

Progress report

The main issue at the moment across the division is the rash of problematic energy infrastructure planning proposals, including the pylons, vast solar parks (East Pye and Tasway proposals) and gross and ill-placed BESS storage units. Alongside parishes and district councillors and the MPs, I am working hard to ensure that we get proper assessment of the environmental impacts, proper consultation, proper attention to local residents, and correct reports concerning the quality of the land, to ensure that the planning system can do its job properly. But the situation has become truly overwhelming and in some cases we seem to be left powerless. I'm working with both the local MPs to address the weaknesses in the UK's national rules for planning, and to get strategic commissioning instead of the current free market for speculators. The government has now said it is intending to do this, but it's come a bit late in the day. In addition South Norfolk has also usefully adopted some new guidelines to indicate which places are suitable and likely to succeed if planning applications are lodged for energy schemes. I'm pleased to see that the unsatisfactory BESS proposal for Rushall seems to have been paused, perhaps never to rise again, and maybe also the much-talked-of but never-seen energy park in Gissing.

I remain alarmed that the government's chief desire seems to be to slash protections for nature and heritage. I raised the issue of protection for chalk streams with Ben Goldsborough recently and he has forwarded the reply he received from the Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for Housing and Local Government. I have posted it on my facebook page.

I've attended scheduled meetings with Field about the BESS proposed in Great Moulton (which will be decided at South Norfolk DC), and with East Pye Solar (about their mega solar farm plans) which will be decided in Westminster. I set up a site visit to Long Stratton and Great Moulton along with with my counterpart in Long Stratton to look at the road route suggested for construction traffic for the BESS proposal in Great Moulton, and a meeting with the NSIPs officer at County Hall to look at their East Pye response. In all these cases I'm feeding into the County Council responses, raising issues about roads, drainage and ecology etc. Watch my facebook for daily updates on what actions I've been taking on these and other things. I am also hoping to deliver a newsletter soon.

At the May County Council meeting, I submitted a motion to address the concerns about the number of simultaneous applications for energy schemes. There was a Conservative amendment, but nevertheless the motion was still mostly intact, and it passed with a substantial majority. You can read the motion on my facebook page, and there is also a link to the recording where you can watch the debate including what I think is a very informative speech that I made about energy security (see whether you agree!). At the July Council meeting I submitted an amendment to the Conservative motion calling for more regulation relating to BESS schemes. The debate was cut short, and there was limited understanding of the importance of avoiding creating alarm by misrepresenting the risk of fire in BESS schemes, so I am hoping that the press will do some coverage to row back on the sensationalist misinformation which is being spread by campaign groups and reinforced by ill-informed Councillors who are causing serious anxiety among residents by appearing to endorse the suggestion that there is a high risk of fire. The chance of being killed by lightning are 300,000 to one. The risk of a fire in a battery cell in a BESS is 40 million to one.

Meanwhile I note that the government is going to make it mandatory for energy developers to provide substantial community funding. See link here(it's not just coastal but rural areas as well): [Cash boost for coastal towns hosting clean energy infrastructure - GOV.UK](#). It is important to

insist on this in any parish response to a proposal within the vicinity. We might also want to look into more community based energy schemes that would be for local people to have cheap power directly, instead of mega industrial stuff for London.

In other local work, I've been working with landowners and the footpath officer to solve a footpath issue in Winfarthing, and with residents and the riparian rights and water management teams to solve problems in Bressingham. We are looking forward to the completion of resurfacing on two of the important B roads in the division, at Tivetshall and the horrible pitted surface at Winfarthing/Shelfanger. I note that several roads have also been given surface dressing. There will be various closures on the A140 over the summer for joining up the new bypass at Long Stratton, and in August there is an opportunity to walk, cycle or run on the new road when it opens for a community fun day.

New community fund

Thanks to a new member fund, I can offer grants between £200 and £2,500 to support projects that promote things like social inclusion, volunteering, and community engagement. This can include church groups if they serve the community. Larger grants require matched funding, but there is support for this via a crowdfunding scheme. Please ask me for a leaflet, or you can find details and how to apply on the county council website [here](#). Anyone with an eligible project should contact me on Catherine.rowett.cllr@norfolk.gov.uk.

Info from County Council

Norwich Castle Museum – Castle Keep opening date announced

Norwich Castle Keep will re-open on 7 August 2025. Priority booking with a Norfolk Museums Pass opens: Thursday 17 July. General booking opens: Thursday 24 July. Further information about the Norwich Castle, Museum and Art Gallery is available [here](#).

Summer Reading Challenge at Norfolk libraries

Norfolk libraries are inviting families to take part in The Reading Agency's 2025 Summer Reading Challenge, encouraging children aged 4-11 to explore the magical connection between storytelling and the natural world with this year's theme: Story Garden - Adventures in Nature and the Great Outdoors. In 2024, the Challenge reached nearly 600,000 children and inspired over 100,000 new library memberships across the UK. To find out how to join in and discover events happening at your local library, visit the [Summer Reading Challenge page](#).

National Govt

NHS Dentistry

The Government has announced new reforms to the dental contract to deliver more NHS work and fix the foundations of dentistry. They've launched a [consultation](#) (closes 19 August 2025).

VJ Day 15 August

The government is encouraging members of the public to participate in a national two-minute silence on Friday 15 August to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. More details are available [here](#).

Contact me

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Catherine Rowett

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