

District Councillor Monthly Report to Wicklewood Parish Council

Cllr Richard Elliott – South Norfolk Council

July 2026

Dear Councillors,

Please find below my monthly report covering recent activity at South Norfolk Council together with matters that I believe are particularly relevant to Wicklewood and the wider ward.

Firstly, I should apologise for the length of this month's report and the level of detail included. However, a number of significant issues are currently affecting local government, local communities and future planning arrangements. In particular, Local Government Reorganisation, the preparation of the next Local Plan, changes to highways funding, emerging neighbourhood planning discussions and major changes to waste collection services all have the potential to affect villages such as Wicklewood over the coming years.

1. Community Funding Opportunities – Significant Investment Available

One of the strongest messages I wish to convey this month is that South Norfolk Council continues to place considerable emphasis on supporting communities through targeted grant funding.

Two principal funding streams remain available:

- **Community Facilities Grant (CFG)** – supporting improvements to community buildings and infrastructure, including refurbishment projects, accessibility improvements and energy-efficiency measures.
- **Community Action Fund (CAF)** – providing support for larger-scale community initiatives which can demonstrate clear local benefit.

South Norfolk's ability to offer these funding opportunities reflects the Council's continuing commitment to prudent financial management and long-term investment in local communities. While many councils nationally and locally are being forced or are choosing to reduce discretionary spending, South Norfolk continues to make funding available that can deliver tangible benefits for residents and community organisations.

For Wicklewood, this remains particularly important. Whether future projects relate to community facilities, environmental improvements, recreational provision or local infrastructure, I would strongly encourage early engagement so that potential funding opportunities can be identified and pursued.

Conclusion

Strong finances are only valuable if they translate into benefits for local communities. These grant schemes provide a real opportunity for villages such as Wicklewood to secure investment that might otherwise be difficult to obtain.

2. Highways Safety Remains a Key Local Priority

Whilst highways remain the responsibility of Norfolk County Council, road safety continues to be one of the most significant concerns raised by residents throughout Wicklewood.

I remain firmly of the view that highway safety issues must remain at the forefront of local decision-making. Speeding traffic, visibility concerns, junction safety, the condition of road surfaces, verges and drainage all directly affect residents' quality of life and safety.

As we continue to experience growth across South Norfolk, it is essential that infrastructure keeps pace with development. Throughout my work at District and Cabinet level I continue to raise the importance of:

- Protecting rural lanes from inappropriate traffic volumes;
- Ensuring highway improvements accompany development;
- Maintaining visibility splays and roadside vegetation;
- Addressing drainage and flooding issues which impact road safety; and
- Supporting measures that improve pedestrian safety in villages.

I would encourage Wicklewood Parish Council to continue highlighting any emerging road safety concerns so that they can be escalated through the appropriate County Council channels. Road safety remains one of the issues most frequently raised by residents and should continue to be treated as a priority.

Residents rightly expect councils to focus not only on major infrastructure projects, but also on the routine and ongoing maintenance of the highway network that affects their daily lives. Funding for major transport schemes is often sourced through separate capital programmes, developer contributions and Government infrastructure funding, whereas routine maintenance such as pothole repairs, verge management, drainage works, signage maintenance and road resurfacing relies heavily upon Norfolk County Council's highways maintenance allocations and wider highways budgets. Both forms of investment are important, but it is often the smaller, localised improvements and maintenance activities that residents notice most.

Highways Local Member Fund

Members may also be aware of a recent decision by Norfolk County Council to discontinue the Highways Local Member Fund, a scheme that had been in place since 2017 and which provided each County Councillor with up to £11,000 annually to support small-scale highways and environmental improvement projects within their division. The fund had been used across Norfolk to support a wide range of locally identified priorities, including speed limit reduction schemes, traffic calming measures, footpath improvements, grit bins, signage and other targeted road safety initiatives.

Norfolk County Council has stated that the funding, worth approximately £924,000 per annum across all 84 county divisions, will instead be returned to the wider highways maintenance budget to support resurfacing, pothole repairs and reducing the county's highways maintenance backlog. The County Council has indicated that the Local Member Fund was originally carved out of the highways budget and that the resources will now be reinvested directly into highway maintenance activities.

Whilst I fully appreciate the importance of investing in routine maintenance and addressing Norfolk's highways backlog, I am disappointed by the decision to remove a funding stream that gave local communities and their elected representatives a practical means of delivering smaller road safety improvements of the type I have often heard requested at parish council meetings. Experience has shown that relatively modest investments can often have a disproportionate impact on residents' quality of life, whether through speed reduction measures, improved pedestrian safety or resolving long-standing local concerns. These projects may be small in financial terms, but their benefits to local communities are often significant.

It is worth noting that major highway maintenance funding continues to be provided through dedicated Government and Department for Transport allocations, whilst the now-abolished Highways Local Member Fund represented a local decision by Norfolk County Council on how a portion of its wider highways budget should be deployed. I therefore hope that alternative mechanisms can be identified in future to ensure parish councils and local communities retain opportunities to bring forward locally supported road safety improvements alongside the essential programme of major maintenance and resurfacing works.

Conclusion

In summary, highway safety remains one of the most important issues affecting residents in Wicklewood. Whilst major investment in resurfacing, maintenance and infrastructure improvements is essential, there is also a continuing need for smaller, locally focused interventions that address specific concerns within the village. The recent decision by Norfolk County Council to abolish the Highways Local Member Fund represents a significant change in how such improvements can be brought forward, and I remain concerned that through this funding cut communities may lose an effective mechanism for delivering targeted road safety measures. Going forward, I will continue to advocate for a balanced approach that combines long-term investment in the wider highway network with practical local solutions that improve safety, reduce speeding and respond directly to concerns raised by residents.

3. Carbon Reduction and Environmental Projects

Recent work includes continued investment in energy-efficient operations, improvements to environmental services, support for biodiversity enhancement and work connected with wider Norfolk climate initiatives. South Norfolk Council's approach demonstrates that environmental responsibility and sound financial management can work together to benefit residents. By reducing energy consumption, improving efficiency and securing external funding, carbon reduction

initiatives can lower long-term operating costs whilst simultaneously delivering environmental benefits.

In my view, this stands in contrast to the approach taken by some local authorities that have chosen to view carbon reduction primarily through an ideological or political lens rather than recognising the practical and financial benefits that can be achieved. Whilst there will always be legitimate debate about priorities and delivery methods, it seems increasingly difficult to ignore the evidence that well-designed carbon reduction projects can help reduce operating costs, strengthen financial resilience and attract additional funding opportunities. South Norfolk's approach has been to focus on outcomes rather than ideology, on substance rather than soundbites, recognising that environmental improvement and responsible financial management are not competing objectives, but can often be delivered together for the benefit of residents.

For communities such as Wicklewood, this presents opportunities to bring forward local projects involving:

- Energy-efficiency improvements to community buildings;
- Community renewable energy initiatives;
- Biodiversity enhancement schemes;
- Tree planting and habitat creation; and
- Environmental improvements to public spaces.

These projects are increasingly attractive to grant funders and align strongly with South Norfolk Council's environmental and community investment priorities.

Conclusion

In summary, South Norfolk Council's approach to carbon reduction is grounded in practical outcomes rather than ideology. By investing in projects that reduce energy consumption, improve operational efficiency, attract external funding and enhance environmental resilience, the Council is delivering benefits for both taxpayers and the environment. For rural communities such as Wicklewood, this approach creates opportunities to improve local facilities, reduce running costs and strengthen community assets for the future. I believe this demonstrates that environmental responsibility and sound financial management can, and should, go hand in hand, delivering lasting benefits for residents whilst protecting the Council's long-term financial position.

4. Local Government Reorganisation

South Norfolk Council's Challenge to the Government's Decision

Whilst South Norfolk Council recognises that Local Government Reorganisation is now Government policy and must therefore prepare responsibly for any eventual transition, the Council has not simply accepted the Government's decision without challenge.

On 25 March 2026, the Secretary of State confirmed the Government's decision to proceed with a three-unitary authority model for Norfolk, replacing the existing county, district, borough and city councils with three new authorities from 2028.

Following that announcement, South Norfolk Council raised a number of concerns regarding both the process followed and the outcome reached. The Council has consistently argued that rural communities risk losing influence within larger authorities, that local accountability could be weakened, and that the Government's final decision did not adequately reflect concerns expressed by many communities across South Norfolk. Concerns have also been raised regarding governance arrangements, financial sustainability and the extent to which alternative options were properly assessed before the final decision was made.

As a result, the Council took the decision to explore formal legal options. South Norfolk Cabinet considered a dedicated report on 8 June 2026 concerning *Local Government Reorganisation (Norfolk): Options for Legal Challenge*. The report confirmed that a Pre-Action Protocol Letter had already been served as part of the Judicial Review process and sought authority for any further legal steps that might be required.

The Council subsequently agreed to make available up to £250,000 from a specific Local Government Reorganisation reserve to support specialist legal advice and the potential legal challenge. Public reporting during June confirmed that these resources had been earmarked specifically for work associated with challenging the Government's decision.

Some residents may reasonably ask whether committing up to £250,000 of taxpayers' money towards a potential legal challenge represents good value for money. That is an entirely legitimate question and one that should be openly acknowledged.

However, the argument advanced by South Norfolk Council is that Local Government Reorganisation will fundamentally alter how local services are delivered, how local communities are represented, how assets and liabilities are managed and how public money is spent for decades to come. The Council's position is that there is a significant difference between spending public money simply to oppose change and spending public money to ensure that a decision of such long-term importance has been arrived at lawfully, transparently and on the basis of robust evidence.

Supporters of the challenge argue that the financial consequences of reorganisation could run into many millions of pounds over the coming decades through changes to governance arrangements, council tax decisions, service delivery structures, assets, liabilities and financial commitments. Against that backdrop, the Council's view is that investing a comparatively modest amount to properly scrutinise the decision-making process may represent prudent stewardship of public finances if it helps ensure that residents are not disadvantaged by arrangements that are flawed, insufficiently evidenced or potentially detrimental to rural communities.

The Council has also argued that this issue extends beyond finance alone. South Norfolk has built a reputation for strong financial management, relatively low levels of debt, significant investment in communities, substantial reserves and the protection of frontline services. Many members believe they have a duty to challenge decisions where there is a genuine concern that those achievements, and the interests of the rural communities that helped create them, could be weakened within a larger and potentially more remote authority.

Whether or not one agrees with the legal challenge itself, the Council's view is that residents would reasonably expect elected representatives to test and scrutinise a decision of this magnitude rather than simply accept it without question.

It is important to understand what a Judicial Review means in this context. A Judicial Review does not ask the courts to decide which local government structure is preferable. Instead, it asks whether the Government followed a lawful process, took appropriate information into account and met the requirements expected of public decision-makers. The legal advice considered by the Council included issues relating to consultation and the information relied upon in reaching the final decision.

At the same time, South Norfolk Council continues to fulfil its statutory responsibilities and participate in necessary transition planning. The Council's approach has therefore been twofold:

1. To challenge aspects of the Government's decision where there are legitimate concerns regarding the process followed and the implications for rural communities; and
2. To ensure that local services continue to be delivered effectively throughout the transition period regardless of the eventual outcome.

In my view, South Norfolk Council has adopted a pragmatic and responsible position throughout this process. The Council has neither simply accepted the Government's proposals without question nor sought to oppose change for its own sake. Instead, it has taken a measured approach based upon evidence, financial analysis, governance considerations and the long-term interests of rural communities. That stands in contrast to the approach taken by some authorities which appear to have built much of their case around broad opposition to change, often seeking to emphasise worst-case scenarios or play upon residents' concerns without always providing the same level of evidence to support their arguments. Change of this scale will naturally generate uncertainty, but public confidence is best maintained through openness, evidence and informed debate rather than by encouraging fear of the unknown. South Norfolk's focus has therefore been on ensuring that any decisions affecting local communities are properly scrutinised whilst continuing to plan responsibly for whatever outcome ultimately emerges.

I also have significant reservations about the wisdom of any authority choosing simply to disengage from the process altogether. Whatever one's view of Local Government Reorganisation, it remains Government policy and is currently proceeding. If change is ultimately implemented, the communities best placed to protect their interests will be those whose councils have remained actively engaged,

influencing proposals, scrutinising decisions, preparing for transition and ensuring local priorities are reflected wherever possible. Walking away from discussions may provide a political message, but it does little to shape the outcome. South Norfolk's view has been that responsible leadership requires engagement even where there is disagreement. That is why the Council has continued to participate in transition planning, continued to make the case for rural communities, and continued to challenge aspects of the process where there are legitimate concerns. In my view, residents are better served by constructive engagement combined with robust scrutiny than by symbolic opposition that risks leaving important decisions to be made by others.

Ultimately, there is an important distinction between resisting change because change is unpopular and challenging decisions because there are genuine concerns about evidence, governance or process. South Norfolk has sought to do the latter. The Council's approach has been to ensure that arguments are evidence-led, financially grounded and focused on protecting the long-term interests of residents rather than seeking short-term political advantage.

Conclusion

In summary, Local Government Reorganisation represents the most significant change to Norfolk local government for more than half a century. South Norfolk Council has sought both to prepare responsibly for change and to challenge the Government where there are genuine concerns about local accountability, financial sustainability and the representation of rural communities. The decision to pursue legal advice and explore Judicial Review reflects the Council's view that decisions of this scale should be subject to the highest level of scrutiny, particularly where the future governance of local communities is concerned. As the process continues, I will remain committed to ensuring that the voice of Wicklewood is heard, that rural communities are not overlooked, and that residents continue to receive the high-quality services they expect throughout this period of significant change.

5. Planning Policy, the Emerging Local Plan and Future Development Pressures

Whilst planning applications often attract the greatest attention, some of the most important decisions affecting the future of Wicklewood will be made through the preparation of South Norfolk's next Local Plan.

Work has already begun on this process. One of the first stages involves a **Call for Sites**, allowing landowners, developers and others to put forward land that they believe may be suitable for future development consideration.

It is important to stress that the submission of a site does not mean development will take place. However, sites promoted through this process may ultimately be assessed as part of future planning policy discussions.

The experience of the Village Clusters Housing Allocations process demonstrated that communities which engage early and provide robust evidence can have a real influence on planning outcomes. The successful removal of a proposed housing

allocation in Wicklewood provides a clear example of the value of active local engagement.

Local Government Reorganisation and Planning

Local Government Reorganisation creates additional uncertainty around planning policy.

At present, South Norfolk and Broadland Councils jointly prepare planning policy through the Greater Norwich planning arrangements. Under future unitary structures, planning responsibilities may ultimately transfer to successor authorities.

There is therefore a risk that planning policy could become more centralised and increasingly remote from smaller rural communities. This makes it even more important that Wicklewood clearly articulates its aspirations, priorities and concerns at an early stage.

A key theme emerging from the Local Government Reorganisation debate is the importance of ensuring that local communities have an effective mechanism through which their voice can continue to be heard. Against that backdrop, neighbourhood planning may become increasingly important as one of the few planning tools directly controlled by local communities.

Conclusion

The next Local Plan will help determine where development takes place, what infrastructure is required and how rural communities evolve over the coming decades. Early engagement will therefore be critical.

6. Planning Application Update – Low Street (Plots 1 & 2)

The variation of conditions applications relating to **Plots 1 and 2, Low Street, Wicklewood (application references 2024/3725 and 2024/3726)** continue to attract considerable local interest.

Over recent months revised information has been submitted relating to drainage, flood mitigation and surface water management. The applications have been subject to further consultation involving planning officers, the Council's Flood and Water Management Team, the Parish Council and local residents.

The principal issues under consideration continue to relate to flood risk, drainage arrangements and the adequacy of proposed mitigation measures. Additional technical work has been requested and extensions of time granted to allow that work to be undertaken.

At the time of writing, no final determination has been made on either application.

I continue to monitor the position closely and maintain the view that decisions must be evidence-based, robust and fully take account of local concerns and infrastructure constraints.

Conclusion

Given the importance of drainage and flood-risk considerations, it is essential that any decision is made on the basis of comprehensive technical evidence and a full understanding of the potential impacts on existing residents.

7. Food Waste Collections – Major Service Rollout Begins This Summer

One of the most significant service changes currently taking place across South Norfolk is the introduction of separate weekly household food waste collections. This is not a discretionary initiative being introduced by the Council; it is a **new statutory duty** arising from the Environment Act and the Government's Simpler Recycling reforms, which require all waste collection authorities to provide separate weekly household food waste collections and collect a consistent range of recyclable materials across England.

Following extensive preparation, procurement of specialist collection vehicles, recruitment of additional staff and distribution of collection equipment, South Norfolk Council will begin rolling out the new service during summer 2026.

Rollout Timetable

The service is being introduced in phases across the district:

- **Phase 1** – collections will commence during the week beginning **27 July 2026**.
- **Phase 2** – collections will commence during the week beginning **28 September 2026**.
- Subsequent phases will cover communal properties, flats and more complex collection arrangements once the main household rollout has been completed.

Not all households will begin receiving collections at the same time. Residents can check their individual rollout phase and start date using the postcode checker available on the Council's website.

What Residents Will Receive

Prior to collections commencing, households will receive:

- An information leaflet confirming their collection start date;
- A small indoor kitchen caddy;
- A 23-litre external food waste bin; and
- A supply of compostable liners.

What Can Be Collected?

The new service will accept a wide range of household food waste, including:

- Fruit and vegetable peelings and cores;
- Leftovers and plate scrapings;

- Out-of-date food;
- Tea bags and coffee grounds;
- Meat and fish waste; and
- Bones and carcasses.

Collection Arrangements

Food waste will be collected every week, on the same day as existing refuse and recycling collections, by a dedicated food waste collection vehicle. South Norfolk Council has also confirmed that there will be no immediate changes to existing collection days during the rollout period.

Why This Matters

Food waste collected separately can be processed through anaerobic digestion facilities, producing renewable energy and nutrient-rich fertiliser rather than being disposed of as residual waste.

The scheme is expected to:

- Increase recycling performance;
- Reduce waste requiring disposal;
- Support renewable energy generation;
- Reduce carbon emissions; and
- Contribute towards national environmental objectives.

Funding and Financial Implications

Whilst there are potentially significant environmental benefits, it is important to recognise the financial realities behind the scheme.

South Norfolk Council has had to procure specialist vehicles, purchase tens of thousands of containers and caddies, recruit and train staff, arrange delivery of equipment and develop the infrastructure necessary to meet this new statutory requirement.

Government has provided funding towards implementation. However, Cabinet reports have highlighted concerns regarding the longer-term position, including confirmation that there will be **no future Government capital funding for replacement vehicles and major collection assets**, meaning councils will ultimately be required to meet those costs themselves.

This reflects a broader concern frequently raised across local government. Whilst councils are legally required to introduce and operate the service, there remains an ongoing debate as to whether the full long-term costs of delivering this statutory obligation have been met through Government funding.

Personally, I welcome the environmental benefits that the scheme can deliver and I am pleased that South Norfolk has worked hard to prepare for its introduction in a careful and phased manner. However, I also believe it is important to continue making the case that when Government places new statutory duties on councils, those duties should be accompanied by sufficient long-term funding so that they can be delivered without placing additional pressure on local taxpayers.

8. Wicklewood Neighbourhood Plan – Community Engagement and Future Opportunities

One of the most encouraging developments locally has been the discussion around the potential preparation of a **Neighbourhood Plan for Wicklewood**.

I have been pleased to participate in two of the three public meetings held to discuss this proposal and was encouraged by both the level of attendance and the quality of discussion. Residents clearly demonstrated a strong interest in the future of their village and a willingness to engage constructively with the planning process.

A Neighbourhood Plan provides communities with an opportunity to shape future development through locally produced planning policies. Whilst it cannot prevent all development, it can help influence where development takes place, design standards, protection of important green spaces, infrastructure priorities and the long-term vision for the parish.

Once adopted through independent examination and referendum, a Neighbourhood Plan becomes part of the statutory development plan and carries significant weight in planning decisions.

In the context of increasing development pressures, the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan could provide an important mechanism for ensuring that future growth reflects the wishes and priorities of local residents, particularly as Local Government Reorganisation and work on the next Local Plan progress.

Conclusion

Whatever decision is ultimately taken, the discussions held so far have already demonstrated something very positive: residents care deeply about the future of Wicklewood and are willing to engage constructively in shaping it.

9. Local Issues and Casework

A significant proportion of my councillor workload continues to involve assisting residents with individual casework.

Common themes over recent weeks have included:

- Planning enquiries;
- Highways concerns;
- Environmental matters;
- Fly-tipping;

- Community funding enquiries; and
- General council service issues.

I remain available to assist residents and the Parish Council whenever issues arise.

Looking Ahead to August

Key issues likely to dominate over the coming month include:

- Progress on Local Government Reorganisation;
- Further work on the emerging Local Plan and Call for Sites process;
- Continued discussion regarding a potential Wicklewood Neighbourhood Plan;
- The phased rollout of food waste collections;
- Ongoing progress on the Low Street applications;
- Community grant opportunities; and
- Highways and infrastructure concerns affecting the ward.

Final Remarks

Although local government faces a period of considerable change and uncertainty, South Norfolk Council remains in a strong position and continues to invest in communities, support local projects and deliver services effectively.

My priority remains unchanged: ensuring that Wicklewood has a strong voice, that local concerns are heard, and that opportunities to improve village life and protect the character of our community are actively pursued.

Cllr Richard Elliott
South Norfolk Council
District Councillor for Wicklewood Ward

July 2026