

Minutes of the Greater Norwich Growth Board

Date: Thursday 26 September 2024

Time: 2.30pm

Venue: The Upper Yare Room, Horizon Centre, Peachman Way, Norwich, NR7 0WF

Present:

Name	Organisation	Role
Cllr Sue Holland (Incoming Chair)	Broadland District Council	Board Member
Cllr Emma Hampton	Norwich City Council	Board Member
Cllr Kay Mason Billig	Norfolk County Council	Board Member
Cllr Graham Minshull	South Norfolk Council	Board Member
Sarah Ashurst	Norwich City Council	Officer
Ben Burgess	South Norfolk Council & Broadland District Council	Officer
Trevor Holden	South Norfolk Council & Broadland District Council	Officer
Chris Starkie	Norfolk County Council	Officer

In Attendance:

Name	Organisation	Job Title
Grace Burke	Norfolk County Council	Greater Norwich Programme Manager
Wendy Brooks	Norfolk County Council	Head of Environment
Thomas Cushan	Norfolk County Council	Greater Norwich Project Manager
Matthew Davies	Norwich City Council	Norwich Fringe Project Officer
Isabel Horner	Norfolk County Council	Sufficiency Delivery Manager
Ellie Leeper	Norfolk County Council	Greater Norwich Project Officer
Ruth Oyeniyi	Norfolk County Council	Greater Norwich Project Manager
James Wilson	Norfolk County Council	Director of Sufficiency, Planning and Education Strategy

1. HANDOVER OF CHAIR

Cllr Sue Holland took the Chair and thanked Cllr Kay Mason Billig for Chairing the Board over the last year.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs D Elmer and M Stonard, their substitutes were Cllrs G Minshull and E Hampton.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record.

5. PROJECT SHOWCASE: YARE VALLEY WALK

The Board received a presentation from Matthew Davies, Norwich Fringe Project Officer, on the Yare Valley Walk, attached at Appendix A to these minutes.

Members were reminded that the Yare Valley Walk was a popular six-mile nature and walking route from Bowthorpe Southern Park to Marston Marsh. The Greater Norwich Growth Board had contributed £47,000 to fully fund improvements to the Cringleford Meadow area of the walk to enhance visitor experience and access. This work had filled in a vital missing link on the route via a new hardcore path connecting Cringleford Meadow to the existing route, improving car parking facilities, installing a new interpretation board and waymarking posts and providing biodiversity enhancements by grubbing out an historic ditch system.

The Board was informed that the project had made an important addition to Green Infrastructure in Greater Norwich, especially as Cringleford was a key growth location with limited access to green space. These improvements meant that more people would be able to enjoy the Yare Valley Walk, whilst managing the impact of the extra use by implementing formal pathing.

6. SCHOOLS' CAPITAL PROGRAMME FOR GREATER NORWICH

James Wilson, Director of Sufficiency, Planning and Education Strategy at Norfolk County Council, introduced the report which provided an overview of the Schools' Capital Programme for Greater Norwich, detailing the current and future educational infrastructure needs, funding sources, and key projects.

It was emphasised that the annual contribution of £2.5m from the Greater Norwich Infrastructure Investment Fund was crucial for the Programme and it was recognised that oversight of the programme could be improved, and it was, therefore, recommended that work continued to be undertaken with the Greater Norwich Project Team to develop the reporting of the Schools' Capital Programme. Members were also advised that there was no financial request from the Infrastructure Investment Fund in 2025/2026, instead Children's Services would work with the Greater Norwich Project Team to develop a major infrastructure bid towards a new high school in North-East Norwich.

Isabel Horner, the Sufficiency Delivery Manager, informed the Board that Norfolk County

Council's position on borrowing had changed, reflecting the national economic conditions, and this would have an impact on the capital delivery for schools and the programme timescales.

As a result of constraints on funding for capital the County Council had presented an annual Schools' Capital Programme, rather than the usual three-year cycle and henceforth, all schemes would be subject to greater scrutiny and prioritisation.

The County Council required the Capital Programme to be deliverable from its available funds and as the external grant for pupil growth had decreased this had created a greater challenge for the provision of new school places where there was housing development.

The report provided updates on the projects either being delivered or just completed with the support of the infrastructure fund and for this year this included the completion of a new primary school at Cringleford, the relocation and expansion of Blofield Primary School, and the expansion of Hethersett High Academy and Wymondham High Academy.

It was proposed to bring a case study report on Cringleford Primary to a future meeting of the Board, so that members could understand how the Infrastructure Investment Funding had been spent in more detail.

Short-term pipeline projects in the Capital Programme were a new school at Smeeth Lane, and new Primary Schools in Rackheath and Beeston. Medium term projects proposed new Primary Schools in Taverham and Hellesdon and as already mentioned a new high school in North-East Norwich located in Rackheath. It was estimated that the high school would cost between £50- £70m and it was recommended that a major infrastructure bid be brought to the Board at a later date.

Trevor Holden welcomed the report, which he noted was an improvement over previous reports, however, he suggested that it still needed to set out the level of basic need grants coming into the Programme, so the totality of what was being requested could be measured against available resources.

In response, the Board was informed that the annual allocation from Central Government had been erratic in terms of the timing and the amount of funding, which in recent years had been either a very small amount or nothing, due to the lower demographic growth in Greater Norwich in comparison to previous years. The County Council, therefore, did not have the level of detail available to make an accurate forecast of the allocation.

Trevor Holden reiterated the point that it would be useful for members to see the totality of that data in this report when seeking funding from the Board. He also noted that the Board had agreed two years ago that the Infrastructure Investment Funding allocation could be used to capitalise against borrowing if required and that this might be something that was also included in future reports.

James Walsh confirmed that he would take away these points and ensure their inclusion in subsequent reports. In respect of central Government funding, he advised members that a particular challenge was that the Norwich area had significant growth, but the demographic picture in Norfolk did not justify the overall level of spend from Whitehall, which created an urgent need to find different funding sources. Working with the Greater Norwich Growth Board in more detail would be a useful means of addressing these issues.

It was noted that the last high school built in the Greater Norwich area was in the 1970's.

The Chair also noted that the number of places at the Hewett School had dropped from 2,000 to 700 and she asked how this change in numbers was being managed.

In response, Isabel Horner informed the Board that the project was being led by the Department for Education with the Inspiration Trust, which ran the school as a Multi-Academy Trust. It was confirmed that the school had fallen in popularity as a result of the parental preference admissions process, whilst other surrounding schools had increased their admission numbers and new schools had opened in the area. However significant investment would be going into the Hewett School, and it was anticipated that admissions would increase going forward.

Sarah Ashurst suggested that it might be useful for the Board to have sight of any trends that were influencing the programming of schools going forward, so that they had the wider picture of the projects that there were going to fund.

It was,

RESOLVED

- i. To note the delivery update on the existing growth programme projects.
- ii. NCC Children's Services will continue to work with the Greater Norwich Project Team (GNPT) to develop the reporting of their capital programme.
- iii. There is no financial request from the Infrastructure Investment Fund (IIF) in 2025/2026, instead NCC Children's Services will work with the GNPT to develop a Major Infrastructure bid towards a new high school in North East Norwich. This will return to the GNGB for a decision at a later date.

7. GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY UPDATE

Wendy Brooks, the Head of Environment at Norfolk County Council presented the report which provided an update on work completed to date to progress delivery of the Greater Norwich Green Infrastructure Strategy and Delivery Plan (the Strategy).

The Board was advised that the Strategy was designed to protect, enhance and create green infrastructure for the growth areas in Greater Norwich by providing a network of linked multifunctional green spaces that would deliver health and well-being benefits, assist nature recovery and provide climate change resilience. The presentation on the Yare Valley Walk, received earlier in the meeting, was a good example of the type of project coming through as part of the Strategy

Members were reminded that CBA Consulting Limited were appointed to progress development of the Strategy with a remit to build on work already completed by Norfolk County Council's Natural Norfolk Team.

To date, CBA had delivered four of the seven milestones agreed within the Project Plan. These include an Evidence and Opportunities Supplementary Analysis Report, and two Stakeholder Engagement Workshop designed to engage with a broad range of key stakeholders at an early stage, to ensure that the outcomes of the Strategy fully reflect the current and future aspirations of Greater Norwich.

The Board was asked to note that because of the six-week pre-election period the original planned programme had to be extended, which meant that the final Strategy could not meet the deadline for reporting to the Board meeting on 28 November 2024, and instead would be tabled at the 11 March 2025 meeting.

Members were also asked to note the good progress being made with the revised programme.

It was,

RESOLVED

- i. To note progress of delivering the Green Infrastructure Strategy and Delivery plan and the proposed next steps.
- ii. To note that due to the 6 weeks pre-election period, the original planned programme had to be extended to accommodate the required rescheduling of the GI Strategy Stakeholder Workshop. The resultant impact of this meant that the final strategy could not meet the deadline for reporting to the GNGB meeting on 28 November 2024, instead the report will be tabled at the following meeting on 11 March 2025.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 28 November 2024 at 14:30 at The Horizon Centre.

The meeting closed at 3.03pm