

Stoke Holy Cross District Councillor Report 16th January 2025

Grants

Member Ward Grants for 2024/25 have been used on local projects. Requests for future support with small projects (up to £1,000 usually) to benefit the local community can be made to your District Councillors.

South Norfolk has been awarded c£510,000 for 2025/26 from the Shared Prosperity Fund, around 30% less than last year. Some of this is likely to be available to support larger community grants in 25/26. Details will be available later in the year.

Devolution & Local Government Reorganisation

Just before Christmas, the Government published the English Devolution White Paper outlining an ambitious program to devolve power to Mayoral Strategic Authorities and to reorganise two-tier areas such as South Norfolk, so that services managed by County and District Councils are, in future, managed by a new combined authority.

The County Council has confirmed its interest in joining the Devolution Priority Programme and has requested deferral of the May 2025 County elections. The final decision on elections is expected from Westminster in January. It is possible that the first Mayoral election will be in May 2026.

Whether one combined authority will be the outcome for Norfolk remains to be seen. Plans for reorganisation are required no later than Autumn this year for areas in the priority program.

Mental Health Awareness in the Community – Mulbarton 21st January

A free training course is being delivered by NHS Talk Therapies at Mulbarton Village Hall from 1pm – 2.45pm on Tuesday 21st January. The course will give an overview of mental health conditions, how to manage stress, how to start a conversation and where to signpost people for help. This course also contains some content on suicide awareness. This is part of South Norfolk's "Mindful Towns and Villages" programme.

Places can be booked here: <https://forms.office.com/e/tQasbwdFn9>.

Building Futures Apprenticeship Grants – Business Applications Close 31st January

Grants of up to £2,000 are available to businesses looking to take on a new apprentice. As well as financial support, businesses will receive a free skills analysis and practical support to pick the right apprenticeship and provider. For businesses looking to develop green skills, enhanced grants of £5,000 are available 'Dark Green' apprenticeships. For my information and to apply:

<https://apprenticeshipsnorfolk.org/buildingfutures>

Recycling & Bin Collection

A variety of options are being considered to manage the cost of collections (including food waste from 2026) and to improve the rate of recycling in South Norfolk from 42% to 50%. This may include weekly on-demand collection for textiles and small electricals to most properties, ending side-waste collections (extra waste left next to the bin) and reducing black bin collections to three-weekly. and reduce the level of contamination of recycled items.

South Norfolk Budget Update

Lower-tier councils like South Norfolk have been disadvantaged by the Government's financial settlement for 2025/26. Initial budget estimates for SNC assumed an increase in funding, the proposed settlement is for a £0.5 million reduction in cash funds leading to a shortfall approaching £1.0 million.

This has been more than offset by a guaranteed income of at least £2.1 million in 25/26 for packaging Extended Producer Responsibilities, much higher than earlier estimates. This is a new charge on business which is aimed at encouraging bigger companies to reduce packaging waste and improve recycling. Longer term financial pressures are expected as this income stream is expected to reduce.

Planning Consultation – Self-Build and Custom Build SPD

Cabinet is being asked to approve starting a 6 week consultation on a proposed Supplementary Planning Document on Self-Build and Custom-Build Housing. The Greater Norwich Local plan introduced opportunities for this type of housing on the edge of existing settlements outside of development boundaries. This document is important as it seeks to provide further guidance on where such applications may be approved.

Landscape Impact of Energy Infrastructure Projects

South Norfolk has commissioned a report on the landscape impact of new energy infrastructure. The report is expected to form the basis of a further Supplementary Planning Document which may help better manage the sprawl of infrastructure across our District. The initial report will be discussed at a meeting of the Council's Planning & Economic Growth Committee later this month.

Rooftop Solar – CPRE Campaign

South Norfolk Council supported a Liberal Democrat motion to support CPRE's rooftop solar campaign. The objective of this is to both increase the use of rooftops and reduce the need for the loss of farming land for Solar Farms.

'Norwich to Tilbury' Update

National Grid has recently announced that it will be taking forward the pylon option for crossing the Waveney Valley. This decision reflects "environmental policy, planning policy and cost". The recent newsletter confirms that the application for a Development Consent Order will be in 2025.

PylonsEastAnglia are continuing to campaign against the pylon proposals. For further information visit <https://pylonseastanglia.co.uk/actions>

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