



Norfolk County Council

Cllr Gary Douglas-Beet Update

June 2026

County Councillor Briefing Note

Wicklewood Parish Council — July 2026

To: Wicklewood Parish Council Clerk and Members
From: Cllr Gary Douglas-Beet, NCC Member for Hingham Division
Date: 1 July 2026
Re: Advance report ahead of Wicklewood Parish Council meeting — 6 July 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report covers NCC activity relevant to Wicklewood Parish Council for July 2026, together with comments on matters raised at the council's recent meeting.

- Electrical waste (WEEE) recycling at Norfolk's recycling centres has been disrupted since a fire at the previous treatment facility. A new contractor, Recycling Lives, is targeting service resumption from 1 July 2026 for fridges, freezers and small electrical items.
- NCC's Leader has confirmed (delegated decision, 24 June 2026) that the Highways Local Member Fund will not continue for new proposals in 2026/27. The funding is being redirected into highways maintenance to tackle the backlog and increase preventative work that reduces future pothole formation. Schemes already committed from the 2025/26 allocation are unaffected. This directly affects any locally prioritised highways schemes not already committed.
- In the same decision, the Norfolk Community Fund (due to launch this month) will not proceed in 2026/27; that funding is being transferred to Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service, which has seen a 73% rise in incident activity over five years. A separate £3.25 million VCSE grant scheme, funded from the Crisis and Resilience Fund, will launch shortly as an alternative route for community groups.

- Councils and organisations seeking funding for local infrastructure projects should be aware that Section 106 contributions and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts are held primarily by the district council. I set out below what is and is not directly accessible, and how I can help facilitate conversations with South Norfolk Council.
 - I have reviewed the minutes of Wicklewood Parish Council's most recent meeting and comment below on the matters raised, including the Neighbourhood Plan, highways matters including an obscured road safety sign, and village facilities. Where items are NCC matters I set out how I can help; where they fall to the district or another body, I point the council to the right route.
 - NCC remains fully opposed to the Government's plan to reorganise local government in Norfolk and formally submitted a judicial review application to the High Court on 25 June 2026. The full NCC letter to the Secretary of State is at Appendix A. The administration is limiting reorganisation preparation to the legal minimum to protect frontline services and taxpayers' money.
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1. MY ROLE AT NORFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL

I was elected as the NCC Member for the Hingham Division at the May 2025 county elections. My division covers Hingham Town Council, Wymondham Town Council, and five parish councils: Wicklewood, Spooner Row, Wreningham, Morley, and Deopham and Hackford.

I am Vice Chair of the Strategy and Corporate Scrutiny Committee (SCSC), which scrutinises the performance, finances, and major decisions of Norfolk County Council. For this month's committee meeting, I have submitted 88 written questions to NCC officers covering council services, key performance indicators and financial decisions. I will share outcomes with this council where they are relevant to the division.

I can act as a conduit between this Parish Council and NCC officers on matters such as highways, waste, planning consultation, and commissioned services, and will escalate issues where needed. Norfolk County Council is responsible for highways, education, social care, libraries, and waste management. Planning applications and local environmental issues fall under South Norfolk Council as the local planning authority, and I can help facilitate contact with them as needed.

My View

The SCSC is one of the most important democratic checks on NCC's decisions. Submitting 88 questions reflects my commitment to rigorous scrutiny of the council's performance and finances on behalf of all residents in the division. If you require any intervention from me, please ask and I will do my best to accommodate.

2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Local Government Reorganisation remains the most significant issue facing Norfolk. In March 2026, the Secretary of State announced the Government's decision to replace Norfolk's existing two-tier system with three new unitary authorities: Greater Norwich Council, East Norfolk Council, and West Norfolk Council, subject to Parliamentary approval, with implementation targeted for April 2028.

Norfolk County Council had advocated for a single county-wide unitary authority and does not believe the Government has made the case for change. Concerns have been raised that the Minister's decision went against civil service advice on financial resilience, service delivery, and geography.

NCC's Position and Judicial Review

On 25 June 2026, NCC formally submitted a judicial review application to the High Court challenging the lawfulness of the Government's decision-making process. NCC has instructed officers to pause non-essential LGR implementation work. The administration will not participate in voluntary Joint Committees.

NCC's case rests on three grounds: no meaningful public mandate (only 1,737 of 940,000 residents responded to the consultation); unaffordable costs (£96 million implementation cost, £2.7 million Government contribution, £93 million gap); and an unrealistic timetable placing Outstanding-rated Children's Services at risk. The full letter is at Appendix A.

My View

I fully support NCC's judicial review. Fewer than 1,800 responses from 940,000 residents cannot credibly represent a mandate for fundamental change to local government. Reorganisation is being proposed at a cost of £96 million with only £2.7 million offered by Government — and that gap falls on Norfolk taxpayers who are already facing rising council tax and reduced services. I will keep the council updated as the legal position develops.

3. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

South Norfolk Council has confirmed £6,000 remaining from the initial Neighbourhood Plan grant, with a further £10,000 from the transitional fund. Public meetings are being planned to gauge community interest in producing a plan.

Neighbourhood Plans must be genuinely community-led to be valid and to carry weight with planning inspectors. A successful Neighbourhood Plan increases the Neighbourhood CIL share from 15% to 25% of CIL receipts from development in the parish. The Neighbourhood Plan process is led through South Norfolk Council's planning policy team — they are the right first point of contact.

My View

A Neighbourhood Plan is one of the most powerful tools available to a rural community. Getting it right — with genuine community engagement at its heart — is essential for it to

carry weight at planning examinations. The Neighbourhood Plan process sits with South Norfolk Council's planning policy team, but I will support however I can from the county level. Should the council need me to raise this directly with officers, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

4. LOCAL HIGHWAYS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Hackford Road

This matter was referred to the Health and Safety Executive under reference CAT-0355400, as NCC Highways advised it is an HSE matter. I can follow up with NCC Highways if further clarity is needed on their role alongside the HSE referral.

30mph Sign — Humpback Bridge

The 30mph sign near the humpback bridge on the Wymondham Road is obscured by a tree. This is an NCC Highways road safety matter. The clerk has been asked to report this through the NCC system; I also raised it directly with NCC Highways officers to ensure it is actioned promptly, as this is a genuine road safety concern.

Village Signs and Bus Shelter

Village signs need cleaning — the council should contact NCC Highways to clarify responsibility; if they are NCC assets, I can raise this directly. The bus shelter rivets issue has been resolved satisfactorily. There is also an opportunity to get this done quicker by engaging the village and asking for help.

My View

Road safety is non-negotiable and the obscured 30mph sign must be addressed without delay. This is an NCC Highways matter and I have raised it directly with Adam Mayo. On Hackford Road, if the HSE referral does not produce a satisfactory outcome, I will explore what additional pressure can be brought through NCC's channels. I am happy to take this up on your behalf if a direct approach from your County Councillor would help move things forward.

5. VILLAGE FACILITIES AND GREEN SPACES

Playing Field

The climbing frame is showing signs of wear and paint loss. The clerk has been asked to include this in the current works list. A new gate latch has been installed. Playing field management is the council's own responsibility; the Football Foundation and SUEZ Communities Fund (Section 7) may be worth exploring for any capital replacements.

Allotments and Orchard

A double allotment plot is likely to become vacant and the community plot is being managed by new volunteers. The orchard is due for its next cut in early July.

Noticeboard

A request for a parish noticeboard was discussed. As no budget has been allocated for the current year, this has been deferred to the 2027/28 budget cycle. There is also no availability from NCC's Councillor to provide funding support.

My View

Playing field and allotment facilities are important community assets. Village facilities of this kind sit within the council's own remit, but I am happy to help with any grant applications or connect the council with the relevant funders. Please contact me if you would like me to escalate this — I will do what I can to assist.

6. NCC SERVICE AND NATIONAL UPDATES

The following updates are drawn from the Councillor Briefing Notes and recent NCC Cabinet decisions.

Highways Local Member Fund — Suspended for 2026/27

On 24 June 2026, the NCC Leader took a formal delegated decision confirming that the Highways Local Member Fund will not continue for new proposals in 2026/27. The funding is being redirected into highways maintenance to address the backlog and increase preventative work. The Parish Partnership Scheme remains available for parish-initiated highway improvements, with NCC matching parish contributions. Schemes already committed from the 2025/26 allocation are unaffected and will still be delivered.

Norfolk Community Fund — Not Proceeding in 2026/27

In the same announcement, the Leader confirmed that the Norfolk Community Fund (due to launch this month) will not proceed in 2026/27. The funding has been transferred to Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service, which has seen a 73% rise in incident activity over five years, leaving the service unable to manage within its agreed budget.

NCC will shortly launch a £3.25 million VCSE grant scheme funded from the Crisis and Resilience Fund as a replacement route for community and voluntary sector organisations. Any local groups who were expecting to apply to the Community Fund should monitor NCC communications closely for details of this alternative scheme and register interest at the earliest opportunity.

WEEE (Electrical Waste) Recycling — Service Disruption

Norfolk's recycling centres have been unable to accept fridges, freezers and small electrical items since a fire at the previous treatment facility. NCC has appointed Recycling Lives as the new contractor, with service resumption targeted from 1 July 2026. Residents should store electrical items and batteries safely given the associated fire risk while the new service is established.

Parish and Town Council Project Funding: Section 106 and CIL

Members may wish to be aware of the two main routes through which development funding flows to local areas:

Section 106 (S106) contributions are negotiated against individual planning permissions and are held by the authority that granted the permission — typically South Norfolk Council for local items such as open space, affordable housing and local amenity, and NCC for education or highways mitigation. The purpose of each contribution is fixed at the time of the planning permission.

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is collected by South Norfolk Council. Of the CIL raised from development in the parish, 15% (rising to 25% where there is an adopted Neighbourhood Plan) is paid directly to the parish or town council as Neighbourhood CIL, to be spent on local priorities. The remainder is retained by the district for strategic infrastructure. I would encourage the council to contact South Norfolk Council's planning policy team to confirm the current Neighbourhood CIL balance; I am happy to help facilitate that conversation.

Children's Services: Norfolk SEND Reform Plan

Norfolk has published a three-year SEND Reform Plan which, if approved by Government, could see £195 million — 90% of the council's historic DSG deficit — repaid. Nine new specialist bases are opening this year providing 110 additional places, with the majority of children travelling less than 10 miles.

25-Year Farming Roadmap

The Government has published the Farming Roadmap 2050: Growing England's Future with new Sector Growth Plans, £53 million for the Farming Innovation Programme, and Seasonal Worker visas to at least 2030. Key implications for this rural division include rural jobs, land use, water management, and horticulture.

Summer Tax Cuts

From 25 June, VAT on children's meals in restaurants and days out was reduced from 20% to 5% under the Great British Summer Savings initiative.

Media Green Paper

The Government's Watch this Space consultation covers the future of UK media and terrestrial TV. A move to internet-based TV could occur from 2034. This is particularly relevant to rural residents without reliable broadband. The consultation closes 31 August 2026.

My View

The suspension of the Highways Local Member Fund and the cancellation of the Norfolk Community Fund together significantly reduce the direct support available for local improvements in 2026/27. The Community Fund cancellation is a real setback for voluntary and community groups who had been planning to apply. I will alert local groups as soon as the replacement VCSE scheme details are published. If a more formal approach from me would be of use, please let me know and I will act accordingly.

7. RURAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The following opportunities, drawn from the Rural Services Network Funding Digest (June 2026), may be relevant to this council and to local community groups and organisations. I highlight these as funding routes that could support community facilities, green spaces, and rural infrastructure in the division.

Heritage Revival Fund — Architectural Heritage Fund — Up to £500,000 (capital); up to £100,000 (development); up to £20,000 (viability)

Supports communities to rescue and repurpose neglected historic buildings. Viability grants (£20k), development grants (£100k) and capital grants (£500k) for town centre historic buildings. Deadline: Development: 13 July 2026. Capital: 21 September 2026.

FCC Community Action Fund — £10,000–£100,000

Parish and Town Councils are specifically eligible. Covers community facilities, sports fields and playgrounds within 10 miles of an FCC Environment waste facility. Deadline: 19 August 2026.

Football Foundation — Variable (project-dependent)

Grants for councils and clubs covering pitches, changing pavilions, play zones, fencing and defibrillators. Relevant to any playing field project. Deadline: Rolling programme.

SUEZ Communities Fund — Up to £50,000

Capital grants for village hall improvements, sports facilities, playgrounds and historic buildings within 10 miles of a SUEZ/landfill site. Deadline: 2 September 2026.

National Lottery Awards for All — £300–£20,000

Open-access grants for community projects. No deadline — open all year. Deadline: Rolling.

NCC VCSE Crisis and Resilience Fund Grant Scheme — £3.25 million total (individual amounts TBC)

Replacement for the cancelled Norfolk Community Fund. Open to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations. Details to be published shortly — watch NCC communications. Deadline: TBC.

My View

There are more external funding routes available than many councils realise, particularly for playing fields, village halls, community facilities and rural infrastructure. I would encourage the council to review these regularly. Do not hesitate to call on me if you feel direct contact from your County Councillor would make a difference here. I will update this list when new funding streams come available.

8. PLANNING MATTERS

Planning is a South Norfolk Council function. Members noted an ongoing situation at Low Street, with the next key date identified as 19 June 2026. I will monitor the outcome and keep the council informed. Planning decisions since the previous meeting were all approved by SNDC with conditions: a standalone energy system at Rosewall Barn, a

retrospective pergola at The Deer Barn, replacement windows at 49 Low Street, and a rear extension at Oak House, High Oak Lane.

My View

For any planning application that concerns the village, I encourage residents and the council to submit representations directly to South Norfolk Council. I am not a decision-maker in the planning process but can help facilitate contact with SNDC's planning team where needed. I am willing to raise this directly with the relevant officers if the council believes that would help.

9. HOW TO WORK WITH ME

I represent all residents in the Hingham division, regardless of political affiliation. Here is how to get the best from working with me:

- Contact: Email gary.douglas-beet@norfolk.gov.uk — I aim to respond within five working days. Mobile: 07795 002003 for urgent matters.
- Casework: Please provide as much detail as possible — location, reference numbers, prior correspondence — so I can act quickly and effectively.
- Raising issues: I submit formal questions to NCC officers at every SCSC meeting and am happy to include matters raised by this council. If there is an issue you would like raised at committee level, please contact me in advance of the meeting.
- NCC vs District: I can act directly on NCC matters (highways, education, libraries, waste). For South Norfolk Council matters, I can help facilitate introductions and conversations with the relevant officers.
- Meetings: I will attend as many meetings as my NCC schedule allows and will give advance notice if I am unable to attend.
- Written reports: I am committed to providing a Councillor Briefing Note ahead of each meeting covering NCC activity relevant to this area.

I look forward to working with this council on behalf of all local residents.

APPENDIX A

Letter from Cllr Robin Hunter-Clarke, Deputy Leader, Norfolk County Council
To: Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Date: 3 June 2026

Cllr Robin Hunter-Clarke
Deputy Leader of Norfolk County Council
County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich, NR1 2DH
Tel: 01603 495703

3 June 2026

Dear Minister,

Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk

Last week, I was appointed Deputy Leader of Norfolk County Council with Cabinet responsibility for Local Government Reorganisation. I am writing to set out clearly the position of this administration.

Norfolk County Council remains firmly opposed to the proposed reorganisation of local government in Norfolk. We do not believe that the Government has made the case for change and are deeply concerned that the proposals will impose significant and unacceptable disruption and expense.

At a time when families across Norfolk face significant cost-of-living pressures and councils are under severe financial strain, it is difficult to justify spending tens of millions of pounds on a restructuring that local people neither requested nor support. The current two-tier system has served Norfolk well since 1974.

As you will be aware, last month this council issued a pre-action protocol letter setting out our concerns that the decision is unlawful. If the Government's decision is not reversed then we will be compelled to seek a judicial review.

Our concerns fall into three principal areas:

1. There is no public mandate for this change

Only 1,737 out of 940,000 Norfolk residents participated in the Government's consultation — far short of a meaningful public mandate for fundamental change.

2. The costs are unaffordable and the savings uncertain

Implementation costs are estimated at £96 million, with the Government contributing only £2.7 million, leaving a gap of more than £93 million. NCC already faces a budget gap exceeding £34 million for 2027/28, with inherited debt of £900 million.

3. The timetable is unrealistic and creates unprecedented risk

Most concerning is the risk to Norfolk's Outstanding-rated Children's Services, which should not be placed at unnecessary risk for a structural change that lacks public support and a compelling business case.

We will pursue all lawful avenues to challenge these proposals. The administration will not support LGR implementation in advance of any Structural Changes Order, nor participate in voluntary Joint Committees. I urge you to withdraw the requirement for local government reorganisation in Norfolk.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Robin Hunter-Clarke

Deputy Leader of the Council