

Ward Member's Annual report – April 2022

With recent world and national events at the forefront of our minds, it's easy to get caught in the moment and forget what has been achieved in our district over the past 12 months.

This time last year, we were starting to emerge from a lengthy lockdown, during which we had distributed millions of pounds in targeted support to local people and businesses, and had become accustomed to working in different ways – particularly conducting meetings and making decisions online.

Although we hope that the worst of the pandemic is behind us, it turns out that some of the temporary changes had positive benefits and are likely to be incorporated into our normal working lives. Home working reduces commuting – saving time, energy, money and carbon – and it may be that some council roles (as well as many jobs in the wider business community) can be carried out remotely rather than from the office, at least some of the time.

On a similar theme, the rising cost of energy is concentrating all of our minds and, in addition to “smarter working”, we are – along with our colleagues at Broadland - considering moving from our existing offices to a more modern and energy-efficient building in the near future.

As chairman of South Norfolk's Economy & Environment Policy Committee, I am proud to have been involved in the development and implementation of our Environmental Policy – supported by the Environmental Motion agreed by Council at the end of 2021, which commits us to “take urgent action to protect our local environment, by preparing positively for and delivering a zero-carbon future.” Actions will include:

- Helping residents and businesses to recycle more effectively
- Encouraging and enabling the adoption of electric vehicles across the district
- Helping residents and businesses to adopt energy efficiency measures in their homes and premises
- Enhancing our local natural environment
- Maintaining clean streets, clean air and clean water
- Cracking down on environmental crime such as fly-tipping

Actions being more important than words, I'm delighted to report that the financial performance of South Norfolk Council during the past year has enabled us to allocate an additional £1.8M of funding specifically to support our environmental and economic growth plans during 2022/23 – over and above the previously agreed budget. Proposals include:

- A faster roll out of electric vehicle charging points at council car parks, leisure centres and community locations such as village halls
- Solar panels on the roofs of our leisure centres
- Solar-powered EV car ports at our leisure centres
- A joint project with Broadland District Council to improve recycling and reduce contamination through targeted communication and education

Finally, I want to highlight two specific initiatives which should be of interest to the parish:

1. The additional funding for EV charging points is targeted towards parish facilities, and I urge the council to engage with South Norfolk officers to determine suitable locations and the type of chargers required (standard, for overnight charging, or fast/rapid for quick turnaround).
2. The one-off tripling of the Community Action Fund (reported last month) will help to support community initiatives, with funding available of up to £15,000 to deliver new projects to enhance the lives of local people. I will do my best to support any project which meets the funding criteria.

I look forward to working with you all during the coming year.

James Knight
Member for Thurlton Ward
3rd April 2022