

Barry Stone - County Councillor for Clavering Parish Council Report – July 2021



Loddon Roundabout

After five years of monitoring the progress towards the construction of the George Lane Roundabout at Loddon it finally started at the beginning of June. This was the last date I forecast several months ago after years of broken promises and constant badgering of both county officers and Halesbury Homes to get on with fulfilling their planning requirement to build the roundabout as soon as possible. It has been a long, hard slog but finally progress is underway. Although I am no longer the County Councillor for Loddon, I am very pleased that all my effort and hard work has finally come to fruition for the benefit of Loddon residents and motorists using the A146 in general.

Local Member Fund

Once again, this year members have been allocated funding to spend in our Division on a variety of possible projects. We have had an increase however, and this year it will be £10,000. I have outlined below the criteria which has been recommended for what it can and cannot be used for.

What can the money be spent on?

The funding can be spent on a wide variety of highway and environmental related aspects, up to a total combined value of £10,000 each year. The funding is capital so there needs to be an asset as a result of the funding.

Typical uses could include:

- Advisory signs such as 'Unsuitable for HGV's' and advisory speed limits i.e. 20mph signs outside schools, would be possible;
- Capital measures to encourage more active travel (walking and cycling), such as small footway extensions and modifications;
- More significant work to public rights of way to encourage increased levels of use;
- Minor drainage work;
- New non-regulatory signs and replacement of existing signs and road markings. This includes new road markings such as "SLOW" markings;
- Minor traffic management projects including Traffic Regulation Order related works. However, it should be noted that these works can cost between £3,000 and £5,000 each and may be difficult to deliver within a 12-month timescale;
- Day rates for gangs to carry out additional maintenance to areas of the highways that a Local Member would like improved i.e. public footpaths or verges;

- Other highway improvements – improved visibility splays, junction improvements, kerbing, work in conservation areas;
- Capital grants to Town or Parish Councils for highway maintenance related equipment such as grass cutting or footway gritting equipment;
- A grant towards Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points. The Local Member Fund can be used to pay for purchase and installation costs only, so is best suited to community facilities such as village or town halls etc. The applicant (typically a Town or Parish Council) would need to lead on procurement, supply & installation. The Local Member Fund can then be used to offset these costs. In addition, the County Council would not be responsible for future maintenance costs. At the current time, EV charging points cannot be installed on the Highway, although this will change over time as the Council's EV strategy is finalised and trials are conducted;
- A grant towards community tree planting to support Norfolk's Environmental Policy. In a similar way to the EV charging points, the Local Member Fund can be used to pay for purchase and installation costs only, so is best suited to community facilities that can be planted off highway land. The applicant (typically a Town or Parish Council) would need to lead on procurement, supply & installation. Where trees are proposed on Highway land, these would need to be agreed with the local Highways team to prevent future maintenance issues;
- Wildlife friendly measures for amenity and biodiversity gain, including greenspace improvements. Particularly for priority habitats and species like bats and newts. Funding is for implementation costs only, and ongoing maintenance costs would need to be agreed by third parties;
- Repairs to local footpaths on the Public Right of Way network particularly, where appropriate to provide barrier free, all abilities access.

What is excluded from the fund?

The funding is capital funding only, so ongoing maintenance (revenue) costs are excluded from this scheme.

Illuminated signs, street lighting or reflective bollards are not included in this initiative.

In addition, the budget of £10,000 is not to be exceeded. Any schemes which are likely to exceed this amount will not be taken forward, unless other funding streams are confirmed.

Who can help provide advice on what can be delivered and how?

Your local Highways Area team can provide the necessary help and advice on what the engineering solutions to any given problem may be. The Environment team can provide advice on biodiversity, tree planting and other greenspace enhancements. These options will be location specific and will usually involve a site visit to fully understand the issues and identify the optimum solution.

Who records and monitors spend?

Your local Highways Area team will provide an initial cost estimate and if delivery is agreed, will then monitor construction / installation costs. Given the nature of construction, there may be unexpected or unforeseen costs which will need to be managed within the £10,000 allocation. The Highways team will also manage the grants available to fund other agreed works if delivered by communities themselves.

Who can deliver the proposals?

It is expected that the majority of works on the highway would be undertaken by Norfolk County Council and its approved supply chain. Grants made to direct to Town and Parish Councils, i.e. for the EV charging point and tree planting works, would follow those Town and Parish Council's procurement rules.

Environmental Issues

I have made environmental issues one of my priorities for the next four years and as Chairman of the Infrastructure and Development Committee responsible for developing the new Norfolk Environmental Policy I will be keeping a close watch on the developing strategy to deliver the policy aims and objectives. The following commentary outlines the current work my committee is looking at under the heading "Greenways to Greenspaces: Green Travel and Green Networks along Highways Corridors"

"We propose that a new NCC policy on verge management is established to manage roadside verges for wildlife and habitat connectivity by reducing the frequency and/or timing of verge vegetation cutting (where possible and safe to do so). This will build on the changes already implemented this year where highway verge cutting on C and U class roads has already been reduced to once a year except for safety reason at junction for example. This will deliver key aspects of the Environmental Policy including:

- Sustainable land management;
- Improving nature networks and enhancing the beauty of landscapes;
- Connecting people with their environment for health and wellbeing;
- Increasing resource efficiency (including financial resources) and reducing roadside pollution;
- Help for Norfolk's pollinators;
- Help for the local rural economy through environmental enhancement to boost tourism
- and the overall visitor experience;
- Supporting people to make sustainable travel choices.

Additionally, reduced cutting of roadside verge vegetation to allow wildflowers to bloom and seed is something that many parish councils across Norfolk are keen to see.

The Council has designated 112 short sections of roadside verge as Roadside Nature Reserves (RNRs) [https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/what-we-do-and-how-we-work/policyperformance-](https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/what-we-do-and-how-we-work/policyperformance-and-partnerships/partnerships/natural-environment-) and-partnerships/partnerships/natural-environment-

partnerships/local-wildlifeand- geodiversity. These have been identified as having particularly rare native wildflowers or protected or priority species of wildlife such as water vole or common toad.

We propose that the RNR network in Norfolk is increased to 300 sites and that NCC and Suffolk County Council work together to pilot a 3-year nature recovery demonstrator project involving roadside verges which will be included in the emerging Norfolk and Suffolk 25 Year Environment Plan.”

Mobile Phone coverage

Government has announced a £1bn fund to improve mobile phone coverage, especially in rural ‘not-spots’. This will enable operators to share masts where possible and build new masts more quickly. The fund will be split 50/50 with the operators with themselves paying half and the government the other 50%. If you can identify any local ‘not-spots’ in your parish let me know and I will pass on that information to the relevant County Officer.

County Responsibilities

My council responsibilities for the coming year are as follows: -

- Chairman of the Infrastructure and Development Select Committee
- Vice Chairman of the Transport for Norwich Joint Committee
- Member of the Greater Norwich Development Planning Committee
- Representative on the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association
- Member of the Working Group for the Western Link development
- Member of the Town Deal Board for Great Yarmouth

As always, I am here to help in any way I can and will always respond to email and telephone requests for assistance.

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Kind regards

Barry