

Cabinet
4 December 2023
Public & Local Member Questions

	Public Question Time
6.1	<p>Question from John Martin Will the leader please specify exactly what sums the Council has incurred by way of legal expenses as a direct consequence of the court proceedings issued by Dr Andrew Boswell</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance Dr Boswell has challenged government on the Development Consent Order for National Highways' A47 schemes. These are not county council schemes. The county council has not incurred any legal costs as a consequence.</p>
6.2	<p>Question from Rupert Read The Paris Agreement (2015), signed by the UK, commits to making all possible efforts to limiting the average global temperature to 1.5 degrees higher than pre-industrial levels. Just 8 years later, a majority of scientists think that this Paris 1.5 degrees target will soon be breached. How does the Leader reconcile building (construction emissions estimate: 130,000 tonnes of CO2) and operating (additional emissions each year from operation) an NWL with the UK's international obligations, and does she think our children and their children will look kindly on Norfolk County Council's seeming complete indifference to their fate?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance Meeting the national net zero targets will take co-ordinated action across the public and private sectors as we transition from our current ways of life to a way of life that is consistent with net zero.</p> <p>The County Council has taken important steps towards meeting the net zero challenge by adopting its Environmental Policy and by adopting Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) and its Implementation Plan. LTP4 sets out how the council intends to continue to support the people of Norfolk in travelling to, from and around the County safely and efficiently for work, leisure and business whilst having regard to setting a trajectory of emissions that is consistent with achieving net zero targets. The unavoidable emissions arising from the Norwich Western Link scheme must be seen in this wider context of the other planned measures intended to support travel and reduce emissions in the County.</p> <p>Supplementary question from Rupert Read The Leader's division (in which I reside) includes a significant area of low-lying land to the south of the River Yare including the Coldham Hall pub which reports using canoes for deliveries due to worsening flooding (EDP last week). How will the Leader explain her cabinet's decision to increase climate-deadly carbon emissions with an NWL, risking global climate treaties, to the residents affected by flooding in her division?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance A Flood Risk Assessment will form part of the Environmental Statement for the Norwich Western Link scheme. The purpose of this is to assess the potential impacts of the scheme on flood risk and support and define the drainage design to mitigate the potential flood risk impacts of the scheme, including over a range of future climate change scenarios. The</p>

Flood Risk Assessment is expected to conclude, based on the assessment carried out to date as part of preparing it in draft, the following:

-That within the River Wensum floodplain there is likely to be little to no change to the flood extent in this area and the flood hazard for the area remains unchanged.

-A review of the flood risk receptors that could be impacted by the local increase in water levels confirms that, in all events up to the 1 in 100 year annual probability flood event plus 44% climate change allowance, only grazing farmland is affected.

-There is no anticipated increased risk to property or infrastructure.

-There is no anticipated change to flood risk downstream of the proposed scheme.

6.3 Question from Iain Robinson

The proposed Norwich Western Link road runs through the middle of multiple areas of woodland included in a proposed Special Site of Scientific Interest, currently in the pipelines with Natural England, which is aimed at designating the home woodlands of the nationally significant Barbastelle bat colonies in this area, and is based on survey evidence more thorough and detailed than the council's own. Why hasn't the project team put this project on hold until an evidence-based decision has been made by Natural England?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

The Norwich Western Link (NWL) scheme is a large-scale infrastructure project requiring years of continued planning, design, stakeholder engagement and surveys. The NWL project team has had consistent engagement with Natural England (and other key stakeholders) throughout the development of the project to ensure a clear understanding and awareness of Natural England's perspective of the information provided to them, as well as to gain visibility and to discuss how the NWL scheme relates to other significant projects, including the proposal for a SSSI.

Currently the timeframes associated with the designation of the area in question as an SSSI are not fixed, nor does the inclusion of the area on Natural England's designation programme indicate a commitment to designate. As such, it would not be possible, nor desirable to postpone progress of the NWL scheme pending a decision on the area designation. Equally, the Environmental Statement has valued Barbastelle Bats as being nationally important. This would remain unchanged regardless of the SSSI designation.

The effect of the NWL scheme upon local bat populations has been assessed and will be reported within the Environmental Statement and other key documents to be submitted as part of the formal planning application, in due course. The nature conservation value of the population has been evaluated on the basis of thorough baseline survey information in line with relevant national guidelines.

Regarding the surveys undertaken by both the NWL project team and others, the following wording is included in the cabinet report at section 9.2: 'As a result of data collected by the Wensum Valley Barbastelles Research Project (a research project collaboration between Norfolk Wildlife Trust, the University of East Anglia and Wild Wings Ecology) Norfolk Wildlife Trust have advised the project team of a possible bat maternity roost in the vicinity of the NWL scheme. Without access to the data used to support this advice the NWL project team

is unable to verify it. The project team has requested access to the data on a number of occasions but has not been able to obtain it to date. The NWL specialist bat experts have carried out their own extensive bat surveys over several years, which have provided a good understanding of the presence of protected bat species in the area around the proposed route. The project has taken account of this in its design and mitigation measures that have been developed for the planning application.'

Further, and as reflected in the cabinet report, the NWL project team has continued to pursue engagement with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, on their multi-year research project into the local Barbastelle colonies being undertaken by an independent ecologist who we understand is currently seconded to them. Multiple discussions have taken place to facilitate the sharing of this data however this has not yet been provided. Equally, the survey effort undertaken in support of the NWL scheme is commensurate to the scale of the scheme, and the survey data captured has, and will continue, to allow us to appropriately and considerately develop the necessary environmental information and assessment, inform the ecological and environmental mitigation associated with the scheme, and drive thorough due consideration of the ecological requirements within the design development.

Supplementary question from Iain Robinson

According to the Cabinet Papers, the Norwich Western Link will increase carbon emissions by 5475 tonnes (tCO₂e) a year for sixty years, as well as embody carbon emissions from the construction phase (130,000 tCO₂e). Please can the councillors explain how the building of this road can align with net zero targets?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

Meeting the national net zero targets will take co-ordinated action across the public and private sectors as we transition from our current ways of life to a way of life that is consistent with net zero.

The County Council has taken important steps towards meeting the net zero challenge by adopting its Environmental Policy and by adopting Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) and its Implementation Plan. LTP4 sets out how the council intends to continue to support the people of Norfolk in travelling to, from and around the County safely and efficiently for work, leisure and business whilst having regard to setting a trajectory of emissions that is consistent with achieving net zero targets. The unavoidable emissions arising from the Norwich Western Link scheme must be seen in this wider context of the other planned measures intended to support travel and reduce emissions in the County.

6.4 **Question from David Pett**

How can the council be confident that there will be no contamination of the local water supply because of pollutant run-off from the road, especially considering increased flood risk and the need for flood mitigation work within the Wensum SAC area?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

The proposed Norwich Western Link (NWL) scheme includes a surface water drainage scheme and strategy which will capture run-off from the road and includes infiltration basins that will, after appropriate treatment, discharge this run-off to the ground safely. There will be no discharges into the River Wensum.

The Road Drainage and the Water Environment chapter of the Environmental Statement will assess the potential risk of pollutants migrating towards River Wensum and appropriate mitigation will be recommended.

A Flood Risk Assessment will form part of the Environmental Statement. The purpose of which is to assess the potential impacts of the scheme on flood risk, and support and define the road drainage design to mitigate the potential flood risk impacts of the NWL. The Flood Risk Assessment is expected to conclude, based on the assessment carried out to date as part of preparing it in draft, the following:

-That within the River Wensum floodplain there is likely to be little to no change to the flood extent in this area and the flood hazard for the area remains unchanged.

-A review of the flood risk receptors that could be impacted by the local increase in water levels confirms that, in all events up to the 1 in 100 year annual probability flood event plus 44% climate change allowance, only grazing farmland is affected.

-There is no anticipated increased risk to property or infrastructure.

-There is no anticipated change to flood risk downstream of the Proposed Scheme.

A Habitat Regulation Assessment will support the planning application to assess the impact of the proposed scheme on the Wensum SAC. The results of this assessment are expected to conclude there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of the Wensum SAC with mitigation in place.

6.5 **Question from Andrew Boswell**

The Climate Change Committee (CCC) 2023 Progress Report to parliament identified very serious shortfalls in delivery, economy wide, of the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan (CBDP). For the Industry sector relating to construction of the scheme, CCC identified a 114 million tonnes emission reduction shortfall for the 5th carbon budget (including the planned final construction year 2028). In the Surface Transport sector relating to the operation of the scheme, CCC identified 228 million tonnes of emission reduction shortfall for the 6th carbon budget (years 5 to 9 of scheme operation). How does the Cabinet reconcile adding new, unbudgeted carbon emissions against these severe risks to delivery of national carbon budgets?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

Meeting the national net zero targets will take co-ordinated action across the public and private sectors as we transition from our current ways of life to a way of life that is consistent with net zero.

The County Council has taken important steps towards meeting the net zero challenge by adopting its Environmental Policy and by adopting Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) and its Implementation Plan. LTP4 sets out how the council intends to continue to support the people of Norfolk in travelling to, from and around the County safely and efficiently for work, leisure and business whilst having regard to setting a trajectory of emissions that is consistent with achieving net zero targets. The unavoidable emissions arising from the Norwich Western Link scheme must be seen in this wider context of the other planned measures intended to support travel and reduce emissions in the County.

It is accepted that to create a transport network fit for purpose, some new emissions will need to be emitted. The Norwich Western Link (NWL) is an important component of wider transport infrastructure that is being delivered as part of the Transport for Norwich (TfN) Strategy and wider Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4). The Council will need to balance the impact of the NWL with the wider decarbonisation action plan, to achieve a sustainable transport network, aligned to carbon targets.

Supplementary question from Andrew Boswell

The EIA Scoping report does not refer to the Carbon Budget Order 2021, nor the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan (CBDP) which lays out how the Government intends to meet UK carbon budgets and international climate obligations until 2037. What assessment of the greenhouse gas emissions from the scheme will be made against the CBDP, the 4th, 5th and 6th carbon budgets, and the 2030 and 2035 Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris agreement?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

The Environmental Statement that will be submitted with the planning application for the Norwich Western Link (NWL) scheme will assess the carbon impact of the scheme against carbon targets and cumulative emissions up to 2050, in accordance with current national assessment guidance.

The Environment Statement will provide a breakdown of the carbon impact of the scheme against each carbon budget period, aligned to the Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement.

6.6 Question from Dr Matt Tomlinson

With reference to paragraph 3.12.6, please provide the Council's enumerations of the operational carbon emissions from the scheme in the Do-Something and Do-Minimum traffic model cases at the Opening Year (2029), Design Year (2044) and 60-year year (2088) including the data for both before and after applying the Common Analytical Scenario (CAS) forecast.

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

At the moment there has only been a Core Scenario modelled for the Opening Year (2029) and Design Year (2044). These results are summarised on the following table, which highlights the operational carbon emissions from the scheme:

Scenario	2029 (operational year)	2044 (future year)	Average per year (2029-2088)	Total (2029-2088)
Baseline ('Do Minimum')	536,647	338,645	365,045	21,902,709
Do Something	543,634	343,241	369,961	22,197,631
Difference	6,987	4,597	4,915	294,922
% change	1.30%	1.40%	1.30%	1.30%

A sensitivity assessment is being undertaken assuming accelerated levels of electric vehicle uptake when compared against Transport Analysis Guidance (TAG). Relevant findings will be included in the Environmental Statement submitted with the planning application for the Norwich Western Link scheme.

	<p>Supplementary question from Dr Matt Tomlinson With reference to paragraph 3.12.4, please provide the increase in operational carbon dioxide in the Opening Year (2029) and the Design Year (2044).</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport Below is the Greenhouse Gas information for the Opening Year (2029) and the Design Year (2044) based on the current draft of the Environmental Statement. The finalised assessment will be published with the Environmental Statement accompanying the planning application for the Norwich Western Link scheme, once submitted.</p> <p>Baseline Scenario 2029 (Operational Year) - 536,647 2044 (Future year) - 338,645</p> <p>Do Something Scenario 2029 (Operational Year) - 543,634 2044 (Future year) - 343,241</p>
6.7	<p>Question from Sondra Billings In the light of the vandalism of historic buildings in Norwich recently, how much does the council anticipate spending for security at the Wensum Lodge site when it is closed from 22/12/23 onwards?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation The County Council has not undertaken any forecasting as to the cost of security at Wensum Lodge.</p> <p>Supplementary question from Sondra Billings Has a security contract been awarded and at what costing to whom?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation Norse Group provide all security services for the County Council.</p>
6.8	<p>Question from James Mendelssohn The Music House, a Grade I listed building, is currently leased from Norwich City Council on a full repairing lease but it is currently in a poor state of repair. How much has been set aside to renovate the building before handing it back to Norwich City Council and has a heritage building maintenance contract already been awarded?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation? We do not consider the Music House to be in a poor state. The County Council has not yet started discussions with the City Council to yield up the lease. When the landlord conducts their condition and dilapidations surveys this will provide a baseline for any dilapidation costs.</p>
6.9	<p>Question from Bryan Robinson the main implications of the proposed NWL as reported in the Addendum to the OBC have significantly changed in these cabinet papers. The costs have risen by £22m; the operational greenhouse gas emissions have changed from reducing to increasing; the</p>

carbon emissions associated with the construction have increased and the value for money is now medium (optimistically) rather than high. Why were these dramatic changes not reported to the Department for Transport before its decision on the OBC rather than continue to mislead both it and the public with bad out-of-date information?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

The Council has progressed the Outline Business Case in full compliance with the Department for Transport's guidance. In relation to greenhouse gas emissions, the information provided to the Department for Transport complied with the guidance that prevailed at the time it was submitted. There have been changes to this guidance, the nature of which, and consequences of, are reported at section 3.12 of the Cabinet Report.

In relation to the estimate of the costs of the scheme, section 6 of the Cabinet Report outlines the reasons for the changes to the scheme's cost estimate. The delay to the OBC decision is a significant factor in the changes to the costs estimate for the scheme. In accordance with the established processes for the funding of large local major road scheme, the Department for Transport will have the opportunity to consider the Full Business Case for the scheme once submitted, which will not occur until planning permission has been granted for the scheme and the associated statutory orders have been confirmed.

Supplementary question from Bryan Robinson

Applications for planning permission must be valid and in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. What are the material considerations which will enable the Council to submit a valid planning application for the NWL to its own planning department?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

Paragraph 44 of the National Planning Policy Framework advises planning authorities to publish on their website a list of their information requirements for valid applications for planning permission.

These lists were updated on 5 June 2023, for applications to be made under regulation 3 of the Town and Planning General Regulations 1992 (as would be the case for the Norwich Western Link).

The relevant list can be found here <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/-/media/norfolk/downloads/rubbish-recycling-planning/planning/minerals-and-waste-regulations-3-local-list.pdf>

6.10 **Question from Richard Hawker**

The report states that "local communities . . . are suffering. . . from rat-running on small roads . . . not designed (for) volumes or size of vehicles now using them"
These unsuitable roads include the B1535 and its offshoots of Heath Road and Stone Road. How many HGVs movements on these roads could NOT transfer to NWL, e.g. farms and firms within the 'valley' area, and what percentage of total HGV traffic on the B1535 does this represent?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

There is no surveyed information of the specific numbers of HGV's accessing each and every individual farm and operating company within the "valley" area. In accordance with

industry guidance the transport modelling which informs the planning application has been derived from a variety of link counts and turning movements at key junctions, rather than at every access along each route.

The 2029 Do Minimum (DM) forecast modelling (i.e., the future opening year situation without the Norwich Western Link (NWL) scheme in place) is expected to show that there are predicted to be approximately 330 HGVs using the B1535 route per day, of which about 60% is expected to be re-routed to use the proposed Norwich Western Link route, therefore about 40% of HGVs would remain on their existing routes as they have local origins and destinations between A1067 and A47.

With the proposed traffic mitigation in place there is also proposed to be an HGV ban (except for access) on the B1535 Wood Lane, so that as much HGV traffic as possible is re-routed to use the new road.

6.11 Question from Victoria Flute

The Norwich Western Link is expected to improve the local economy. The NDR was expected to do the same, and a 'five-year-after' report was promised to show what effect the road had had on the economy, but it is not yet available. If the report is to have any value, it must be to give an indication as to the accuracy of forecasting the effect of a new road in this area. Why is the report not part of the application for the Norwich Western Link?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

The NDR is part of the 2019 base year transport model and the forecast year transport models that have been used in the assessment of the Norwich Western Link (NWL). Within the Outline Business Case for the NWL an assessment of the wider economic benefits was undertaken which quantified, in monetary terms, the level of benefits that the NWL would be predicted to deliver. As five years have not elapsed the five-year after report is still under preparation and will be published in due course.

Supplementary question from Victoria Flute

How does the Norwich Western Link support Levelling Up? Specifically for those who are medically or financially unable to drive.

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

The Cabinet Report sets out that a Sustainable Transport Strategy has been developed alongside the main Norwich Western Link (NWL) proposals which includes a complementary package of wider interventions to support walking, cycling and public transport use. There would also be reductions in traffic on existing roads, making them more suitable for walking and cycling as a result of traffic diverting to the NWL.

6.12 Question from Julie Rolle

Traffic: The time between closure of the Easton roundabout and opening of NWL may be 3 years, assuming no delays. The proposed alternative route for the 4500 vehicles per day using Lower Easton is the tiny Weston Road and Taverham Road. This will overwhelm those roads and area. Other routes would be through Weston Longville, Ringland or further afield. How does NCC propose to solve this problem; presumably this issue must be a known one, or is the plan that these areas just have to endure this for three years and if so, has this been made clear to those impacted and mitigation put in place?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

The planning application will be accompanied by a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) that will consider the appropriate means of managing and mitigating the adverse effect of construction traffic. It is anticipated that this would be developed in detail after the grant of planning permission, if planning permission is granted, to manage the traffic conditions that prevail during construction.

For example, if both the Norwich Western Link (NWL) and the A47 schemes are being constructed at the same time it is anticipated that the CTMP's for both projects would be coordinated as much as possible and network management plans adopted that aim to minimise any impacts on minor roads and focus traffic onto the more appropriate routes.

The NWL project team are also currently working with the local parishes to determine additional mitigation measures to support sustainable access during construction. A traffic monitoring scheme will also be in place during construction with advisory variable message signs (VMS) on the surrounding highway network to advise of any delays and appropriate route options.

Supplementary question from Julie Rolle

Safety: On p72 of the report, one advantage of the NWL is stated as 'reducing personal injury accidents'. Please can the council publish statistics of such accidents which have occurred on the roads from which NWL would take traffic (viz. Ringland Lane, Weston Longville, etc.) so that a proper assessment can be made.

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

The Council holds statistics of fatal, serious and slight accidents which can be supplied for local roads. The Transport Assessment will include a review of Personal injury Accident data within a 5km radius of the proposed scheme route. There is signage in place on the A1067 between Attlebridge and Lenwade noting a high casualty route which includes the Marl Hill Road junction with A1067 and also B1535 Weston Hall Road junction with A1067 and Porter's Lane. Both of these junctions are expected to benefit from significantly reduced turning movements as a result of the proposed scheme. Hence there would be a reduced risk of collisions in these locations as a result of the scheme.

Together with the A47 dualling scheme, there would also be a much safer road layout at the A47 junctions with B1535 Wood Lane and at Taverham Road. The Easton Roundabout will be removed and the Honingham Roundabout at Norwich Road will be bypassed by the new A47. The A1074 would also have reduced flow in comparison with the Do Minimum situation, so the Longwater Interchange and Longwater Lane junctions with Dereham Road will also have reduced risk of accidents.

6.13 **Question from Rob Bellman**

As a landowner whos beautiful lush woodland, that supports both considerable flora and forna, will be destroyed to build a very short stretch of infrastructure, that doesn't make sense, by any metric, other than to support mass new house building, which is currently on hold due to current water pollution levels, I am seriously concerned that this project already has, and will continue to come up against legal challenges, while costs spiral beyond affordable levels.

Would the cabinet please explain why they are not looking at more viable, effective, lower-impact, sustainable and affordable transport solutions for Norfolk.

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

No legal challenges have been brought against the Norwich Western Link to date, and the project is not required to directly enable any housing development, although as we have stated before, this council believes that continuing to invest in our infrastructure to help our transport networks cope with housing and employment growth is crucial, and the Norwich Western Link is expected to support this growth.

In developing the project to this point, the project team looked at a wide range of options - including non-road options - that would tackle the traffic issues being experienced to the west of Norwich, and that would meet the project objectives that were developed with representatives of local communities in the area. The Norwich Western Link was found to be the best solution, and this remains the case.

It's also important to remember that public transport requires good infrastructure just like any other mode of travel. Bus operators need to be able to run efficient, reliable services to attract and retain passengers and make routes commercially viable, and getting stuck in queuing and slow-moving traffic significantly hinders this.

We want to support people to shift their journeys from using a car to more sustainable forms of transport, such as walking, cycling and public transport where appropriate. This will generally be more achievable over relatively short distances and in and between larger centres of population, or where there is a concentration of public amenities or employment. Once constructed the Norwich Western Link will improve non-car sustainable transport options by reducing levels of inappropriate traffic on local roads, making them more attractive for walking and cycling. It will also be supported by a wider package of complementary sustainable transport measures to take advantage of these reduced levels of traffic.

We have been investing in improvements to facilities for public transport users and walkers and cyclists for several years now, particularly in our towns and larger villages and in and around Norwich through our multi-million Transport for Norwich project (www.norfolk.gov.uk/tfn). We have, among other things, improved pedestrian and cycle access to railway stations in Norwich and Great Yarmouth, there have been upgrades to bus facilities in Norwich, Thetford, North Walsham and Cringleford, and we've created an off-road pedestrian and cycle path linking Norwich to the fast-growing populations in Hethersett and Wymondham, and extended our very popular Beryl bike/e-bike/e-scooter hire scheme from Norwich into those areas.

So there isn't a 'one size fits all' approach to transport and we need to continue to invest in a wide range of transport infrastructure in Norfolk to support all kinds of journeys.

Cabinet
4 December 2023
Public & Local Member Questions

	Member Question Time
7.1	<p>Question from Cllr Ben Price So far, the reported cost of the NWL has risen by nearly 80% since the strategic outline business case was first put forward. Further rises above the currently-predicted £273m can therefore be expected. With any further rise, the county council will have to foot the bill, in addition to paying for the current potential shortfall of £60m. Can the cabinet member please confirm whether an upper limit is being placed on the additional funding the council can commit to the NWL and what that limit is?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport The Government's announcement about the potential to increase their contribution will hopefully mean the local contribution required for the Norwich Western Link will actually be slightly less than anticipated when we submitted the Outline Business Case. We're expecting more details on this from the Department for Transport in the coming weeks and we'll be making the case to bring even more national investment into Norfolk as part of the project.</p> <p>The revised budget for the project takes account of anticipated inflation costs over the life of the project and includes a budget for risk of more than £26m, which would help to deal with any additional costs.</p> <p>In the time we have been developing the project we have experienced a pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine which has affected global supply chains, both of which have affected costs for all major infrastructure projects worldwide. So, while further cost increases can never be ruled out, and it would be irresponsible to do so, we are confident that this is a considered and rigorously-set budget.</p> <p>In terms future decision-making on potential different scenarios, we will continue to be led by the evidence and the importance of continuing to invest in Norfolk's infrastructure. Key to this is that 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 remains the best solution to these problems. Furthermore, this project will bring in over £200m of national investment into Norfolk, that will benefit the local economy and help our transport networks to cope with projected housing and employment in and around Norwich.</p> <p>Question from Cllr Ben Price How can the Council ensure that there will be no contamination of the local water supply from potential run-off material such as hydrocarbons, fuel additives, metal, tyre wear, de-icer, and gritting, from the NWL, considering the significant increase in flood risk and the need for flood mitigation work in the area affected by the River Wensum SAC?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste The proposed Norwich Western Link (NWL) scheme includes a surface water drainage scheme and strategy which will capture run-off from the road and includes infiltration</p>

basins that will, after appropriate treatment, discharge this run-off to the ground safely. There will be no discharges into the River Wensum.

The Road Drainage and the Water Environment chapter of the Environmental Statement will assess the potential risk of pollutants migrating towards River Wensum and appropriate mitigation will be recommended.

A Flood Risk Assessment will form part of the Environmental Statement. The purpose of which is to assess the potential impacts of the scheme on flood risk, and support and define the road drainage design to mitigate the potential flood risk impacts of the NWL. The Flood Risk Assessment is expected to conclude, based on the assessment carried out to date as part of preparing it in draft, the following:

- That within the River Wensum floodplain there is likely to be little to no change to the flood extent in this area and the flood hazard for the area remains unchanged.
- A review of the flood risk receptors that could be impacted by the local increase in water levels confirms that, in all events up to the 1 in 100 year annual probability flood event plus 44% climate change allowance, only grazing farmland is affected.
- There is no anticipated increased risk to property or infrastructure.
- There is no anticipated change to flood risk downstream of the Proposed Scheme.

A Habitat Regulation Assessment will support the planning application to assess the impact of the proposed scheme on the Wensum SAC. The results of this assessment are expected to conclude there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of the Wensum SAC with mitigation in place.

7.2

Question from Cllr Jamie Osborn

According to the cabinet report, the Norwich Western Link will add about 5,500 tonnes of CO2 into the atmosphere each year for its 60-year lifespan. Please can the cabinet member explain in detail what assessment of the carbon budget for transport in Norfolk has been done and what calculation has been done of whether the increased carbon from this project can be afforded?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Meeting the national net zero targets will take co-ordinated action across the public and private sectors as we transition from our current ways of life to a way of life that is consistent with net zero.

The County Council has taken important steps towards meeting the net zero challenge by adopting its Environmental Policy and by adopting Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) and its Implementation Plan. LTP4 sets out how the council intends to continue to support the people of Norfolk in travelling to, from and around the County safely and efficiently for work, leisure and business whilst having regard to setting a trajectory of emissions that is consistent with achieving net zero targets. The unavoidable emissions arising from the Norwich Western Link scheme must be seen in this wider context of the other planned measures intended to support travel and reduce emissions in the County.

Supplementary question from Cllr Jamie Osborn

Can the Cabinet Member confirm whether he will recommend the Norwich Western Link should definitely go ahead if the Government provides £213m in funding and leaves the council to fund a minimum of £60m in the shortfall between Government funding and the currently-predicted cost of the road?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

We are very hopeful, based on announcements made by the government, and specific reference within the OBC acceptance letter from DfT that the scheme could benefit from an uplift in government contribution. In that case, the local contribution required for the Norwich Western Link would actually be less than anticipated when we submitted the Outline Business Case.

The significant traffic issues that are affecting people and businesses to the west of Norwich every day are projected to worsen if we don't take action, and the Norwich Western Link remains the best solution to these problems. A local contribution of £60m would bring £213m of national investment into Norfolk, and the benefits it would create for local residents and the economy would be significant. So, this would still be a good return on our investment but I don't anticipate that this will come to pass, and we hope to hear more from the Department for Transport in the near future on the suggestion that they will increase their funding contribution for major projects like the Norwich Western Link. The £213m of funding would go towards other schemes across the country and be lost to Norfolk should this scheme not go ahead.

7.3

Question from Cllr Paul Neale

Recently the cabinet member said that Park and Ride is an important part of our transport strategy and the renewal of the contract gives us an opportunity to take stock and find out what residents would like to see from the service in the future. Norfolk residents have suggested to me that the county-run Park and Ride sites would make an ideal place for informal car shares to take place for residents traveling into Norwich if parking at the site could be made free to them. Does the cabinet member agree that this is a good idea and will he work with partners such as Liftshare to facilitate its progression?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

As part of the re-procurement of the Park & Ride contract we will be exploring all options. However, we do need to make sure that there is enough revenue from the service to keep the services viable. Allowing people to park for free and not use the bus service means lost revenue if those spaces would have been taken up by a Park & Ride user.

Supplementary question from Cllr Paul Neale

The Chancellor's autumn budget makes clear that real term deep cuts will be made in public spending. Momentum is growing from more local authorities having to declare 114 notices unable to balance their books with year on year real term reductions in government funding settlements. As this council already plans over £26 million cuts to its own budget, will they now have to make even more savage cuts to balance their books?

Response from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Thank you for your question. Forecasts accompanying the Autumn Statement undoubtedly suggest a challenging financial landscape for public services in future years. I have previously commented to Council on the increased number of s114 notices, and I remain

very aware of the risks to the financial sustainability of all authorities at the present time. However, there were very few specific announcements within the Autumn Statement directly relating to local government. As such, the Council is considering the implications of the broader changes, such as the increase to the National Living Wage, as part of 2024-25 Budget setting in the context of previous Government announcements including the Policy Statement issued in December 2022. It was disappointing, although not unexpected, that the Government did not set out any additional funding for social care at the Autumn Statement. The Council therefore continues to await the Provisional Settlement later in December, which will be critical to provide more detail and to inform our planning position for 2024-25. At this stage, and as set out in the October report to Cabinet, the Council is continuing to work to identify further savings, including a third round of Budget Challenge in December, which will contribute to the setting of a balanced budget in February 2024. It remains the case that the Council faces significant budget pressures, a combination of inflation and increasing demand which is outpacing our ability to meet it. This growth will be provided for in our spending plans meaning that in overall terms, the Council will be spending more next year than it does currently. The Budget reports to Cabinet and Full Council next year will provide details of the full implications of Government funding announcements, as well as the forecast level of savings required to balance the Budget over the medium term financial strategy period. As always, the budget setting process and savings targets will be kept under review as budget planning progresses.

7.4

Question from Cllr Catherine Rowett

Can the Cabinet member explain what checks have been done and what legal advice has been obtained to secure confidence that the Environment statement, including impacts on biodiversity, relating to the NWL will be robust and comply with all necessary legislation.

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

The Council has appointed WSP as the competent experts to prepare the Environmental Statement. The Council has also appointed specialist legal advisors to advise the Council on its proposed application for planning permission. A legal review of all the planning application documents is being carried out prior to finalisation and submission of the planning application.

Supplementary question from Cllr Catherine Rowett

What risk analysis has the Council carried out on the delivery of the policies and proposals in the council's Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4), and especially the LTP4 carbon reduction targets, in cases of with and without the NWL scheme?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

County Council officers are monitoring delivery of the local transport plan and will take a report to Members at Select Committee in the spring. Specifically on the carbon target, work on carbon quantification is being put underway that will provide an evidence base and technical support that can be used to inform decision-making on the measures required for the carbon target. Members will know that we are waiting for further guidance on local transport plans, first trailed by government in 2022. We will take stock of the guidance as and when it is released by government in respect of this work and also consider implications of the guidance on any other aspects of LTP.

Question from Cllr Brian Watkins

7.5

Last year, the government opened a new immigration route by expanding the health worker visa scheme to include care workers. However, there are reports that restrictions could be put in place to reduce net migration to the UK. Professor Martin Green, CEO of Care England has said that some of the changes proposed could make it harder for providers to retain and recruit overseas staff and increase the risk of forcing some of them out of business altogether. Norfolk's care market is under huge strain and close to breaking point. How does the Cabinet member believe that residents and their loved ones will be impacted if the restrictions are implemented?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

Thank you for your question.

The introduction of the health and social care visa helped the adult social care market to rapidly bolster vital workforce capacity, and has improved retention rates - enabling greater continuity of care. Furthermore International Recruits (IR) have enabled greater diversity within the workforce, beneficial for decision making, innovation and problem solving.

There are around 62 adult social care providers in Norfolk that currently hold a license to sponsor international workers, so recruitment from outside of the UK is a key feature of some, but not all workforce strategies. Developing sustainable approaches to increase domestic based recruitment remains a priority, as we rise to the challenge to resource ever growing demand.

Supplementary question from Cllr Brian Watkins

This Council faces a budget shortfall of £46 million for the forthcoming 2024/25 financial year. This is a staggeringly high amount and is by far the highest deficit faced by any other local authority in the East of England as 'Politics East' recently highlighted. You have repeated on several occasions that although worrying, Norfolk County Council is not standing on the edge of a financial precipice. Are you prepared to stake your administration's reputation that this remains the case and that the Council's financial future is safe in your hands?

Response from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Thank you for your question. I would note in this context that all local authorities are highly dependent on central government funding decisions and we continue to face significant uncertainty about funding levels for 2024-25 and beyond. This is why we continue to call on Government to provide us with funding certainty over the medium to longer term to enable sustainable and robust long-term financial planning. In terms of 2024-25 planning, you are correct that £46m is a significant budget gap, and I do not underestimate the scale of the challenge this represents. However, I would note that it is significantly less than the gap of £59.927m which we addressed in the 2023-24 budget, and is broadly in line with average level of savings that the Council has found each year since 2011-12 (£564.933m budgeted in total, representing an average of c£43m savings for each year). The size of the gap reflects the fact that this administration is being realistic during budget setting about the level of financial pressures we face each year. We will continue our approach of tackling this in a managed and robust way. This Council has a strong track record of balancing the budget each year.

Question from Cllr Rob Colwell

7.6 With 'efficiency saving' in the budget consultation significantly impacting children's services, what reassurances can you provide to Norfolk families who say their child's special educational needs are not currently being identified?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

The support that is provided for children with special educational needs is a combination of support direct from early years settings, schools and colleges and that provided by Children's Services. In simple terms children at 'SEN Support' have their support provided by educational settings with funding delegated directly to them (£38million+ annually) and for those with 'Education, Health & Care Plans' provided by Children's Services. The majority of funding for SEN in this way is via the High Needs Block grant and the Local First Inclusion programme, which has been set out in detail at Cabinet and Committee throughout this year, is the joint DfE / NCC £100million investment to increase opportunities for mainstream inclusion alongside expanding our specialist provision over a six year period. A key focus of this new programme of work is identify needs earlier and putting in place effective support.

Second question from Cllr Rob Colwell

It is welcome to see £2m of levelling up funding for Hunstanton to build a new library and bus stop. However, many residents have raised concerns about the lack of facilities currently available in the area for disabled and less able people. Between now and September 2024, what is the plan to ensure that these people are provided with suitable facilities to meet their needs?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

These types of facility are the responsibility of the King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, however the County Council is refurbishing the library and creating a Travel and Community Hub in the heart of Hunstanton. This will enable residents, tourists, people working in Hunstanton and those who use the town to; access services, travel easily, use greener travel options including cycling as well as accessing an improved library offer with Adult Education and Tourist Information, combined with spaces for community groups and outreach.

The Travel and Community Hub share many aims and objectives, including improving access to community services, improving visitor information and transport connections, and promoting net-zero and sustainability. It will also provide refurbished community toilet facilities including a new Changing Places facility.

The refurbished, accessible library will be a community space for all with computers and free Wi-Fi, activities for all ages including 'Bounce and Rhyme' sessions, 'Just a Cuppa', 'Knit and Knatter' and many more.

The project is estimated to cost £2m, with £1m being funded through the Norfolk Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and £1m from the County Councils Capital Fund.

The work is being carried out in two phases to avoid disruption during the busy summer season and we are aiming to keep the bus station operational throughout both phases of the work. All elements of the project are planned to be completed by early 2025.

Question from Cllr David Sayers

7.7

How can the council address the critical funding gap in the early years sector, particularly with the current inadequacy in covering nursery charges? The sector, a lifeline for families, faces a recruitment crisis and is making it impossible to accommodate more children. Staff, overworked and underpaid, are at breaking point. Insufficient funding fails to attract talent, barely covering growing daily costs. The widening gap between government funding rates and the living wage exacerbates the issue. Without an improved funding offer, providers may struggle to retain qualified staff, jeopardising the sector's vital role. What immediate steps can the council take to rectify this urgent funding shortfall?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Early Education and Childcare funding rates are set using a national funding formula. As a local authority we consult with early years providers and a consultative group of early years providers to determine with Schools Forum the best local formula for distribution of this funding within a strict set of limited rules. We are not able to distribute more funding than we receive from central government.

In the Spring budget there were several announcements which have the potential to make a significant difference to the childcare market in Norfolk – this included from September some increase in funding for 3-to-4-year olds and a significant increase in the funding rate for 2-year-olds. Starting in April there will be a phasing in of extended entitlements for working families of children from 9 months of age. Funding allocations to local authorities were published on the 29th November – with an increase of 4.6% to the base rate for 3-and-4-year olds. The local authority will receive £5.48 per funded 3-and-4-year old, £7.70 per funded 2 year old and £10.48 for children under 2. The government has stated the revised rates reflect the increase to the national minimum wage. We remain in full agreement that funding rates remain too low, but welcome the increase and continue to do everything we can to maximise the funding available to providers.

Recruitment and retention is an issue nationwide – the Department for Education (DfE) are starting a national early years recruitment campaign in the new year and are promoting early years apprenticeships to try and grow the workforce, but there remain significant challenges across the care and education sectors in recruiting and retaining staff as a result of competition from other sectors and the increased cost of living. We have also supported new providers to open, including Little Gillies, a new provision in Wells-next-the-Sea. We have an active childminder recruitment campaign where we are supporting more new childminders to enter the market with training and start-up funding. We continue to effectively support providers to adapt their business models and be sustainable.

The evidence suggests that despite significant challenges, Early Education and Childcare in Norfolk remains strong - the percentage of good and outstanding early years providers is slightly above the national average (the most recent figures show that 97% of Norfolk providers are good or outstanding, compared to 96% nationally) and the percentage of children who reach expected standards in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile is above the national average in every Early Learning Goal

Second question from Cllr David Sayers

The February 2023 P&CSC report outlined notable EHCP progress, especially in initial assessments. Challenges remain in prolonged EHCP plan production. EHCP reviews face persistent challenges. Baseline data comparisons highlight positive trends, but sustained efforts are crucial for EHCP performances to meet statutory timescales. How does the council intend to address challenges, ensuring timely EHCP processes and enhanced outcomes for SEND children? Additionally, could the council provide updates on progress post November 2022, indicating any continued improvement in EHCP performance?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

The current performance for the number of new EHCPs issued within the 20 week timeframe is 42.3% (taken as a cumulative measure January to end of October 2023). The marginal reduction in performance from 2022 arises from clearing a large backlog of overdue EHCPs in the first quarter of 2023 where recognition should be given to the team who produce EHCPs whose exemplary performance has resulted in record numbers of new EHCPs being issued so far this year. As at October 2023, 2039 EHCPs have been newly issued, an 87% increase on the total for 2022. Demand for EHCPs continues at overwhelming rate, with requests for EHCPs on course to reach 2,500 for 2023, an increase of a further 25% from 2022's record peak. The Council continues to support EHCP delivery with further reviews of the resourcing within those teams, and effective use of the commercial sector to supply Educational Psychology resource which is suffering from national shortage. Critical to an EHCP system that is ultimately sustainable is enabling the children's needs to be more effectively met at SEND Support and this is the cornerstone of the Council's Local First Inclusion strategy which places resource, funding and support directly into mainstream schools, early years settings and colleges so that children's needs are well met and the confidence in this system increases.

7.8 **Question from Cllr Terry Jermy**

I am grateful that following my question at the Corporate Select Committee meeting that officers have confirmed there remains approximately 15,000 streetlights in Norfolk still to be upgraded to LED. This is of course disappointing news given the benefits that LED upgrades have. Can the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation confirm how many are located in each Councillor division and the timetable for upgrading those remaining 15,000 lights to LED?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation

Works are ongoing and will be completed in two years time.

The remaining non LED lights are on many roads which have been built or adopted since the start of the PFI contract. Outside of these adoptions, the remaining roads are those with the lowest energy use, as our previous upgrade programmes targeted the roads with lighting systems that used the most energy, which would therefore save the most carbon and money.

The programme of 15,000 lights are spread across the county and I have asked the team to send you details of the lights within your division.

Question from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton

7.9	<p>Can the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation confirm what actions are being taken to ensure the property and grounds of the Angel Road Junior School site does not fall into further disrepair?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation / Children’s Services</p> <p>As previously indicated to Members, the responsibility for the site and buildings at Angel Road at present remains with the Evolution Academy Trust (EAT) under its academy lease. However, we have been working with the EAT on the basis the site will return to NCC, acknowledging that the Multi-Academy Trust has Secretary of State for Education permission to surrender the lease once the conditions are met.</p> <p>As a result, we have worked with EAT to specify the required level of security on the site, set out by NCC insurers, so when it does return to the NCC Estate, it will not require additional works to secure. When the buildings and site are surrendered back to the County Council, officers from Children’s Services and Corporate Property Team will visit and agree an appropriate monitoring schedule.</p> <p>We will commission any works to the ground periodically to ensure it remains relatively tidy.</p>
7.10	<p>Question from Cllr Chrissie Rumsby</p> <p>Can the Leader confirm the carbon impact of reintroducing the “Your Norfolk” magazine being sent to every household in Norfolk and how this is being measured?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</p> <p>Your Norfolk has been reintroduced in paper format, acknowledging not all households have access to digital means, to give residents essential information regarding winter issues and to ensure we reached every household in the County.</p> <p>We have sought further details from our printing and distribution suppliers and we will provide further information as we receive it. We believe any impact is outweighed by the benefits of supplying useful council information to all county residents, which digital channels cannot achieve on their own. We have already received a positive reaction to the reintroduced print edition.</p>
7.11	<p>Question from Cllr Colleen Walker</p> <p>Since my question last month, the people of Hemsby have seen further permanent loss and damage to the coastline, creating continuing anguish and uncertainty. The Council resolved to write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – please can you share the letter that was sent and the response received?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</p> <p>Thank you for your question. This matter was debated fully at the Scrutiny committee and there was a resolution to write to government concerning the appointment of a Coastal and Flood Minister. This will be brought before Council this month for debate and should it be agreed a letter will be sent from the Leader of the Council to the Secretary of State. A copy will be shared with members at that time</p>