

County Councillor Report to Caston Parish Council 2/9/24

It's good to see the new 'Gold Standard' bus shelter installed in Watton High Street,

facilitated from funding of £49.55m allocated to Norfolk by the previous Government to improve bus services across the County. (Norfolk received the sixth highest allocation of funding in the country.) Approximately £12 million of that funding was allocated to providing new or expanded bus routes with more evening services on key routes including to Dereham and Watton.

As part of its Bus Service Improvement Plan Norfolk County Council identified Watton as one of 20 Towns in Norfolk (including Swaffham) which qualified for a Gold Standard Bus Stop meaning a covered waiting area, lighting, real time passenger info, extra seating, cycle parking, printed timetable info etc.

As your County Councillor I have been very pleased to support and see the delivery of this investment in our Market Town which will be to the benefit of the local Watton and Wayland economy, residents and visitors alike.

I note that Konect bus has announced changes to a number of its services from September with one of the new routes will run 3 times a day, serving Carbrooke village, Ovington, Saham Toney and Watton. Unfortunately Route 3A between Watton and Dereham has been withdrawn due to low passenger numbers.

January 2025 Flood & Drought Summit, Council Chamber, County Hall - Following postponement earlier this year, due to the calling of the General Election, the NSFA and NCC are re-arranging the multi-agency summit to discuss flooding and the actions we can collectively take to mitigate it. Now taking place on Friday the 31st of January 2025, we are bringing together a wide range of agencies and stakeholders which have various responsibilities relating to water management. The focus of the summit will be on action, and how we can achieve this through collaborating better with each other. There will be a variety of speakers, including Norfolk County Council as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), as well as representatives from Anglian Water and the Environment Agency.

Residents across Norfolk are being reminded of the importance of buying lithium-ion batteries for a range of everyday devices *only from reputable and safe retailers*, to ensure they meet UK safety standards and aren't a fire risk. As a Safety Bill about the rechargeable batteries is due to go before the House of Lords on Friday (6 September 2024), Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service and Norfolk County Council's Trading Standards team is investigating a house fire which is believed to have been started by a battery which was charging. The occupants of the house in Bowthorpe managed to escape the fire last Tuesday evening, and a subsequent fire investigation has concluded that the fire started with the battery, purchased from an online retailer, and charger. Lithium-ion batteries are found in a range of devices including; mobile phones, tablets, laptops, mobility scooters, e-bikes, e-scooters, e-cigarettes and hover boards.

Car Park Charging Model

As both District and County Councillor for Watton I am, of course very aware of local residents' concerns about the recent decision by Breckland Cabinet to introduce a car park charging model

across all it's market towns. The reasoning being to offset car park maintenance challenges and costs, which it's current free parking policy unfortunately can't sustain.

My understanding always was that any review of the Car Park policy would consider each market town according to it's individual situation. Therefore knowing that the report consultants did not originally consider that Watton should be subject to parking charges, I fully support Watton and Wayland residents and businesses who have approached me with their concerns.

To that end I attended Breckland Scrutiny Commission meeting on 11th July and Cabinet on 15th to raise questions around comments in the report and to challenge the assertion that the inclusion of Watton in a charging regime was 'only fair', when the consultants themselves had not found a case for charging in Watton. A period of public consultation will begin in the Autumn, giving members of the public the opportunity to feed back on the individual charging proposals for each town and I encourage Watton and Wayland residents, shoppers and businesses to take part. At the Cabinet meeting, in response to a question raised by a member, I was pleased that the Chairman, Cllr Sam Chapman Allen, agreed that the consultation documentation content be brought to a future Scrutiny Commission for examination and discussion. I shall be attending that meeting and the Full council meeting, at which the release of funds for the new policy will be on the Agenda.

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