DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT FOR JANUARY 2025 FOR MELTON CONSTABLE PC

COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS

There is some uncertainty that elections for the County Council on 1 May will take place. Both Conservatives and Labour groups at County Hall voted last Thursday to replace the County and District Council with a new Unitary Authority by registering an expression of interest with the Government. Liberal Democrats, Greens and Reform opposed this and would prefer elections to proceed. It may take 2 or 3 years to legislate to abolish the current system and implement a one size fits all proposal for Unitary Administration. This represents disdain for local democracy and threatens the existence of some services as the current debt of the County Council is aggregated across district regions.

From tackling homelessness to delivering social care, from bin collection to driving local economic growth, good local government is the foundation of working in partnership with central government to deliver better outcomes for our communities. Councils, local government officers and frontline staff are due respect and appreciation for the work they have done to keep services going through very difficult times given the drastic financial constraints from central government.

TOURISM STATISTICS

Our coastline, countryside, built heritage, attractions and nearby Broads National Park account for tourism being a very significant feature of the local economy. The latest data from 2023 suggested the District welcomed 9.4 million visitors with 8.8 million day trips and 600,000 staying down slightly on 2022. Total visitors spend was £427,112 up from £421,880 in 2022. The visitor economy had a total value of 519,653 supporting an estimated 11,779 jobs, 27.4% of employment in the District: an increase on the previous year.

PLANNING CHANGES

The Council has received proposals from Government to streamline our planning committee and the way decisions are delegated to planning officers to restrict applications being referred to the committee. Only 1.74% go to committee of the 2000 or so cases received at the Council. Even major developments will be decided by officers if schemes comply with Local Plans and National Design Guides.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANACE SETTLEMENT

While Government promised no reductions in the Autumn Statement to the Core Spending Power many rural authorities including ours saw no increase either. This stagnation contrasts sharply with the substantial increases experienced by some

metropolitan areas of almost 10% in some areas. This variability in changes to spending power continues to significantly disadvantage rural areas. Urban areas get 36% more funding historically while rural areas paid 20% more per person in Council Tax.

PLANNING INFRINGEMENTS

The enforcement periods for infringements have been changed by new legislation so that the historic 4 yeartime limit for bringing enforcement action against building and changes of use to single dwellings have been removed and replaced by a single 10-year tariff. It applies where the alleged operational development or single dwelling change of use was substantially completed since 25 April last year.

HUNWORTH BELL DEVELOPMENT

I have referred the application (ref PF/24/2458) to the Development Committee (most likely for March) for consideration given the importance to the community of the proposal to extend the pub, build two semi-detached dwellings to the rear of the carpark and additional dwellings on the adjoining farmyard accessed from King Street.

TREE MANAGEMENT ADVICE

I have asked for this information to be added to the Council's Website. Some frequently asked questions: -

Q: I don't know who the tree belongs to

Check Norfolk County Highways adopted highways and footpaths Norfolk Highways and Public Rights of Way

Land registry if absent owner of domestic property Search for land and property information - GOV.UK

Q: Is my tree protected?

Check maps for Conservation Areas and Tree Preservation Orders (TPO). Cadcorp SIS WebMap 9 - TPO

If tree is protected you will need to notify or apply to the council for the work, the application is free, available online and most reputable tree surgeons will be able to do this on your behalf.

Home | Tree works (north-norfolk.gov.uk)

It is a criminal offence if you fail to notify us of works on protected trees and could result in enforcement action, and even prosecution

Q: My neighbour's tree(s) overhangs my property boundary

When a neighbouring tree has branches or roots that overhang or encroach onto your property, you have a common law right to prune these back to your boundary line unless the tree is protected.

(TPO or Conservation Area)

- it is strongly recommended that you contact the tree owner before any work is undertaken
- carry out the works with reasonable care and if more than minor trimming is required it is recommended that the advice of a professional Arboriculturist is sought
- branches or roots should not be cut back beyond the boundary in anticipation of them overhanging or your neighbour could take action against you for damaging their property
- you cannot alter the height of trees on neighbouring land you can only cut back branches as far as the boundary line
- you must not trespass onto neighbouring land
- any material that is removed belongs to the tree owner, before works start agree how any arising waste will be disposed of

Q: I've got boundary problems, but I've fallen out with my neighbour, can the council help?

As a civil matter you should try and resolve the issues between yourselves.

- Follow guidance in Over the garden hedge on approaching the issue Over the garden hedge - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- third party mediation, Citizens Advice Bureau, may be able to sign post you to certified mediators or arbitrators
- Consider drawing up a boundary agreement Your property boundaries: Make a boundary agreement with your neighbour - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Q: My tree is dead or dangerous, can I remove it?

Trees that are too big or too tall are not necessarily dangerous, examples of a dangerous tree;

- structurally unsafe or leaning dangerously
- damaged, decayed or diseased
- collapsed or fallen / hung-up in other trees

- dead

Q: There are trees currently being felled, is this allowed?

Check Felling licence ArcGIS Web Application (forestergis.com)

Check NNDC planning for Tree work applications Home | View and comment on a planning application

If outside a Conservation Area or covered by TPO permission is not required. NNDC may want to consider TPO if further removal occurs

Q ; I'm worried about tree work causing disturbance to wildlife

If you witness disturbance to wildlife, report to the police.

Q: I'm worried about damage being caused to trees on a development site

Send to Tree Officer or NNDC Planning team.

Felling Licences

Larger scale tree removal is controlled by the Forestry Commission, any removal of trees that equates to more than 5 cubic meters of timber per calendar quarter requires a felling licence. Tree felling licence: when you need to apply - GOV.UK

You can check if there is a current felling licence here ArcGIS Web Application (forestergis.com)

Thank you for taking time to read this report.

Cllr Andrew Brown

12/01/2025