

It's been another busy month in both Westminster and North Norfolk. I've gone from shining a light on the humble glow-worm in my adjournment debate about light pollution and dark skies, to helping many residents directly affected by the flooding around the area. Regardless of the issue, whether obscure, pressing, or long-running, if it matters to North Norfolk - it matters to me.

I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter about all the different issues I've been working on.

1) North Walsham West Development

I promised to write to NNDC with my concerns about the Local Plan and the 1,800 homes earmarked for North Walsham. I wanted to ensure that the people of North Walsham had the chance to have their say directly - so I highlighted five key issues that constituents told me were concerning them. They were:

- Scale and growth of North Walsham
- Infrastructure delivery
- Traffic impacts
- Environmental considerations
- Mix of housing

I think my letter captured the thoughts of views expressed to me, and I know the planners will take note of the many public representations to shape this major development in the best interests of all residents.

My primary concern, which I think is shared by many, is the sheer scale of the development. North Walsham will see a population increase of a minimum of 35% - a huge amount. This housing increase must be supported with the relevant infrastructure, be that school places, water treatment or local medical capacity.

You can read my full letter on my Facebook page.

2) The Future of Briston Church

I attended a packed-out meeting held in Briston on the 10th of October to hear about the plans for All Saints Church.

The key takeaway from the meeting is that there were substantial concerns about some of the outline plans.

I spoke at the meeting and represented the majority view that, as a minimum, the roof, heating, and masonry repair work needed to be a priority to ensure the church is safe for users.

The concerns centred around adding an extension to the building, to provide a kitchen and toilet, and potentially seeing the removal of some pews and the church organ.

I am due to meet the Bishop to discuss these proposals in much more detail, and I will ensure the people of the village are kept informed of my progress on this matter. Thankfully, I do feel more are being listened to since the meeting.

3) Sheringham Flood Response

I met with affected residents in Sheringham following the heavy rainfall we saw earlier this month, and I promised that I would hold a meeting with Cllr Judy Oliver, Norfolk County Council, North Norfolk District Council, and Anglian Water over what more could be done to protect constituents from future flood events.

The recent heavy rain saw 48 mm of water fall on the town in just an hour, a huge amount that totally overloaded the drainage system.

Cllr Oliver and I told NCC that we were not happy. Action needs to be far swifter to protect residents from future incidents by working harder on household protection schemes.

These schemes allow for up to £12,000 in grant funding for flood protection measures, such as waterproof doors, airbrick covers and waterproof paint in downstairs rooms.

NCC gave me a cast iron guarantee that additional efforts will be made to inform residents of what financial support is available for flood property protection measures.

I have also just written to over 300 local households to inform them of what support is on offer; these details what both immediate flooding and long-term action they can take to try and secure the above-mentioned remedial work to protect their homes.

Good news for Bodham too - the roadside grips along Hart Lane have been cleared of undergrowth - something which may have contributed to the flooding of some properties in the village.

I will continue to do all I can to ensure my constituents have the best possible protection against flooding, and that all those who have been affected know exactly how they can access support from the local council.

If you encountered issues or know someone who did, please write to me so I can try to help.

4) Marching for Benjamin Court

I attended and spoke at the protest over the closure of Benjamin Court. Ever since the announcement was made that the healthcare facility in Cromer would be closing, I've been fighting to ensure that the NHS do all they can to ensure the building does not go to waste. I want to make sure that we have the best possible facilities here in North Norfolk, and whether that means repurposing the building as a stroke, dementia or palliative care unit - I've made it crystal clear, I want every option explored!

I'll be continuing to campaign on this front, and I'm due to meet with key members of the NHS, on-site to reiterate the need to ensure the building stays supporting the people of North Norfolk.

5) Blue Flags and Major Investment into Mundesley

This month I had a very promising meeting with the Environment Agency (EA) discussing water quality at Mundesley, Sea Palling and East Runton beaches.

Ever since these beaches lost their Blue Flags last year, I've been campaigning persistently, working with a range of authorities to find out the details, and trying to get them back.

As one of the leading MPs in Parliament on the Environmental Audit Select Committee, who was involved in there port on water quality - I know just how much our beaches mean to our communities. There is so much misinformation on social media - I want to make sure that people are given the full story and the correct information.

The Environment Agency attributed our flag losses to higher bacteria levels occurring from what they suspected was entirely natural phenomena such as seal, bird and dog matter. Not sewage.

Further, as a result of my campaigning, it is now very positive that our beaches are being tested twice as frequently this year for extra certainty, with virtually every reading coming back as normal. All the new data suggests that there has been absolutely no decline in these beaches' water quality.

The EA has also committed to testing any incident of elevated bacteria found on our beaches for its DNA, to make sure that we know exactly where it is coming from for future reference.

I've been assured that they will continue to work with Anglian Water, landowners and other key parties to ensure that we continue to responsibly handle wastewater and other possible contaminants.

I am also extremely pleased that Mundesley will potentially see a water quality improvement investment of over £2m in the coming years to install new storm tanks to reduce CSO spills, further monitoring equipment and decommissioning of old equipment.

6) North Walsham Jobs Fair

The fourth employment fair I've held this year! I've built up a brilliant working relationship with the local DWP team who have helped me deliver these important local events. Through all four of our fairs, three in North Walsham and one in Stalham, we have had over 500 people attend this year to try and find a new job or network with local and national businesses/organisations.

This event was no different from the rest, with a flow of people coming all morning. It's one of the most rewarding things I've done, especially when we've heard of many people having interviews and eventually ending up with a new career as a direct result!

7) Briston Planning Application for 179 New Houses

Last week I was in Briston again to represent the community at an important planning meeting with Jolanda Stenton.

I was seriously disappointed by the plans unveiled by Scenic Homes.

179 houses to completely engulf Astley school.

Local people are understandably very upset about this huge proposal, especially given the size of the village. It's far too much development placing huge pressure on the village, its roads, local doctors and the school. We don't have the infrastructure to squeeze so many houses in. This needs a rethink, and I made my thoughts clear. Go back and think again.

8) Protecting our Dark Skies!

We have some beautiful dark skies in North Norfolk, with Kelling Heath and Wiveton Downs both being nationally recognised designated dark skies sites. The North Coast is well known for being one of the darkest places in the United Kingdom. As the MP representing these very special areas, I think it is important to help protect them and the range of biodiversity that thrive in these environments.

I teamed up with Bug Life, a national charity that works to protect insects and invertebrates across the United Kingdom. I wanted to shine a light on the humble glowworm, a species that is severely impacted by the harmful effects of light pollution. They quickly made me the Glowworm species champion - a title I proudly hold!

We worked together to set up an adjournment debate in Parliament, to raise awareness over the severe impacts of light pollution on wildlife and also people's mental health.

It is not simply about flicking a switch and plunging us into darkness, but more about taking practical and realistic steps to lessen the impacts. Instead, by using light better, we can promote better quality, community-friendly lighting. Further still changing artificial lighting around environmentally sensitive locations will promote positive change.

We must treat light in the same way we treat other pollutants; we need to monitor light and set targets to reduce light pollution levels to ones that satisfy our needs with those of the planet.

I hope that you found the update on my work this month useful - I think we covered many important issues both nationally and locally. This is just a tiny snapshot but I look forward to updating you again next month!