

DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT FOR PRIORY WARD FEBRUARY 2024

Council Tax Changes

The annual budget Full Council on 21 February will set the rates for next financial year. It is unfortunately necessary to use some Council reserves and to increase some discretionary charges to balance the books which is required by law. District council tax will need to increase by 2.99% and County Council tax by 4.99% which is the maximum permitted. Several discretionary services have been withdrawn as a consequence like the former Big Society Fund, and Repairs Grants have been suspended due to the financial pressures.

Flood Reduction

The Government's Environment Agency (EA) has announced 20% cuts in funding for river flood defences with especially tree planting and wetland habitats being hardest hit. In times of dire need to manage the defences against the climate change challenge to our habitats this is a real concern for conservation across our district. The EA national target was to protect 336,000 homes by 2027 but due to the cuts this has been reduced to 200,000. Small developments in rural villages are particularly vulnerable with new build development still being allowed on flood plains.

Holt Bank Hub

Pleased to announce that the Council are supporting the Banking agency, Link, to source premises to install a bank hub so each bank can visit on different days in the same premises to deliver a full range of banking services. We will expedite any full planning application for this purpose.

Planning Appeal Delays

The Council continues to be afflicted by a worsening delay in appeals by written representations being decided by the Planning Inspectorate taking 58 weeks (up from 55) against the recommended target of 16-20 weeks. The recent change to withdraw a free re-submission of a refused application will lead to more appeals and worsening delay.

Biodiversity Net Gain

All planning permissions for housing, industrial and commercial development with a few exceptions will have to deliver at least 10% net gain in diversity from 12 February. It will also be required for small sites from 2 April. After Brexit rules on nature protection, water quality, clean air and environmental protections were at risk, so the Environment Act 2021 is intended to fill that gap. In future there will be a section assessing the need in every Council planning report on applications.

Unspent Housebuilding Fund

The Government £4.2 bn Housing Infrastructure Funding intended to boost local council housebuilding remains 69% unspent 6 years on from its creation in 2017. When pressed, Government admitted that work had started on fewer than 1 in 10 of the promised homes and the annual new homes target with all its implications for house prices affordability reduced from 340,000 to 270,000 nationally.

Offshore Windfarm Construction Traffic

Details have been released by Orsted and their haulage contractor Somerscales of proposed use of the B1149 from Holt through Edgefield, Saxthorpe/Corpusty to the Oulton Street for 2 or 3 wide loads between 7am and 6pm per day over 8 slots from now until December. In July 2-3 deliveries per week of cables from the depot to the site will also occur.

Hornsea 3 Community Fund

An annual £700k fund for the next decade has been launched this week. Details can be accessed online at grantscape.org.uk/fund/hornsea-3-community-fund. You can check there if your Parish is eligible and also submit applications for funding if you are one of the parishes impacted by the construction scheme. There are 2 closing dates each year on the 8 May and 27 November with decisions announced on mid-August and mid-February respectively. A further Skills Fund of £100k and Legacy Fund of a further £100k will also be available. Carbon reducing improvement schemes for village halls and environmental community projects would be eligible with no match funding required. Grants from £500 to £75,000 are on offer subject to conditions which need to be carefully considered.

Local Government Funding Crisis

As more and more councils warn that they will be unable to balance their books, many people feel a lack of trust in local government largely due to inadequate funding. However, the pending change in government of whatever persuasion presents an opportunity to reset the relationship between local and central government. We need to scrap the wasteful and inefficient system of competitive bid funding and go back to multi-year funding settlements as recommended by the independent Local Government Association. If central government doesn't trust local councils to deliver, no one wins.

Thank you for reading this report.