

Borough Councillor report to Downham Market Town Council

Cllr Josie Ratcliffe

17th October 2023

Consultation on Local Plan Review

The Borough Council is working on its Local Plan Review (2016-2036) and consultation on the latest documents closes this Friday 20th October.

The draft Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State in March 2022, but in January 2023, the Inspectors announced the adjournment of the Local Plan Examination Hearing, and requested that the Borough Council undertake further work to justify the strategy and distribution of housing.

The revised requirement for housing in Downham Market is now set at 647 dwellings (up from 390 in the submitted plan). However, all but 70 dwellings already have planning permission, which is why no new housing sites had been proposed for Downham Market (which the Inspectors had queried). I understand the remaining 70 are expected in phase 2 of the Bridle Way site.

The Planning department is keen to encourage responses to the current consultation. Responses must relate to the recently published suite of documents: https://www.west-norfolk.gov.uk/info/20216/local_plan_review_2016_-_2036/1070/consultation_on_additional_evidence_base_documents

I've been advised that the documents likely to be of interest to Downham Market Town Council are:

- F47 - Topic Paper Spatial Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy (including Neighbourhood Housing requirements)
- F48 - Update on Technical Note on Transport Evidence
- F50 - Updated Housing Land Supply

Housing Standards

The Borough Council's "Environment & Community Panel" recently reviewed schemes that can help owners and tenants to insulate homes, cut emissions and reduce heating bills.

The council's 'Housing Standards' department can advise whether households are eligible. They believe that a high proportion of homes in West Norfolk might be eligible for some form of help, and they would like to be contacted:

Email: HousingStandards@West-Norfolk.gov.uk

Tel: 01553 616227

Unfortunately, the availability of funding has led to a rise in scams and unregistered firms. A letter was distributed locally by "iEnergy" which refers to "the local council". I asked the Housing Standards team whether they were aware of this firm, but they are not, and iEnergy is not on the TrustMark register. We recommend that residents do not respond to cold-calling offers of funding, or online adverts.

Norfolk Library and Information Service

Norfolk Libraries' 'Warm and Well' offer is back at Downham Market and all Norfolk libraries:

From today you will be able to collect items like blankets and hot water bottles as well as toiletries like toothpaste and shower gel, should you or your family need them.

Their Tricky Period initiative is still running where you can get sanitary products like disposable and reusable sanitary pads, and menstrual cups.

Most importantly, all items are free, with no questions asked - just pop and help yourself or tell a staff member what you need.

West Norfolk Wins supports charities in and around town

'West Norfolk Wins' is a community lottery that raises money for good causes in West Norfolk. Residents can enter for £1 per week and choose a good cause to get a share of ticket sales.

Discover Downham Heritage Centre & Downham Dementia Support are among the organisations that are receiving funding via this local lottery.

Search for "Wins" on the Borough Council website for information, and enter the lottery here:

<https://www.westnorfolkwins.co.uk/>

Access to Dentists

The new Borough Council administration is determined to take action to improve access to NHS dentists for our local community. While the council cannot directly provide dental services, we are making plans to:

- give practical support to bring Oral Surgery to King's Lynn;
- investigate funding opportunities to provide premises for dentists;
- lobby for the NHS dental contract to be improved;
- lobby for a dental training school to be set up in Norfolk;
- work with Norfolk County Council to establish school dentists.

A proposal to start this work is scheduled to be debated at Full Council on Thursday 19th October. Starting at 5pm, the meeting will be livestreamed on YouTube, and the recording saved on YouTube.