

Report from your County Councillor, Cllr Steffan Aquarone



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New Bank Hub in Holt

I'm pleased to report that our work in getting a Bank Hub in Holt has finally paid off!

When the last branch left Holt in December 2021, I began working with LINK to find a way of enabling Holt with a banking hub.

After spending time visiting Holt with LINK, I'm grateful to have worked with a team of people who put effort into understanding the difficulty of accessing banks for those in rural areas, and understand the limitations that can come from many people having to rely on long journeys and public transport to access something necessary for daily life.

I could not be more pleased that our community request was successful. Hopefully this is a step in the right direction for many towns and villages in North Norfolk!

Liberal Democrat Budget Amendments

The County Council, at which we are now the main opposition, is preparing for its annual budget meeting. We have proposed a few key amendments to the budget, in light of the much needed additional settlement from central government, and the £9.5m uplift in social care funding.

Opposing the reduction in MIG

We are opposing the reduction of MIG, which has naturally caused concern for many people. People who receive care and support in their own home, are entitled to a Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) to ensure that they keep a level of income which covers their living costs.

This decision would have disproportionately targeted some of the most vulnerable members of our community, and while the County Council is in a perilous financial situation, reducing MIG will only serve to put greater numbers of people into financial instability, and have greater reliance on the Council regardless.

Supporting Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Services

We are hoping to use some of the funds to tackle the backlog of EHCP assessments (Educational Health and Care Plans- like a prescription for educational support) in SEND services, in line with central government's funding suggestion, with the aim of achieving the government's 20 week EHCP turnaround suggestion.

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Flooding

I'm pleased to announce that the budget amendment includes proposing hiring an additional Flood Risk Officer. Flooding issues are endemic in North Norfolk with much of our population living in rural communities, however it is quite clear due to the increasing frequency of flooding that it is worsening as time goes on due to climate change.

I know this issue is one that has been widespread across Melton Constable division in the past few months.

I hope that this amendment will lead to increased work in flood prevention, but also in dealing quickly and efficiently with the impacts of flooding to highways and to people's homes.

"Cost of Giving" Fund

This fund would be introduced to ensure unpaid carers are not penalised for giving up their time, after loss of funding from Norfolk County Council. The aim of this fund is to enable unpaid carers to apply for funds to help with their needs, with £200,000 being put into the initial fund.

Transport

We are also proposing to pilot a new style of transport network, by placing park and ride-style car parks in out of town locations across the county, allowing people to drive a few miles to their nearest hub, and access towns across the county.

This should provide local links between rural communities, to each other, rather than having Norwich be the "centre" of the transport networks.

As opposition amendments these are, however, unlikely to be supported by the County Council administration - despite the additional money coming from government and their suggestion as to how it should be used.