

**Annual report from South Norfolk District Councillors – Cringleford ward  
(Cringleford, Colney, Keswick & Intwood) – May 2022**

Like all of us South Norfolk Council has been facing unprecedented challenges. As the COVID pandemic has receded we are now facing the consequential inflationary pressures that the response to the pandemic has produced - exacerbated by the events in Ukraine and impacts of that conflict on the wider world.

**COVID-19 response**

Looking backwards first, during lockdown the council distributed over £1m per week to thousands of local businesses to sustain and keep them alive to the point of recovery. Retail and hospitality businesses had special attention including some businesses which fell through the gaps of the national schemes, for example beauticians and dentists. As a result, our local economy is well placed to recover.

A third of our staff were redeployed to support families and individuals – for example gym instructors helped the refuse crews so that bins were collected and other staff were seconded to work at the N&N working as orderlies.

Our Help Hub also extended its working hours to ensure those in most need were supported.

But as COVID-19 recedes, the cost of living is increasing and so we have made available hundreds of thousands of pounds in additional support for families who find themselves in an unexpected crisis over-and-above our normal financial support via Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support. This can include one-off help with rental deposits, fuel payments and other expenses for those in severe financial distress. If you become aware of someone who is really struggling please ask them to contact the Help Hub.

**Ukraine response**

Recent events in Ukraine have seen refugees coming to Norfolk and families from South Norfolk represent about a third of all the offers for help in Norfolk under the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

We have utilised our offices as a reception centre for displaced families. Whilst the national bureaucracy has been frustrating, we are supporting both the refugees and also their host families

with the complex psychological problems faced by people fleeing war and also giving the refugees a place to keep in touch with each other as they are placed throughout the district.

Separately we have also started a refurbishment project on the Council's temporary accommodation which is aimed at families fleeing domestic violence, family breakdown or similar situations. This short term accommodation provides a valuable breathing space whilst officials work with the individuals to come up with a long-term solution for them.

#### **CIL Loan Fund and CIL co-investment fund**

One of the biggest frustrations with new housing developments is that the infrastructure which should accompany such developments does not come ahead of the houses and so to try and mitigate this issue the Council is introducing two schemes to help parishes make better use of their CIL funds. The first is a CIL loan fund whereby the Council will lend nearly all the expected amount of CIL that will be received by a parish up front so improvements can be started immediately rather than waiting for all the houses to be built. Further details of this scheme will be announced in June.

We are also introducing a CIL Co-investment fund. The Council will be inviting proposals for larger schemes (over £100,000) where South Norfolk will match the Parish Council's CIL funds with council money as a grant to double the impact of parish CIL funds. The details of this scheme are being worked up and we plan a conference in June to explain how parishes can get involved in this scheme.

But rather than just relying on CIL funded schemes the Council is going further and has agreed with the local NHS bodies that it will work with the Humbleyard Surgeries and build a new fourth Doctor's Surgery in the Humbleyard area – most likely in Hethersett to try and alleviate the current difficulties with getting an appointment especially given the proposed new houses still to be built.

#### **Electric Car Charging**

We are also introducing a specific scheme to address the current shortfall of electric car charging infrastructure. Given the rise in electric car ownership and its role in moving to net zero, we will be launching a scheme to enable every parish or town in South Norfolk that wants to install electric car charging points to do so, via a bulk contract that the Council is currently negotiating.

The details around insurance, billing and maintenance will be explained in the next few months.

We are also increasing the number of points in our own public car parks and at our leisure centres to improve coverage.

#### **Environmental enhancements**

Last year saw the COP26 summit in Glasgow and whilst the debate about net zero, its costs and the speed at which it can be achieved are ongoing the Council is taking steps to reduce its carbon footprint including investments in solar panels on all our Council Buildings including leisure centres. Our refuse vehicles are now trialling new lower carbon fuels based on recycled oils to minimise emissions.

Locally, it was also good to see the opening of the Kett's Country long distance path between Norwich and Wymondham including the Cringleford Circular route through Keswick.

#### **Collaboration with Broadland Council**

South Norfolk is in our fifth year of a close co-operation with Broadland Council. The joint working between councils already saves South Norfolk taxpayers £1.2m per year which is the equivalent of 15% of our share of Council Tax.

The next step on that path is to move the combined staff into a single building which will save a further £700,000 per year, and also reduce our energy consumption by 84%. The two councils will be meeting in the next few weeks to decide whether to go ahead with the move.

The proposed location for the joint office is at Broadland Business Park.

#### **Improvements to the Wherryman's Way**

The Wherryman's Way footpath along the River Yare between Norwich and Reedham Ferry is being improved to enhancing accessibility and reinforcing the banks of the River Chet – this work is being funded by CIL monies from new developments in the district.

#### **Nutrient Neutrality**

You may have seen recently in the news that there has been a halt put on the approval of new housing in the area due to a policy change by Natural England called Nutrient Neutrality. This is designed to limit the amount of nutrients entering certain rivers from wastewater generated by new

housing. This has meant that new planning permissions for housing cannot be given unless they can demonstrate that the individual scheme is nutrient neutral i.e. the additional impacts from wastewater are offset elsewhere in the same scheme. This impacts large scale housing and also individual houses but generally not extensions and the like (unless they are particularly large).

The exact implications on the Local Plan are being considered and the inspector has raised this with the GNDP team and a response given. Efforts are also being made to understand how schemes can become nutrient neutral and a government grant has been received to hire consultants to do just that. A delay in the granting of detailed permission will also delay the completion of housing and thus the trigger points for the payment of CIL, S 106 and the delivery of certain infrastructure improvements so is of concern in Cringleford.

### **Member grants**

We were pleased this year to support the Trustees of the Patteson rooms with their ongoing refurbishment project – giving a grant of £3,207.21 from our member ward grants. We have previously supported a new bench in Keswick, a dehumidifier at the Keswick Reading Rooms and also an outdoor table tennis table on Round House Park.

Daniel and I have £1,000 each to award to schemes with minimal paperwork and instant payment to support local groups such as play groups, community cafes and other small scale activities so please do get in touch if you know of a group looking for funding.

Throughout the last year Daniel and I have met with Parish Councillors, residents and developers about a range of subjects and we have supported residents on a number of matters and look forward to working on your behalf in the year to come.

Daniel Elmer and William Kemp

May 2022