the Maternity Budget do not cover Shared Parental Leave. Schools Forum have established a working group to look at whether the Maternity Budget could incorporate these costs and, if so, this would be from 2025-26 financial year at the earliest and is likely to require further de-delegation of budgets from schools to cover the full costs to do this. As the current de-delegated budget does not cover this type of leave, there is not the capacity in the budget to provide for a retrospective adjustment of Shared Parental Leave costs for the 23-24 period. In other words, any retrospective adjustment would result in an overspend on the budget, and was not provided for in the amounts originally de-delegated by schools for 23-24 or agreed to be de-delegated for 24-25.

## 7.2 **Question from Cllr David Sayers**

A failure to plan for growing numbers of children with special education needs and disabilities by this Conservative Government is catching up with councils across the country. It was recently reported that council spending on special needs transport has doubled in the last 5 years. How is this council ensuring value for money with rising costs and increases in demand?

### **Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

Children's Services recently provided a report to the People and Communities Select Committee providing an overview of home to school transport arrangements and the range of measures being taken in Norfolk to ensure value for money whilst still meeting needs. The full report can be found here – [!\[\]\(a870788d6ed9b8fd294b7654a8c8526b\_img.jpg\) HTST P&C Select Committee March 2024.docx](#)

Our response in Norfolk includes;

- A £150million capital investment from the council to build more specialist resource bases and special schools in Norfolk ensuring that children who *need* specialist education can access it closer to home
- Delivery of the Local First Inclusion Programme which invests significantly in mainstream schools to enable them to support children with special educational needs without the need to travel to a specialist setting
- The ongoing investment in independent travel training for children with special educational needs
- Ongoing strategic commissioning of transport provision whereby all additional transport resource requirements are put out through our Dynamic Purchasing System to all operators and contracts awarded based on lowest price. Contracts are regularly reviewed, re-planned and re-tendered to ensure ongoing best value for money.

**Supplementary question from Cllr David Sayers**

When a family makes the difficult decision to commit a loved one to residential care, they do so with the belief that this council will do all they can to provide provision that safeguards the individual.

I was shocked to learn that Norfolk has come second in a list of reported case sexual abuse in care homes, a total of 295 incidents have been reported in the county since 2019. What explanation does the cabinet member have for this failure in safeguarding our most vulnerable residents?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services**

Thank you for your question.

We know that a total of 9,676 sexual incidents were reported to the CQC nationally and 295 reported in Norfolk. The number of reported notifications may not directly correspond to the number of individual incidents, and we are pleased that in Norfolk people feel that they have a voice that is heard and feel able to report any incident.

The incidence of sexual abuse allegations within care homes forms some 6% of all safeguarding concerns within the care home market in Norfolk. In 2022/23 74 safeguarding enquiries regarding allegations of sexual abuse were undertaken. 36 (49%) of that number were substantiated. In 2023/24 72 safeguarding enquiries regarding allegations of sexual abuse were undertaken. 27 (38%) of that number were substantiated. In a significant number of cases, wider issues concerning mental capacity and mental illness and cognitive decline play a significant aspect in the cases that have occurred.

While a relatively small decline has occurred over the period, ASSD remain vigilant. All allegations of sexual abuse are examined within care environments given the vulnerable nature of people who reside in such settings.

Safeguarding has a wider role in preventing such incidents from occurring by working with care home owners and staff alongside colleagues in the health service to raise quality and care provision, as well as investigating such incidents when they occur.

I would want to reassure all residents of Norfolk that ASSD has always had a focus on safeguarding vulnerable people wherever they are in Norfolk including care homes.

**7.3 Question from Cllr Brian Watkins**

The closure of the Bernard Matthews site at Great Witchingham came as a great shock to our residents and indeed those who relied upon the employment at the site for their livelihoods. It is good to hear that 2/3 of the laid off work force have been redeployed. Does the leader have any updates regarding the other 200 laid off workers?

**Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Governance and Strategy**

NCC Employment and Skills Service officers attended a meeting organised by DWP in mid-March with the Bernard Matthews to identify the potential numbers of staff affected and to agree how support could be delivered on site. Bernard Matthews confirmed that a number of individuals had not been placed elsewhere, we understand this is mostly

due to the location of the sites offered and that these workers would therefore be made redundant.

DWP Jobcentre Plus and the NCC-led Working Well Norfolk programme attended the Bernard Matthews site on 20<sup>th</sup> March and are working together to provide redundancy support sessions to workers, a number of individuals with long-term health conditions self-referred into the Working Well Norfolk service, where they will receive bespoke support to mitigate their barriers and to move back to the labour market

We understand that Bernard Matthews have further engaged with another local employer and recruitment agencies to support workers with alternative employment options.

**Supplementary question from Cllr Brian Watkins**

Could the Leader inform the Council how the 'bridge-building' is going with Norfolk's district councils over the developing County Deal, and in particular the identification of new infrastructure projects which could form part of a first five-year gateway programme?

**Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Governance and Strategy**

The County Council has been working collaboratively with district councils to develop the list of projects to benefit from brownfield funding. The council is also working with district colleagues on the design of the Norfolk Investment Fund that will support other projects across the County as well as identifying potential projects for the fund. It is the intention to complete the design of the fund by early summer and agree the priority areas with our partners before inviting formal bids to the fund in due course. These partnerships are being further strengthened and embedded through the external governance that we have proposed, consisting of three key Boards, to which all Norfolk Local authorities will be invited to participate.

**7.4 Question from Cllr John Crofts**

Last year, Norfolk suffered a severe data breach which included the names of more than 1,000 victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Could the Cabinet Member update us on the work undertaken by this council in partnership with the PCC to ensure the safeguarding of these residents, as well as to ensure the robustness of this Council's own data systems which hold sensitive information on vulnerable residents?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation**

This was a N&S Police data breach and, in conjunction with them, we supported affected individuals where appropriate. As for our own information, we are confident that we have robust controls in place to keep it safe

**7.5 Question from Cllr Tim Adams**

After hearing of the costs associated with other directly elected leader/mayors elsewhere in the country, residents have been in contact with me about the potential cost to this council in introducing our own DEL? Can the leader outline the potential expense of introducing this new role into our governance?

**Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Governance and Strategy**

Our proposed model of devolution does not require the creation of yet another local authority, with all the additional costs this would incur. As stated in the report to Full Council on 12 December 2024, it is expected that a directly elected leader would be supported by the County Council's existing officers and systems. By incorporating functions into the county council we remove the need for the running costs of a separate authority. This contrasts with mayoral combined authorities, which have their own staff and running costs, separate from all the local councils and creating another layer of local government. The election for a DEL in 2025, will cost c. £190,000 for the additional polling cards, postal voting papers and ballot papers. This cost will be mitigated by the capacity funding Government is making available to Norfolk, to support the election. All other costs are accounted for as part of the four-year County Council Election cycle.

**7.6 Question from Cllr Saul Penfold**

Culture and Arts are a vital component for Norfolk's economy to grow. I was concerned when the news emerged that our Conservative neighbours in Suffolk had opted to cut all investment in the Arts and Culture Sector that the same fate may befall our own sector. How is this Council going to harness the advantages of devolution to secure the future of our culture sector?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships**

Norfolk County Council has a strong track record for investment in culture and heritage, and we have a national reputation for our work in areas such as creativity and wellbeing. The current discussions with Government about devolution have included culture and heritage. Details of how culture fits within the devolution deal can be found on the Government [website](#) : [Norfolk Devolution Deal](#) (p27). We also continue to meet with the Arm's Length Bodies referenced in the deal text to consider future opportunities for extending our partnerships.

**7.7 Question from Cllr Lucy Shires**

This council has been asleep at the wheel when it comes to flooding, as the lead flood authority residents have lost confidence in this Council's ability to protect them from the impact of floods. Residents of Happisburgh have been let down by the radio silence from this council. What message does the cabinet member have for these residents whose homes are on the brink and who feel forgotten?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

As a serving County Councillor you will know the Water Management and Highways teams are committed to helping local communities reduce risk/impact where we can. It is not the role of Norfolk County Council to resolve flooding, as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) however, we may investigate the cause and notify any relevant Risk Management Authority and assist residents in finding resolutions where possible.

There is an ongoing investigation into flooding in Happisburgh. Various on-site meetings have taken place during February and March involving both the Highways and Water Management teams. The area is served by a network of riparian owned ditches that are the responsibility of landowners to maintain as well as some highways-maintained assets on Coronation Road. Following the flooding blockages were identified in the ditch network on Coronation Road and work has been undertaken to clear these. Norfolk County Council have provided an initial email update to residents

on 27th Feb, a holding statement on 8th March whilst awaiting further information, then subsequent updates were sent on 14th March and 21st March. There has been some subsequent correspondence regarding the Happisburgh Parish Council meetings with a view to a member of the team attending in the future.

**7.8 Question from Cllr Mike Smith-Clare**

Does the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth agree adequate, affordable, high quality childcare is important to enable parents to be economically active to the benefit of their families and the Norfolk economy, and if so, what discussions has he had with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services about building investment and sufficiency component into both the emerging economic strategy and policies for the provision of childcare in the county?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth**

We recognise the important link between childcare provision and economic growth, which is why we have been proactive in this area. Norfolk was chosen as one of 16 wraparound pathfinder authorities who worked closely with the Department for Education (DfE) to influence the design of the Wraparound Childcare Scheme. Norfolk has now been identified as one of four local authority areas who are trialling the programme as an early adopter in the summer of 2024 ahead of the national roll out from September. We have already mapped supply and are currently working with schools to assess demand. We have ambitious plans to create an additional 1,333 places over the next 18 months to support parents back into employment, and will be engaging with schools, childcare providers and other organisations to ensure childcare provision is regular, has longer hours and is more dependable for working parents. Roll out of the early years entitlements for working parents has just started. As with the wraparound scheme we have assessed supply and will continue to work closely with providers to assess demand as it grows over the coming months.

**7.9 Question from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton**

At the risk of irritating the Cabinet Member for Children's Services by raising this issue on behalf of my concerned residents for a seventh time, can she tell me if there has been a condition survey done on the Angel Road middle school (owned by the county council and still leased to the Evolution Trust) to ensure the leak in the roof has not been allowed to do even more damage that might slow down its being brought back into use potentially as a SEND school?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

No further condition survey has been undertaken since this question was previously asked. We continue to work with Evolution Trust and consider the future of the buildings. A condition survey is completed at or around the time of return of the buildings. As no firm date has been set, it would not be appropriate to repeat this exercise at present.

**Supplementary question from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton**

Will she assure me that she will insist the building is returned to the county in the condition it was in when the lease was first granted in accordance with the terms of the lease?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

The terms of the lease do entitle the County Council to require return of buildings as they were at the time of the forming of the lease. However, there is discretion allowed for consideration of the best use of public funds, and in particular, those prioritised for the benefit of teaching and learning for children and young people in Norfolk.

**7.10 Question from Cllr Alison Birmingham**

In the light of the overrun in the Heartsease roundabout scheme local businesses trade has been adversely affected for yet another month. Although he ruled out compensation for losses caused by the initial disruption can the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport give me an estimate of how much extra loss business will endure from the failure to meet the original completion date and what discretionary support and compensation he will make available?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

This is a large-scale project in a very busy area of the city's network but one that is vital to complete – not only to provide much-needed facilities for those walking, wheeling and cycling but, at the same time, to improve the roundabout's currently very poor safety record.

We appreciate the extension to the Heartsease works will add frustration for local people and thank the public for their continued patience as we enter this final phase and will do everything we can to minimise further disruption

The County Council's position of not paying compensation applies throughout the duration of the works and while there is no doubt that these works are disruptive, we are not in a position to comment on financial impacts individual businesses may be experiencing.

**7.11 Question from Cllr Colleen Walker**

At the last Corporate Select Committee meeting Members were told their involvement in the development of a new economic strategy for Norfolk would be limited to attending workshops for stakeholders and the Member Engagement Working Group on devolution. Neither is appropriate for Council Members to debate their ideas and concerns in public, or consistent with the structure of decision making agreed by Council. Will the Leader ensure members have a full opportunity to influence the development of an economic strategy prior to it being considered by Cabinet and Full Council?

**Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance**

Workshops to develop Norfolk's economic strategy have taken place in all of Norfolk's Districts and have already benefited from input from hundreds of stakeholders including Members from every local authority in Norfolk and is an important part of the development of the strategy. County council members have already had an initial opportunity to debate the economic strategy in public through the Infrastructure and Development Select Committee on March 13th, and the economic strategy will be brought back to this select committee before it is considered by cabinet and full council. The Member Engagement Working Group provides a further opportunity specifically for County Councillors, and as it does not meet in public, enables all Members to contribute their views and thinking. It is the intention to continue to engage with the MEWG on the



emerging themes and priorities, as the strategy develops, and we would encourage any Member who wishes to contribute to participate in those meetings.

**7.12 Question from Cllr Mike Sands**

Electric buses are unreservedly a good thing but come with consequences. I was pleased to learn concrete pads were installed when St Stephens was revamped to accommodate heavier buses and greater wear at the bus stops. How much additional wear and tear on the roads of Norwich does the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport expect, what steps is he taking to make city roads more resilient and how much extra has been added to the roads maintenance budget for the city to reflect the extra wear and tear from heavier vehicles?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

The concrete layby's installed in St Stephens Street were funded as part of the Transforming Cities funded scheme and considered the likely loading of the buses.

Prior to the advent of electric buses, we have experienced deformation at busier bus stops, due to the static weight of buses and the frequent nature of buses uses the stops. The materials used at St Stephens Street provides greater resistance to general wear and tear of vehicle movements.

The operation of electric buses is not a concern at present in terms of the maintenance of city roads and no additional funding has been set aside specifically for this.

**7.13 Question from Cllr Matt Reilly**

Lines painted on roads wear much faster than they used to. I understand this is in part because the materials used are often less hard wearing but less damaging to the environment. In turn that means white lines need to be repainted more often to serve their purpose of showing road users and pedestrians how to use the roads safely. What steps has the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport taken to increase repainting of white lines to compensate for the quicker wearing of lines painted with less resilient materials?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

We currently use thermoplastic materials for most of our white lining programme and the specification has not changed. Locations with heavy turning vehicular movements will naturally wear out quicker.

We regularly review new material developments and are currently trialling a methyl-methacrylate (MMA) line marking paint on high wearing locations on the Norwich outer ring road following recent surfacing schemes. The material is hard wearing and should last longer. These sites will be monitored to help inform whether this new material should be used at other higher wearing locations.

**7.14 Question from Cllr Chrissie Rumsby**

As welcome as the extension of the Household Support fund is, we know there are children in Norfolk already going hungry. When the fund comes to an end in the

autumn, families will be facing even greater challenges to feed their children. How much has the Cabinet Member for Children's Services allocated in her departmental budget or can call on directly from other funding to introduce new support measures to ensure Norfolk children don't go hungry?

### **Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

We know that many of our residents and families are struggling with increased costs and we are responding as a whole council given this is not an issue just for Children's Services. However, as is the same financial reality for local authorities across the country, Norfolk County Council cannot replicate the Hardship Support Fund should this cease to be supported by additional funding from central government beyond the current extension period. We do not know what central government's intentions are for the Hardship Support Fund beyond September. For this reason, we will continue to lobby central government for a fair deal for Norfolk residents including the need for ongoing financial support beyond the current extension period of the Hardship Support Fund so that we can assist families experiencing cost of living challenges.

The Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector in Norfolk plays a vital role in supporting and improving the lives of people in the county. This is why as a Council we are maintaining our Empowering Communities Partnership Infrastructure grant. In 2021, we committed to increase our core grant of £172k to £250k for 3 years, recognising the additional pressures facing the VCSE sector post-pandemic and due to the cost of living crisis. The Empowering Communities Partnership provides ongoing support, advice and resources to Norfolk's VCSE organisations. Our teams will continue to engage with families and enable them to be aware of and where needed, connect them with the increasing network of community supermarkets/stores which have been supporting around 22,000 people from over 8,500 households across the county as part of the Nourishing Norfolk network, alongside local food banks and community groups that help to ensure that the wider support that families might need is available.

We are using £6.4m of transformation funding from the Department for Education to strengthen our early help and partnership working to support for families through our Start for Life and family hubs programme and we know that good nutrition in children starts from before birth. Working with partners, our Start for Life offer is focused on all babies, children and families being supported and empowered to have a healthy, happy and safe start for life, ensuring they flourish before birth and beyond. This includes support to enable infant feeding and increase breast feeding rates, especially in our more deprived communities. As part of this, we are operating an enhanced breastfeeding equipment loan offer across the county, have launched an infant feeding community grant scheme to support VCSE organisations within local communities to complement midwifery, health visitor and GP input, and secured agreement across Norfolk's three Acute Trusts and our Healthy Child Programme services to enhance families' access to effective peer support.

Through the Children and Young People Strategic Alliance, a multi-agency working group is focusing on children's nutrition as part of our shared commitment to Norfolk being a place where all children and young people can flourish. We know there is a wide range of local projects and initiatives focused on supporting good nutrition in children, including the work of our Adult Learning Service who provide family focused

courses through their Family Learning programme including 'Cooking on a budget', 'My first solid foods' and 'Healthy Food and Mind'.

We are continuing to promote take up of free school meals and, with almost 100% take up, there are currently just over 31,500 children who access means tested free school meals at a weekly cost of approximately £475,000. This is in addition to all children in Year Reception, 1 and 2 who automatically receive free school meals.

As a council we are also maintaining our commitment to operate our Client Hardship Service which can support families with money management and budgeting advice, and provide financial assistance for food, energy, water and other essential household items.

**7.15 Question from Cllr Brenda Jones**

Having refused to say what thresholds will apply for assessing the results of the MiG consultation the administration has not made it clear the omission of an option not to apply the MIG cut is because they are only consulting on the impact, not the principle of the cut. Having confused matters further by not sending documents to the right people, the whole exercise looks shambolic, made worse by Cabinet hiding behind the consultation and refusing to discuss the issues - which surely should be the purpose of any consultation. If Cabinet persists with this risky and damaging proposal will you please scrap this flawed consultation and do it properly?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care**

Thank you for your question.

As per the Council's constitution there is no predetermined criteria or threshold set in relation to the Council's decision-making process and no decision about the MIG will be made until the consultation has ended and Cabinet has reviewed all the evidence, and this includes the findings from the public consultation. As part of this consultation, we have contacted people that will be directly affected, and we have also welcomed the support of wider groups and organisations to help share this message. I want to encourage as many people as possible to engage with and contribute to this consultation. The consultation asks people about two potential options and there are a range of responses people can make.

No decision will be made until the consultation has ended and Cabinet has reviewed all the evidence. We will take a report about the findings of this consultation to July Cabinet.

My fellow Cabinet Councillors and I will consider the consultation responses we receive very carefully when making our decision we will consider.

I would encourage everyone to take part and there are several ways people can take part in the consultation:

- Complete the questionnaire online at <https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/>
- Online at [www.norfolk.gov.uk/savingsproposals](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/savingsproposals)
- By email at [haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk)
- By post, writing to:

The Minimum Income Guarantee Consultation 2024/25  
Freepost Plus RTCL-XSTT-JZSK  
Norfolk County Council, Ground floor - south wing  
County Hall, Martineau Lane. Norwich, NR1 2DH.

- Email the dedicated team directly at [charging.policy@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:charging.policy@norfolk.gov.uk) or call the dedicated telephone helpline 01603 306864 which is open 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

**7.16 Question from Cllr Steve Morphew**

When the administration asks the Government to cover the £47m already spent on the proposed Norwich Western Link that won't get a bat license to proceed and therefore no planning permission, the Government will quite rightly expect to see what steps have been taken to find alternative solutions to ensure public money already spent is not wasted. Will the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport now reopen the options appraisal process with a view to revising and resubmitting the Outline Business Case to exclude the current scheme and provide alternatives that solve the problems to the west of Norwich and ensure value for public money already spent?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

A planning application is about to be submitted and the merits of the Scheme will be considered as part of the planning process.

A protected species license would only be granted by Natural England following the granting of planning permission. The project team will continue to discuss our proposals with Natural England as part of the planning process with the aim of finding a solution which would enable the necessary protected species licenses to be granted by Natural England should planning permission be granted for the Scheme.

Other options to address the traffic problems to the west of Norwich were investigated and discounted prior to the adoption of the preferred route which is considered to be the best solution to resolve the problems.

Should planning permission for the Scheme not be granted then we would need to consider if other measures could be implemented but without a higher standard route in place, we would not expect these to significantly improve the existing issues and deliver all the objectives of the Norwich Western Link project.

**7.17 Question from Cllr Terry Jermy**

Putting solar panels on rooftops across Norfolk can help us to generate the clean electricity we need, while cutting our carbon emissions and sparing land for food, farming and nature. Will the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste sign the Campaign to Protect Rural England's 'rooftop revolution' petition which calls for rooftop solar, rather than solar farms on behalf of Norfolk County Council?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

The County Council supports and encourages the development of rooftop solar in Norfolk. Rooftop solar is being rolled out across many of the council's own buildings through our Future Ready programme of building improvement works. Furthermore, funding has been allocated through the Norfolk Investment Framework to the 'Norwich solar system' project run by Norwich Business Improvement District. This ambitious project aims to kickstart the UK's largest urban solar farm on city rooftops through coordinating a pooled approach that helps share costs of developing rooftop solar in the city and increase bargaining power to drive better value.

	<p>As the CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) itself recognises, rooftop solar alone will not be sufficient to meet our solar energy requirements. Solar developments on land can bring clean energy at scale in a fast and cost-effective way to help the country towards its energy resilience and net zero goals and to reduce energy costs. That said, it is important that such solar developments are located carefully with consideration of other land-use pressures such as food production, housing and habitat protection.</p>
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	<p>Many of the CPRE's asks from their 'Shout from the rooftops' report which the petition is based on focus on planning policy and regulations, and the County Council is not the local planning authority for buildings or solar farms.</p>
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