

## **CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL**

**23 November 2023**

### **COUNCILLOR TERRY PARISH – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

For the period 19 October to 23 November 2023

#### **1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.**

An unusual month or so as we had the Local Government Association (LGA) peer review immediately before last council and some LGA training / consultation for Cabinet and group leaders between then and now. Perhaps the most significant benefits of both is a chance to compare and contrast approaches to council functions and the people which provide them, including councillors. More will emerge about outcomes of the review when the report is published and the action plan written.

Continuing the theme of talking to people I have continued regular meetings with Independent Leaders which enables discussions with people across the country. Increasing difficulties with homelessness was a fairly common thread though it was linked to rehousing asylum seekers rather than the emerging issues of mortgage defaulting. The former is causing major problems along the south coast. River flooding, after heavy rain, challenged areas to the north and west of us though part of Somerset, susceptible to such flooding, apparently escaped due to investment after previous floods. I kept an eye on potential local flooding as Fring, in my ward, suffered several winters ago. Local maintenance of ditches etc seems, I hope, to have solved that although water extraction rates by Anglian water could have something to do with it. There are concerns that a very neglected pond poses a potential risk to future flooding

That brings me to several environmental matters I am involved in both as Ward member and as Leader. The Heacham River is one of the chalk streams which has suffered in recent years and I hope to be working with local landowners, councils, and the Norfolk Rivers Trust (possibly with Anglian water joining in) to improve matters. The river reaches The Wash at Heacham South Beach and sea water quality there remains poor (over the rolling average) which is of Borough as well as local concern and I have continued meetings with the EA and AW about that. The river enters the sea under the shingle ridge which was debated at last Council and I did write to The Secretary of State and the Environment Agency reiterating this Council's concerns about flood defence funding (countersigned by both other Leaders and the portfolio holder for the environment (coastal). I copied in James Wild MP as his constituency contains those coastal areas. When I get responses

from anyone, I will inform Council of them.

Sea water quality, lack of, particularly off Heacham Beaches was the subject of an EA /AW/RSPB and Creh Analytical Ltd, meeting. It boiled down to, 'there is no smoking gun', 'further investigative work will continue', and how to move forward. This will also be subject to debate at a CPP meeting after I write this. There is likely a need for public consultation and I will await further developments before commenting further. A meeting with AW at Heacham Waste water Treatment Works, also attended by the EA, Heacham Parish Cllrs, and James Wild MP convinced, I think, attendees that sewage did not escape from that infrastructure. However, concerns were still raised about operations at pumping stations which serve Heacham Waste Water Treatment Works and I have received complaints about leakage from local pipes, one anecdotal, one acknowledged by AW as due to overloading of a local pump in heavy rainfall.

I can't avoid the sea and was on the stage for the Port Evo (wash barrier) meeting at the Princess Theatre, Hunstanton. Every seat was taken and I was told over 60 people were turned away at the door. The promoter of the scheme was scheduled to speak last (his demand) and it proved to be an error of sorts. He did say a sentence to open the talks, 'We are not building a barrier'. His full presentation at the end contradicted this. I spoke for the Borough and, before some people go hysterical, I stated that we had no position as we did not have sufficient information. I did give a list of questions we needed the answers to. Other speakers, on fishing, ports, biodiversity, oceanography, did have sufficient knowledge to 'condemn' it. Cllr Bullen spoke on behalf of the King's Lynn Port Authority and he did it well. Anyway, 5+ years of investigations to see if it can be done without causing problems. 3 to 5 years building the port connected to Lincolnshire. Phase 2, consideration of joining to Norfolk – the full barrier.

The Borough will have to ensure it considers all the questions that this proposal generates and I had the problem on a list way back in June. There will be a task group of some sort looking at the particular impacts on West-Norfolk of changes to sea level, mitigation and control measures, environmental impacts, tourism considerations, housing stock and developments, etc. From an initial idea for Cabinet Task Group, I am now moving towards a consideration of a joint panel working party which can co-opt external local bodies to contribute.

Changing tack, though it could be related to matters above, I attended and made a (very small) contribution to a Business Continuity Exercise which placed key officers in modelling conditions which could curtail council activities. They revolved around escalating weather conditions both in the winter and summer. It was pleasing to find that, as things got worse, officer responses got better.

A meeting of the West Norfolk Transport and Infrastructure Steering Group proved informative. It discussed progress, or rather lack of it, on the A17/A47 Pullover junction at King's Lynn. The Dept for Transport has dropped its traffic forecasts and reduced the Benefit to cost ratio to low for a flyover option –

preferred by NCC. A traffic signal upgrade has a high benefit to cost ratio but is not what is really needed and NCC would have to fund it all. A fall out from HS2 cancellation is awaited and a further technical study will be done. A review of many projects in the group's remit indicated no significant concerns with most RAG ratings in the green, some in amber but managed, no red. The Ferry remains problematic as impossible to get external funding for improvements when current service has to be subsidised.

A second meeting with Liz Truss MP proved, potentially, useful. Planning matters as they relate to national practice were both reiterated and expanded with how public enquiries are funded part of the discussion. She will be taking concerns to the relevant Minister. I also brought up Levelling Up 3 Funding and indicated that Downham Market might like to consider possible options,

## **2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.**

Norfolk Public Sector Leaders Board  
WN Prosperity Funding Partnership Group  
Transport East  
Corporate Performance Panel  
Norfolk Coastal Forum  
Environment and Community Panel  
Conservative Leader/Leader Weekly Meeting  
Annual Plan 2023/24  
Sedgeford Parish Council REPORT ONLY  
LGA Leadership Academy in Coventry  
LGA Leadership Academy in Coventry  
Statement of Accounts Briefing/Training  
Special Cabinet re CIL  
Peer Review Staff Feedback Session  
Heacham Parish Council  
Local Hero Awards – Future Sponsorship  
Local Plan Task Group  
Cabinet Budget Development Session

## **3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled**

LGA Independent Leaders Meeting  
Independent Leaders/Labour Leaders Weekly Catch Cabinet Briefings  
Anglian Water/EA Site Meeting  
Unison  
Fring Estate Site Meeting  
Biodiversity Net Gain  
Heacham Bathing Water Quality Meeting  
Independent Partnership and Labour Group meeting

LGA Pre-meet  
Business Continuity Exercise Metis 23 Pre-briefing  
West Winch Rail Station Member Briefing  
Cabinet meetings  
Conservative Leader/Leader Weekly Meeting  
Port Evo preliminary meeting  
Equality Training for Members  
WN Transport & Infrastructure Steering Group  
Liz Truss MP  
Wash Barrier Presentation (Hunstanton)  
LGA Meeting  
LGA Independent Council Leaders Meeting  
LGA Leadership Development Session  
Draft Directorate Plan meeting  
LGA Group Leaders Engagement Session  
Metis 23 Business Continuity Exercise  
Cabinet Budget Development Briefing  
Labour Leader Meeting  
Joint Member Briefing – West Winch/Hunstanton