

THOUGHTS FOR OCTOBER 2026.

Devolution and Local Government Review.

I understand we may hear further from the Minister, Tom Macabe, after the Conference season. He has confirmed that devolution is still a Labour objective and a White Paper is planned on “Rewiring the State” before Christmas.

For the Borough, LGR was not wasted. Through working groups on key operational processes, we learnt more to scope the time and cost implications of merging with or adopting, the service procedures of others. This will help change, whatever that entails, and we estimate the extra cost so far to be around £130K which will save us some processing time when some form of reorganisation is actioned (which I think is inevitable with the current Labour Government leadership).

All staff working on LGR are now going back to their original roles in the Borough.

As regards original roles, Borough elections will now take place next May for the existing Ward boundaries.

New Local Plan

The call for sites has created significant concern. Obviously, the sites offered up were not always realistic propositions in themselves and taken together created a scenario which was totally unrealistic for this rural part of the Borough with less than limited services to support any significant growth. I am sure sense will prevail, in particular around the ability of families to grow and be sustained with the absence of facilities to raise them.

The delegation of authority to approve developments is however changing and I believe this will put more onus on Parish Councils to scrutinise changes to plans and building developments. One consequence of the new scheme of delegation is Borough Councillors will lose their ability to “call in” planning applications.

There is a significant irony that whilst the Government is maintaining its objective of building more homes, the NHS and it’s complicated web of commissioning action and treating patients is seriously considering downgrading the A&E facility, Maternity and the Intensive Care Unit in the

new build of the QEH at Kings Lynn. The QEH Top Team are presenting their ideas to the Borough Councillors on 8th October pm.

Housing Developments

I took advantage of a tour around our Florence Fields development (adjacent to Kings Lynn Academy). Top grade buildings using modern technology, many with solar panels, all with air source heat pumps, 226 swift bricks, 100 bee bricks. Trying not to sound like an Estate Agent!

226 homes, more than 40% available for market and affordable rents, some for shared ownership and social housing. This development at a cost of nearly £50m is part of this Council's house building programme of over 1000 dwellings with a development cost in excess of £100m, to counter the lack of development by building development companies in flood prone Kings Lynn. The Florence Field development has a significant sub soil drainage system to counter this.

Locally, the Development at Southend Road, Hunstanton is being taken under our wing through our 100% owned housing companies.

The developments in Lynn are also part of a town improvement programme including the Guildhall and associated buildings, the Customs House, Library is finished and a new racket centre has been approved at Lynnsport. A new aquatic centre is also being designed for a build decision early next year if the price is right.

Medium Term Financial Plan and 27/28 Budget

My personal focus is the Medium Term Financial Plan and setting a balanced budget for next year. As a reminder, this Borough's tax take is less than 10% of the Council Tax you pay. The majority goes to the County and the Police. Even then 43% of the Borough tax receipts are allocated to pay a levy from the various Internal Drainage Boards. This huge take from your tax payments is an unfair levy on the people of West Norfolk. DEFRA has appointed consultants to examine IDB finances and I am attending a presentation on 6th October to hear of their findings and recommendations. I am of course hoping that the Government, via DEFRA, will recognise the iniquitous charge on us and offer a better deal. I am not holding my breath.

Docking Recycling Centre

The County Council has intimated that they were planning to close Docking Recycling Centre but it has been removed from their list of proposed budget savings. Good news.

Community Projects Fund

The applications for an award under this new (£500k) fund are now in and it is over-subscribed. I chair the Task Group adjudicating the submissions, with recommendations to Cabinet for final decisions in November.

Borough Council News in general.

As a reminder, there is a regular West Norfolk Council “Your News” paper which can register to receive and which contains topics of interest that the council is pursuing.

All for now.

Cllr. Chris Morley