

Crowdfund Norfolk platform launched to attract donations for environmental projects

Grassroots and community-focused projects that aim to improve the environment will be supported through a donation-funding platform launched by Norfolk County Council in collaboration with Crowdfunder.

Using the power of the crowd, Crowdfund Norfolk will help environmental, sustainability and net zero projects to get the funding they need to turn their ideas into a reality.

Projects that match the criteria can seek donations from the community to reach their budget and will be eligible for 50% funding up to a maximum value of £10,000.

The innovative initiative was launched at the recent Norfolk Market Towns Conference that explored ways in which footfall can be increased across the county's 22 market towns.

Further information about Crowdfund Norfolk funding and how to apply is available on the crowdfunder site [here](#).

Norfolk county council budget update

Norfolk County Council is facing difficult decisions as the pressures on local government budgets continue to grow.

The council will need to put more money into its budget to protect vulnerable people despite 'substantial uncertainty' about local government funding.

The budget is expected to grow by £64.5m for 2025-26, however this is not expected to cover the projected increases in demand, particularly in adult social care and children's services.

Cabinet members will consider a number of budget proposals when they meet on Monday 7 October.

A number of the proposals that Cabinet members will be considering would require public consultation - with feedback taken into account before any final budget decisions are made in February 2025.

Proposals that would go out to public consultation are:

- Raising council tax - with the following options: an increase of 3%, an increase of up to 5%, an increase of more than 5%.
- Review of our Housing Related Support Services.
- Switch off a further 2% of Norfolk County Council maintained streetlights.

The pressure on the council's budget is also being felt in the current financial year.

Further details about the challenges and budget proposals are available in our press release [here](#).

Cabinet papers and meeting links are available [here](#).

Norfolk Recycling centres – changes due in November

Changes are being made at Norfolk recycling centres that will affect Norfolk residents and traders.

The changes will help with service demand, reduce congestion and make sites safer whilst ensuring costs are covered for the disposal of waste.

Anyone wishing to visit a Norfolk recycling centre from Monday 18 November 2024 must book in advance. Bookings can be made up to seven days ahead either online via the council's website or by phoning the customer service centre. The new booking system will be live from Monday 11 November.

Additionally, from the 1 November trade customers will see a change to the way they pay to dispose of their waste. Businesses will be charged based on the size of vehicle and the type of waste they bring, instead of the number of bags.

Further details about these changes are available in our press release [here](#).

Further information about rubbish and recycling, including more information about the new booking system is available on our website [here](#)

Norwich Park and ride update

Following a competitive tender process Norfolk County Council has this week awarded contracts to run Norwich Park and Ride services for up to the next eight years, starting in early 2025.

Two operators have been successful, with First Bus having been awarded the contract to run services from the Airport and Thickthorn sites, and Central Connect (operating as Simonds) providing services from Harford and Postwick. First Bus has committed to running zero-emission buses from the Thickthorn and Airport sites. All four sites will see earlier and later journeys and a service on a Sunday.

The Sprowston site will continue to be part of the overall park and ride offer but offering a slightly different service as it will be opened up to local bus services to use as a transport hub on local routes.

More details on each service will be provided in the coming months as the new operators finalise their plans.

Details about current park and ride services are available on our Travel Norfolk site [here](#).

School safety inspections update

Initial safety inspections of ceilings at 60 Norfolk schools have now been completed, with no further school or class closures needed.

Fifteen schools of the 60 inspected, require immediate work on parts of their ceilings and a small number of schools require follow-up checks where specialist equipment is needed to reach inaccessible areas.

All schools remain open and have appropriate measures in place to ensure a safe and effective learning environment for pupils.

Norfolk County Council commissioned the inspections at the start of the new academic year, following the partial collapse of a lath and plaster ceiling at an academy led by Synergy Education Trust.

The council is still calculating the cost of the maintenance work needed because of the inspections.

Regular visual inspections take place at all of Norfolk's maintained schools, in addition to day-to-day checks carried out by the schools themselves. Some schools also sign up to a Building Maintenance Partnership scheme, to manage the regular maintenance of the buildings which provides additional checks. This is in line with the inspection programme in other local authorities, but the council will look at whether future additional checks are needed, because of this latest issue.

Academies are responsible for their own maintenance programme and the council has written to trusts to notify them of this issue.

National updates

Improved accessibility on buses and coaches

New regulations came into force on 1 October that will improve accessibility for passengers on local bus and coach services

The Public Service Vehicles (Accessible Information) Regulations 2023 require operators of local bus and coach services to provide information on the route, direction of travel and each upcoming stop.

The regulations will boost confidence for travelling passengers, including those with sight and hearing impairments because route information will be clearly displayed and announced.

The introduction of the regulations means newer vehicles (those first used on local services since 1 October 2019) must now be compliant. There is a staggered deadline for older vehicles through to 2026, with partially compliant status vehicles needing to be compliant by 2031.

Shadow Great British Railways update

The Transport Secretary has [appointed Laura Shoaf as Chair of Shadow Great British Railways \(SGBR\)](#).

In the role, Laura will help drive the government's overhaul of the railways, bringing senior leaders together to deliver improvements for passengers and work towards a more unified rail system.

SGBR will also help design Great British Railways – a permanent body that will oversee railway infrastructure and services, unifying the oversight of track and trains.

Ahead of legislation being passed, SGBR will lay the groundwork for this new system, ensuring no time is wasted in delivering better for passengers and freight.

Solar power taskforce

At the first meeting of the government's reactivated [Solar Taskforce](#), Energy Secretary Ed Miliband said that solar power will be a key driving force behind their 2030 clean power mission.

The taskforce brings together leading figures from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), industry and regulatory organisations, and will focus on accelerating the delivery of solar energy across the country. It aims to drive forward the increases in rooftop and ground mount solar needed to accomplish the [government's 2030 Clean Power Mission](#), laying the groundwork for longer-term growth.

The government says that homegrown, renewable energy projects including solar will help build the UK's energy independence and reduce dependence on volatile fossil fuels – protecting consumer bills and providing clean power.

Reflecting the government's ambitions to generate more solar power by 2030, the taskforce has committed to delivering an updated solar roadmap within the coming months. The solar roadmap will outline how the UK will overcome critical barriers to the sector's growth, among them skills and access to the electricity grid.

Homes England Priorities

The Minister of State for Housing and Planning, Matthew Pennycook, has [written](#) to Homes England's Chair, Peter Freeman, setting out his priorities for the Agency in their role of delivering housing and regeneration across England.

The letter includes 7 immediate priority areas to support delivery of new homes and places:

- For the Agency to do everything in its power to accelerate development and increase delivery in 2024/25.
- To continue to provide appropriate support to the New Homes Accelerator.
- For the Agency to continue to support the Department's work on new towns and other major schemes.
- To take steps to ensure that the Agency is maximising the number of social rent homes.
- For the Agency to support the reform and diversification of the housing market.
- To continue to focus on achieving best value for money for the taxpayer and ensure that the Agency drives efficiencies and prioritises resources.
- To ensure that the Agency provides robust and timely input into the Budget and Spending Review processes.