

Norfolk County Council Updates 26-02-26

Highway improvements across Norfolk

Norfolk County Council has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting local communities with the approval of 99 new highway improvement schemes for 2026-27, delivered in partnership with town and parish councils across Norfolk.

Reports for the Cabinet meeting on 2 March highlight how the Parish Partnership Programme gives local communities a voice in shaping the highways enhancements that matter most to them - such as improving pedestrian safety, slowing vehicle speeds, or making it easier to walk, cycle or access local services.

This year's programme represents a total investment of £769,034, made possible through the longstanding 50/50 funding model. Town and parish councils will collectively contribute £384,517, matched by £384,517 from Norfolk County Council, enabling more than twice as many small-scale schemes to be delivered than could be funded by the council alone.

The full report including a list of all 99 schemes can be found from page 788 in the cabinet papers online. [People can watch the meeting and read the reports online.](#)

Government decision relating to Westen link capital funding

The Government has approved the council's capitalisation direction for the Norwich Western Link. This allows previously received grant funding to be used to write off costs already incurred in developing the scheme prior to the insurmountable issues raised by Natural England, which ultimately prevented the project from proceeding in its original form.

The decision removes financial uncertainty and provides clarity on the project's legacy costs and expenditure write off. The council will now continue work on developing an alternative route to meet the scheme's objectives.

West Winch Housing access road update

Further details have been confirmed to resolve an issue which threatened to hold up the West Winch Housing Access Road, a major road project for west Norfolk.

The scheme will reduce congestion on the A10, improve the A47 south of King's Lynn, remove heavy traffic from West Winch and support up to 4,000 new homes.

Ahead of construction, two high-pressure gas mains must be diverted by National Gas Transmission. While this was anticipated, updated cost estimates have increased significantly. The issue was reported to the County Council's cabinet last December and a further report that provides an update and a way forward is due to be considered by cabinet members at a meeting on 2 March.

Subject to the recommendations in the report being approved by cabinet, work to divert the two gas mains is anticipated to start during the spring and is programmed to be completed ahead of construction of the new road beginning next year.

The cabinet will consider the report on West Winch Housing Access Road on Monday 2 March. [People can watch the meeting and read the reports online.](#)

Plans for two new special schools in Norfolk

The county council has confirmed it will proceed with two new special schools in Downham Market and Great Yarmouth, rather than fund additional places in existing schools.

Although the case was approved over two years ago, funding for the new schools was paused following a change of Government. The Department for Education later offered c £13.7m to develop extra places in existing schools as an alternative. With the two new schools costing an estimated £40m, the council wanted reassurance that if it went ahead with the original plans the Government would cover the full cost. This has now been confirmed.

The new schools will be led by Unity Trust, in Great Yarmouth, and Eastern Learning Alliance, in Downham Market. The Great Yarmouth school will support 170 children with learning disabilities, whilst the Downham Market School will cater for 100 children with complex communication and interaction difficulties.

Special schools are part of [Norfolk County Council's Local First Inclusion programme](#) which aims to help more children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) learn locally by strengthening support in mainstream schools while increasing specialist places for those with the most complex needs.

Investment in Beryl bikes along the A11 corridor

Norfolk County Council is taking action to help residents get into Norwich during the ongoing A11 improvement works by National Highways.

The works are bringing much needed investment and improvements to a major junction in Norfolk but are also causing significant disruption.

The county council is committed to providing alternative travel options that make journeys easier and quicker for people. As part of the work to keep Norfolk moving, the council is investing in the Beryl bike and e-scooter network along the A11 corridor, focusing on Wymondham and Hethersett. The investment includes 35 new e-bikes, 40 new e-scooters, additional Beryl bays and improvements to the cycle route.

Further details are available in our press release [here](#).

Norfolk Fire and Rescue service

Six new water rescue boats have been delivered to Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS) strengthening its ability to respond to inland, Broads and large flood-related incidents.

The boats replace existing vessels at King's Lynn, Great Yarmouth, Dereham and Carrow fire stations, with an additional boat for training at Bowthorpe. They will also complement new Technical Rescue Units arriving later this year. NFRS also continues to promote water safety through the Norfolk Water Safety Forum, working with partners to reduce risk and save lives.

NFRS's water rescue work does not include rescues from sea, where residents should still call 999 but should ask for HM Coastguard.

Further information about the Norfolk Water Safety Forum, including links to advice and safety information is available [here](#).

National Updates

Schools White Paper published

The Government's [Schools White Paper 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving'](#) has been published.

This sets out a 10-year reform programme for schools and SEND. It aims to raise standards, improve inclusion and halve the disadvantage attainment gap for disadvantaged and SEND children.

The proposals include an expectation that every school provides a broad, high-quality enrichment experience as part of a wider, ambitious curriculum. Reforms include new funding models, improved support and the expansion of family hubs, breakfast clubs and mental health support.

The paper positions schools as key partners within the wider system that includes local authorities, health services, social care, voluntary and community organisations.

Alongside the White Paper, the Government has also published a consultation on reforms to the SEND system, [SEND reform: putting children and young people first](#). This sets out a broader set of reforms, building upon proposals set out in chapter 3 of the White Paper.

SEND proposals include a significant shift towards earlier, mainstream support for children with SEND, including new Individual Support Plans (ISPs) for pupils who need additional help. Over time, it is expected that EHCPs will be focused on the most complex needs, supported by increased specialist advice through the "Experts at Hand" programme. Special schools (such as the two new schools being built in Norfolk) will ensure there is the right support for those with the greatest needs.

Further details and information about the White paper and SEND proposals are available in the links below:

- The Government blog page for parents - [Schools white paper: What parents need to know about changes to the SEND system](#).
- The [Local Government Association briefing](#) on the Schools White Paper that sets out their response and the key proposals in the paper.

Government response to the Post Office Green Paper

The Government's response to the Post Office Green Paper confirms the long-term protection and modernisation of the Post Office network, with a commitment to at least 11,500 branches and a new requirement for a minimum number of full-time, full-service branches.

This is welcome news for local communities, as Post Offices remain at the heart of many communities, offering trusted access to essential services and acting as important local hubs, especially in rural areas. They are also helpful to residents who are digitally excluded, and as community assets, supporting local high streets.

