DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT FOR MELTON CONSTABLE PC – JUNE 2025

1.Builders will lose land if developments don't progress

Housebuilders who leave development sites unfinished may lose the land to local councils under new Government proposals. For the first time, developers must commit to delivery timeframes before receiving planning permission and submit annual progress reports to councils. The move is part of government plans to speed up the delivery of new homes. Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner commented: "This Government has taken radical steps to overhaul the planning system in the hope of getting Britain building again after years of inaction." The proposals will be detailed in an upcoming Government working paper to which the Council will respond.

2. Sewage networks struggle to cope with new developments

Britain's deteriorating water infrastructure poses a significant risk to the Government's housing targets. With a goal of constructing 370,000 homes annually and 1.5m by the end of Parliament, utility companies and local councils are struggling to connect new developments to the existing sewage systems. James Stevens from the Home Builders Federation expressed concerns, stating there is "increasingly this question being raised by some councils and some water companies over whether they can provide the water infrastructure necessary to meet the Government's housing targets." Water companies including Anglian Water and Thames Water have indicated potential objections to new housing schemes due to insufficient sewage capacity. The Government is reviewing the situation, emphasising the need for collaboration between councils and water companies.

3. Anglian Water Visit

Senior managers (Messrs Grant Tufts and Angus Outram) attended the Council this week to answer questions about future plans for the district from our Scrutiny Committee. We urged Anglian Water (AW) to provide data of leakages, sewage discharge data, consult with local landowners about nature-based solutions for dealing with surface water overflows, inform the Government that AW business plans account for the impact of new housing developments on the risks for surface water drainage and run off. We also explored the potential change in status of AW as a statutory consultee in the planning process.

4. What is the future for Neighbourhood Plans

Government have withdrawn the central funding to sponsor neighbourhood plans which allow communities to plan for development within settlement boundaries following the recent national spending review. We have some plans which have started

but will now be jeopardised due to lack of grant money and council officers are being put in a very difficult position moving forward. Corpusty & Saxthorpe, Holt, Blakeney, Great Ryburgh and Wells all have neighbourhood plans already completed but 10 villages are yet to finish theirs and need funds in order to do so.

5. A148 Road Safety Funding

I am pleased to say following my lobbying for an award by a local developer who was granted permission to convert the former Pine Heath Nursing Home into residential accommodation. My request at the Development Committee in March was passed to provide £20,000 for road safety improvements following the fatal accident in the same area last December.

Against the odds, we have managed to secure the funding under a S106 planning agreement binding the County Highways Authority to propose an improvement scheme.

6. Local Government "Reform" (LGR) – Part 4

Contrary to reports in the media there is more support than ever for a 3 unitary area format, namely Greater Norwich, east and west Norfolk as opposed to either one or two unitary areas replacing both the County Council and seven District Councils by 2028. We the Council are proposing that North Norfolk as an administrative area remains intact and will be part of either the east or west sectors. Personally, I prefer the east, but the Government will have the final say. Both the PC chair, Emma Southgate and the PC clerk Amanda Yacoubian attended a recent presentation by the County Council in North Walsham on the current progress with LGR and the Mayoral Combined Authority elections next May for both Norfolk and Suffolk. Further public updates are proposed in Fakenham and Mundesley

7. Bacton Carbon Capture Setback

The Government's Spending Review has promised investment for carbon capture projects on Merseyside and in the North-East but not for Bacton as we expected.

8. Local Government Finance Settlements

Under the new government review, all Councils will get a portion of £3.4 billion grant funding awarded for 2028-29 but no detail of the anticipated multi -year settlements to enable longer term financial planning. The less than efficient yearly review in play, which keeps Councils in suspense until just weeks before we have to declare a council tax setting budget every February, continues notwithstanding the change in central government last year. They have said they will move towards changing this but no detail has been announced.

Not all bad news though, East of England Ambulance service will get 24 new ambulances; £39 billion announced for Affordable Housing build programme over the next 10 years; the Social Housing settlement from 2026 will limit social rents to a 1% above annual inflation increase by social landlords; a boost of £2.5 billion for low interest loans to invest in new house building. Finally extra funding for temporary accommodation (TA) of £950 million has been invested in the Local Authority Housing Fund between 2026-30to help council increase the supply of good quality TA and drive down the burden of hotels and b&b costs which are an enormous burden on council taxpayers inflicted by central government.

9. Planning Scrutiny

An internal audit of S106 funds held by the Council undertaken every year (as required by law) has highlighted issues and room for improvement; a project as portfolio holder I have started to address in advance. An urgent review is needed of unspent monies approaching deadline dates (after which they have to be returned, usually 10 years), ensure all consultations are completed and require developers to report regularly at each stage of construction by conditioning this in original agreements and regular reporting to Town and Parish councils.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report.

Cllr. Andrew Brown

14/6/25