

Coastal erosion in Hemsby

At a meeting of GYBC in January, members considered a Motion on Notice from Councillors Smith, Bensly, Plant, Flaxman-Taylor and Candon.

It said: "This winter has seen an unprecedented loss of property up and down our coastline, with District and Borough Councils left to try and support residents as best they can with the loss of the homes and property as a result.

"At Hemsby, high tides and high winds meant ten metres of cliff were lost overnight, not as the result of a storm, but the normal tidal process. This loss has meant that 18 properties became critically close to the cliff edge, many of which would have been considered as being on the anticipated erosion line for 2055.

"These are people's homes, where they have often invested every penny they have into a property which now faces imminent demolition. The funding available for sea defences is woefully inadequate given the number of properties affected by coastal erosion and rising sea levels. The immediate number of properties affected is around 9,000, with this figure being significantly higher by 2050 should the current shoreline plan not be implemented.

"We therefore urgently call on the Government to provide a scheme of insurance, similar to that provided by Flood-Re, where properties at risk of coastal erosion could be insured for their loss and the real cost of demolition.

"Finally, a national adaptation strategy for communities affected by Coastal Erosion that enables local councils to support their communities to adapt to coastal change in a managed way, not through pilot schemes but through a formal process that is clearly structured for residents to understand.

"Without these changes, our residents will suffer immeasurably from the stress and emotional and financial burdens of coastal change. Council therefore asks that the Leader writes to the Environment Secretary, the Environment Agency, and the Prime Minister, requesting that the above proposals are taken forward and implemented."

In addition - since essential work began in December 2025 - 35 properties in Hemsby have been demolished.

The council continues to liaise with homeowners following an extremely difficult winter which meant the dunes in Hemsby have seen about 50 per cent of the erosion predicted for the entirety of the next 30 years. More than 10 metres of land was lost in just over 12 months. Since the 1940s, there has been at least 100m of dune recession.

The GYBC coastal management team continues to monitor and map ongoing erosion closely - including the use of specialist drone equipment - and officers have been making house calls to meet with affected residents regularly to keep them informed and explain all the options available.

Making sure residents and the public are safe is of paramount importance. There will inevitably be further loss of land and how we plan for that and provide information about the options available to people is the primary focus.

It is hoped, as summer approaches, there will now be a period of calmer weather.

Meanwhile the council awaits further detail from the Environment Agency on its announcement earlier this year that coastal communities in Yorkshire, Norfolk and Suffolk are set to benefit from £30 million to battle eroding shores.

Under the EA's new Coastal Adaptation Pilots, £18 million will be shared between coastal projects in the three counties to help fund new long-term adaptation approaches.

This will include selective property purchases or long-term financing solutions that could provide a sustainable model for managing coastal transition in areas where homes face imminent risk from erosion.

An additional £12 million will also be made available to Regional Flood and Coastal Committees (RFCCs) to select projects that can deliver smaller-scale adaptation readiness actions.

These projects will help communities take practical steps to prepare for coastal change, including moving community buildings away from at-risk areas, testing early warning systems that can alert residents to erosion events, and improving beach access and coastal tourism infrastructure.

The new pilots will require a 10 per cent local funding contribution from participating areas. This aims to unlock over £3 million in additional investment and demonstrate how national and local resources can work together to address this growing challenge.

The Environment Agency will manage the pilots and will provide technical support to participating areas and will ensure that learning is shared with other coastal communities facing similar pressures.

GYBC will continue to update the Hemsby Stakeholder Group – of which the PC is a member – when there is more information.

GYBC share of Council Tax bills set for 2026/27

At a meeting of GYBC in February it was agreed to increase the council's portion of borough residents' Council Tax bills by 2.99 per cent.

This means that for an average Band D property in the borough, GYBC's part of the annual Council Tax bill is £198.25 - an increase of £5.76 (per annum) from last year. This delivers services including housing, waste collection, recycling, planning, licensing and environmental health, car parks, cemeteries and the internal drainage board levy, among other things.

GYBC's share of Council Tax bills represents eight per cent (£198.25) of the total people will pay. Of people's total Council Tax bill, 77 per cent (£1,843.38) goes to Norfolk County Council, 14 per cent (£344.79) to Norfolk Police Authority and one per cent (on average £27.99) to parish councils.

Members also agreed that council home rents will increase by 4.8 per cent for 2026/27, which means the weekly rent on a two-bedroomed property will go up, on average, £4.53, from £94.52 to £99.05.

The budget allows for continued investment in the council's housing stock, including a continuation of its energy efficiency programme for the next two years totalling in the region of £10m.

Norfolk County Council increased its share of Council Tax by five per cent for 2026/27 and Norfolk Police Authority increased its share by 4.53 per cent.

For the first time in more than a decade there has been a significant change to the way local councils are funded by the Government – which now takes into account relative deprivation, need and resources as well as providing a three-year settlement. For GYBC this has meant an increase of 14.7 per cent over the next three years compared to 2024/25. However, this is still low compared to the average increase across the sector of 24.3 per cent.

The council's overall net budget for 2026/27 is in the region of £17.5m.

To ensure its budget is balanced, over the next financial year GYBC plans to make savings of £150,000 and use £214,000 from its reserves.

In March the Government issued a 'minded to' decision on a three-unitary model for Norfolk

The Government will now progress a three-unitary model for Norfolk as part of its Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) plans, saying it believes this structure would provide the best outcomes for residents of Norfolk.

Three options had been submitted for consideration by Norfolk councils: a one-unitary, two-unitary and three-unitary model to replace existing councils in the county.

Great Yarmouth Borough Council had supported the three-unitary model alongside Breckland District Council, Broadland District Council, the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, North Norfolk District Council and Norwich City Council.

Councils have now moved into the next stage of planning for LGR, with everyone focused on preparing for the proposed implementation by April 2028. The next phase of work will involve all eight existing councils in Norfolk collaborating to develop the detailed transition plans required to deliver the three-unitary model for residents.

Under the Government's 'minded to' decision, a final determination cannot be made until the necessary legal processes are completed, which is expected in the autumn. Elections to the new shadow authorities are scheduled for May 2027, with the new councils proposed to become operational in April 2028.

Councillor Carl Smith, Leader of Great Yarmouth Borough Council, said: "Throughout this process, I and fellow councillors have always wanted what is best for the people of Great Yarmouth. Now the Government has decided a three-unitary model of reorganisation is the best way forward, we will focus on the next phase of work to develop the proposed governance and service arrangements for the new authorities so the transition is as smooth as possible for our residents."

In a letter to Norfolk council leaders explaining the decision, Steve Reed, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, said: "I found that the three unitary proposal would better reflect Norfolk's communities and local identities, drawing on a detailed understanding of local need. It establishes councils that are better aligned to Norfolk's distinct communities and will therefore be able to design and deliver public services that respond more effectively to local priorities across Norfolk's different urban, rural, and coastal areas. I also judged that it would provide more effective balance within the planned Mayoral Strategic Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk, which will support more effective governance at the strategic authority level."

He added three councils will allow public service delivery to fit Norfolk's distinct urban, rural, and coastal community identities and local economic clusters, enabling the new unitaries to best meet local needs, including on housing supply, and addressing local economic and social challenges in a proposal that was supported by six out of eight councils in the area.

Government endorses Pride in Place programme

Last month, Great Yarmouth's proposals for the Government's Pride in Place funding were officially endorsed.

Great Yarmouth was one of 70 places across the country initially selected for £20m Pride in Place support over the next decade, with the aim of helping to build stronger and more connected communities with local people deciding where the money will go.

The Town Board was responsible for drawing up the programme of projects following a major survey of local residents carried out in 2024. It will also oversee the delivery of the work that is designed to contribute to long-term economic and social regeneration in the borough.

Reducing crime, improving health facilities, tackling dilapidated buildings and having better parks and green spaces are some of the things people said they'd like to see the Government funding spent on.

There was a clear consensus around five themes – making it easier to access health services; bringing empty shops and buildings back into use; making the town feel safer; keeping streets clean and tidy; and creating places for children and young people to socialise and have fun.

As a result, work will be focused on:

- Regeneration of The Conge is seeing acquisition, enabling works, lease-extinguishment, compensation and preparation ahead of a major residential development which has been approved by planners.
- Repurposing vacant buildings to reduce blight, drive residential use and increase footfall, with an emphasis upon landmark buildings and heritage at risk.
- A Great Yarmouth Town Centre Taskforce has been created, to ensure streets and shop frontages are clean and free of litter, fly tippers prosecuted, empty properties brought back into use and anti-social behaviour tackled and more use made of Public Spaces Protection Order powers.
- Events and cultural animation will see the council working alongside partners to develop activities to drive welcoming and inclusive community participation with arts and culture in public spaces.
- Targeted, collectively owned work to foster positivity and pride in the town, encouraging civic engagement by linking with organisations like Visit GY and the Town Centre Partnership.
- Parks, landscape and ecology management with dedicated resources focused on improving the quality of green spaces and planting to encourage 'dwell-time', mobilising volunteers to encourage community engagement.
- Heritage enhancements via an investment fund in partnership with Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust to capitalise on the historic built environment, improving community participation and engagement.
- New preventative town centre health and dental provider facilities, to bring care into local communities, helping to get people back into work and narrowing health inequalities.
- Sourcing funding from Sport England to develop facilities to give young people access to sports and activities that provide somewhere safe and enjoyable to meet friends, increase engagement and aspiration.
- A campaign and resources geared towards younger people to foster civic engagement, pride and volunteering, encouraging and empowering young people to make positive contributions to their communities.

£740,000 investment programme to revamp play areas across the borough

In April, GYBC approved plans to spend more than £320,000 from its capital budget on revamping play areas.

The investment will supplement £308,000 allocated for play area improvements from the Government's Pride in Place programme and further works being paid for under Section 106 agreements.

The council manages and maintains 90 play areas across the borough - with almost 650 pieces of equipment - and the decision means a major programme of works will now get underway.

Priority sites for the improvements were identified by the council's property team as part of its £100,000 annual inspection and maintenance schedule.

Currently, only high-categorised works have been able to be paid for and members have now agreed to allocate £323,129 to ensure a raft of improvements can take place.

Including the Government Pride in Place funding of £308,000 and £90,000 of Section 106 money, it means about £740,000 will be spent over the next financial year on 14 play areas. Other sites will get repairs to wear and tear.

In Great Yarmouth the play areas that will get improvements are the ones at: Coronation Road; Ferrier Road; Lichfield Road; Peggotty Road multi-use games area; St George's Park; and the Marine Parade basketball court.

Other play areas in the borough that will get upgrades are the ones at: Diana Way in Caister; Gorleston Cliffs; Martham playing field; Mill Lane playing field in Bradwell; Ormesby playing field; Rollesby playing field multi-use games area; Watsons Close in Hopton; and Fleggburgh playing field.

Hopton playing field will also see a Section 106 contribution of £181,000 pay for new equipment and other improvements.

Additional Section 106 contributions will also see improvements at a number of other play areas including: Trafalgar Grange in Hopton; King George V Playing Field in Caister; and Mill View LAP, Ormesby St Margaret.

And, subject to further external funding being secured, Section 106 monies have also been allocated for improvements at: Green Lane play area in Bradwell; Southtown Common Recreation Ground; Magdalen Square play area in Gorleston; and East Anglian Way West Play Area in Gorleston.

The works will be completed in phases over the coming year. Meanwhile, the council's property team will continue to monitor all play areas in the borough and liaise with stakeholders – including parish councils – to highlight what and where improvements will be necessary in future.

Additional £1.5m of Government funding for immediate works

Last month, the Town Board approved a range of work paid for with £1.5m of immediate additional Government funding.

The schemes include the previously announced £320,000 to improve children's play areas, with a five-year programme to refurbish or replace equipment at priority locations.

There will also be £200,000 for Peggotty Road Community Centre to improve heating and reduce running costs. And £150,000 to enhance St George's Park and Gorleston Cliffs with hard landscaping, better accessibility, improved paths and paving, planting and new inclusive play options.

£200,000 is being made available to restore the derelict Caister-On-Sea Cemetery and Grade II-listed Gorleston Old Cemetery Lodge to provide distinctive family homes.

And £62,000 will go to reinstate the Gorleston Carnegie Clock which has been in storage since the former Carnegie Library was demolished in 1975. Gorleston Library Friends started fundraising to restore the clock to full working order and the flowerbed outside of the Feathers Pub has been identified as a suitable location for installation.

In April the council launched a new taskforce to tackle anti-social behaviour and clean up Great Yarmouth town centre

In the first initiative of its kind in Norfolk, there are now four new council enforcement officers, three more police officers and three additional street cleansing operatives focused on anti-social behaviour, resolving problem properties and keeping Great Yarmouth's streets clean and tidy.

The issues were all highlighted by residents as issues they wanted the council to focus on and GYBC, working with the Town Board, secured Government funding for the project via the Pride in Place programme.

It means that for the first time in Norfolk a council will now be helping to fund police officers to provide a dedicated resource.

The aim is to improve the look and the feel of the town and deal with anti-social behaviour so people feel safe and that there is a welcoming environment. There will be increased use of the Public Spaces Protection order to target street drinking and a range of other issues, and the taskforce means enforcement is stepped up and there is a more targeted focus on street cleaning, fly-tipping and run-down buildings.

More than a dozen people have been prosecuted, with more cases due in court – and fines and charges of more than £14,000 have been handed down, as have jail sentences. The additional resource will make it easier to deliver changes at the pace people want to see.

There is also a major focus on educating people and providing support and advice where appropriate, with the council's outreach team on hand to signpost people to housing services or NHS practitioners.

Over the past 18 months the council has re-shaped the way it approaches grounds maintenance and street cleaning, with improvements in grass cutting, maintenance, emptying of bins and litter picking.

Great Yarmouth's new Transport Strategy formally adopted

Norfolk County Council and GYBC formally adopted the new Great Yarmouth Transport Strategy in March, marking a major step forward in shaping the future of travel, connectivity and infrastructure locally.

The strategy sets out a vision for how people will move around Great Yarmouth over the next decade, reflecting changes in national and local transport policy, evolving post-Covid travel habits, and ongoing economic and housing growth. It identifies the transport infrastructure and improvements needed to support sustainable development while protecting Great Yarmouth's unique culture, heritage and coastal character.

The adoption followed a public consultation in late 2025, during which residents, businesses, community groups and stakeholders shared their views on the proposed direction and priorities.

Feedback from the consultation directly shaped the final version of the strategy approved by both councils.

Since the previous strategy in 2020, Great Yarmouth has already seen significant transport improvements, including:

- The opening of the Herring Bridge in February 2024, reducing motor traffic on Haven Bridge by 42%
- Upgrades to the railway station access junction
- Enhancements to the A47 Harfreys Roundabout, supporting better traffic flow and the new crossing

The new strategy builds on this progress and sets out a clear framework for future investment focusing on:

- Improving walking, wheeling and cycling routes
- Enhancing access to public transport
- Supporting planned housing and employment growth
- Reducing emissions and improving air quality
- Strengthening transport links for residents, visitors and local businesses

It means there is now a clear and ambitious plan that supports the town's future, with a foundation for sustainable, long-term growth and make the town more attractive for further economic investment.

Masterplan unveiled for North Quay regeneration

In December, GYBC, working in partnership with developer Willmott Dixon and retail outlet specialist Rioja Estates, unveiled an emerging masterplan for the regeneration of the North Quay area of Great Yarmouth.

The multi-million-pound regeneration, led by GYBC and supported by Levelling Up funding, will transform the 10-acre riverside site into a vibrant mixed-use quarter. The scheme will reconnect the town centre with the waterfront, create new public spaces and deliver long-term benefits for residents, visitors and local businesses.

Expected to attract up to two million visitors per year, the scheme will also provide a welcome boost to tourism and local businesses. It is expected to create up to 500 jobs during the construction phase, up to 600 permanent positions in retail, leisure and hospitality in the development itself, and up to 400 further jobs in the surrounding area once open.

At the heart of the regeneration are a major Leisure Box anchor with an Imax-ready multi-screen cinema and conferencing facility, a retail outlet centre with approximately 70 premium and high street brand stores, a 100-120 room hotel, housing, cafes, restaurants, flexible workspaces, community facilities and parking for up to 900 cars. The development also includes green riverside walks, play areas, new public squares and a cycle route that will connect North Quay with the town centre, link the railway station with the Market Place and create views over Breydon Water and the Broads.

Willmott Dixon, which was chosen as the developer for the project by Great Yarmouth Borough Council, has chosen to partner with Rioja Estates Ltd, a leading UK-based real estate development company that specialises in premium outlet destinations and has extensive expertise in retail-led regeneration. Its portfolio includes some of the most innovative designer outlet projects in the UK and internationally, and it has brought forward outlets in Bridgend, Swindon and Cannock, as well as sites in Europe including Malmö Designer Village.

The ambitious vision dovetails with GYBC's determination to make Great Yarmouth a thriving place to live, work and visit. The plans were the result of ongoing, cross-party partnership working in the borough which is focused on ensuring a successful future for everyone in Great Yarmouth.

The North Quay regeneration will be phased, with community consultation already underway and a planning application later this year.

Main contractor for Winter Gardens restoration

In the autumn, GYBC appointed VINCI Building as the main contractor for the first phase of work for the restoration of the town's iconic Winter Gardens.

The key milestone for the ambitious multi-million-pound project, means initial enabling works - including cleaning of the existing ironwork – is now underway.

The start of initial construction work follows months of detailed collaboration with stakeholders - including The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England, Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Norwich's John Innes Centre and the University of Cambridge Institute of Sustainability – on designs for the renovation of the Grade II* listed building on the Golden Mile.

The designs for the building include innovative and sustainable plans for high-quality glazing, heating and cooling systems, significant planting, rainwater harvesting, irrigation and low energy and decarbonisation for what is the UK's last surviving Victorian glasshouse on a seaside promenade.

With the Winter Gardens scheduled to open in 2028, the aim is to reduce life-cycle costs and increase asset value, as well as improving the visitor experience for the public.

Last year The National Lottery Heritage Fund awarded £12.3 million to the council to deliver its vision for the Winter Gardens – Reimagining the People's Palace, a bold and inspiring programme, restoring the unique historic building to its former glory. Combined with £6 million of investment from the Government's UK Towns Fund and a £500,000 grant from Historic England, the restored building will also feature community spaces, catering and opportunities for leisure, entertainment and learning.

Landlords register for new Selective Licensing Scheme that aims to improve housing standards

With the introduction of a new licensing scheme for privately rented properties in Great Yarmouth, landlords and letting agents are being urged to take advantage of a range of resources offering advice and support.

A new Selective Licensing Scheme came into operation in April and private landlords have until June 30 to apply and complete the necessary paperwork.

The introduction of the scheme – which mirrors those in operation in many other places across the country – followed a public consultation and GYBC says it will help ensure a thriving housing market where people have homes that are healthy, safe and efficient.

The scheme covers the Nelson Ward, Central and Northgate Ward, Southtown and Cobholm Ward and eight streets in Yarmouth North Ward - an area of about 5,000 homes covering about 60 per cent of the borough's privately rented properties.

GYBC has received more than 350 applications so far with more 'onboarding' events planned. More information about what resources are available can be found at www.great-yarmouth.gov.uk/selective-licensing-scheme. And the team is available to answer queries

from landlords and can be contacted on 01493 846636 or by email at slicence@great-yarmouth.gov.uk.”

Ahead of proposing the scheme, the council carried out a feasibility study which included gathering and analysing data about demographics and the condition of rental accommodation in the borough.

Research revealed there is little evidence to show rents have risen due to licence fees being introduced in other parts of the country with similar schemes. The consultation showed many people thought it would have a positive impact on the local community.

The scheme will last for five years and is not allowed to make a profit. It will be self-financing there is a licence fee of £694 for landlords.

Kind regards

Cllr James Bensly