



CONSTITUENCY MP REPORTING BACK

2024

GEORGE FREEMAN MP

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR MID NORFOLK



Hello

Being an active local MP involves working hard to address the key challenges facing Mid Norfolk and helping to find practical solutions to improve our community.

It also means being accountable to YOU—the people I'm honoured to represent and serve. As I've pledged on each of the five occasions I've now been elected, I am committed to doing my best to represent everyone in Mid Norfolk, regardless of whether or not you voted for me.

Wishing you and your loved ones a very Happy Christmas and New Year.



George



A STRONG VOICE FOR MID NORFOLK

As a committed constituency MP, I have always relished making a difference locally while representing our area in Westminster and previously in Government. Mid Norfolk faces many challenges, which is why I stepped down as a Minister this time last year to focus entirely on my campaigns on flooding, rural underfunding and better joined up support from children and adult social services for those with special needs. Making a difference here remains my top priority as your MP.

*Following the recent boundary changes at the last election, I no longer represent Wymondham but have gained several villages/hamlets in the new Mid Norfolk constituency, including **Banham, Barford, Broadflash, Dam Brigg, East Wretham, Eccles Road, Great Hockham, Hunt's Corner, Illington, Lower Stow Bedon, Merton, Mill Common, Newton, North End, Pockthorpe, Quidenham, Shropham, Snetterton, South End, Stonebridge, Stow Bedon, Thompson, Wilby, and Wramplingham**. I have been working closely with these new communities which were previously in South West Norfolk, listening to their concerns, and ensuring they have a strong voice in Parliament. What follows in this bulletin is a detailed update of what I have been doing over the last year.*



MP hits out at petrol car driving eco-activist

ELIZABETH STONEY
Norfolk Daily News

Environmental Dr Andrew Burrell was branded a 'hypocrite' by a senior Norfolk MP after he told this newspaper he drives a gas-guzzling petrol car. MP George Freeman launched the attack on Dr Burrell after the campaigner lost his latest challenge to stop the doubling of the A47. It can also be revealed that despite legal bills of £75,000 in his fight against the work, the former UKA activist has not put a penny of his own money towards the challenge. Instead, he has raised all the money from members of the public through crowdfunding. National Highways believe the delays caused by the legal bid - which was thrown out earlier this week at the Court of Appeal - have already cost the taxpayers tens of millions of pounds.

the Supreme Court. Dr Freeman said that he would be approaching the Secretary of State for Transport Mark Warburton, to urge that a long-delayed scheme get underway despite the threat of legal challenges.

Dr Burrell, a former Green Party and county councillor, told this newspaper that he drives a VW Golf, rather than an eco-friendly electric car.

He also confessed that he has spent any of his own money on the campaign against road schemes. "It was entirely funded by the generosity of thousands of people," he said.

The projects involve dual-lane roads over 1.6 miles of the A1047 between Diss and North Walsham, and the A1047 between Diss and North Walsham, including a section blocked by a bridge with 5.5 miles of road along with 5.5 miles of road between Diss and North Walsham.

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Following 'the Norfolk way' on new homes

In his latest column, Mid Norfolk MP George Freeman takes aim at 'aggressive developers exploiting the planning system'.

Building enough decent homes to meet the demand for new homes is a challenge that all of us face. In his latest column, Mid Norfolk MP George Freeman takes aim at 'aggressive developers exploiting the planning system'.



MP calls to end 'buck passing' as sewage comes pouring into bungalows

George Freeman has called for an end to 'buck passing' as sewage comes pouring into bungalows in the constituency.



campaign to stop a village's last pub from being turned into a care home

MP throws support behind campaign to save village's last pub being lost

campaign to stop a village's last pub from being turned into a care home

MP criticises lack of action to prevent flooding

An MP has accused environmental agencies of being more interested in leaving drainage ditches and waterways "full of mud and silt".

DAN GRIMMER
dan.grimmer@newsquest.co.uk

GETTING TO KNOW THE 17 NEW VILLAGES

If you live in one of the new villages that have joined the Mid Norfolk constituency following the recent boundary changes - I'm committed to ensuring that your voices are heard and your concerns acted upon. I've already started working closely with your local councillors to understand the specific issues and opportunities in your area. From addressing local challenges to unlocking new opportunities for growth, I'm here to advocate for what matters most to you.

If there's ever anything I can do to help—whether it's raising an issue in Parliament, supporting a local project, or assisting with individual concerns—please don't hesitate to get in touch. My door is always open, and I'm here to serve you.

Together, we can build on the strengths of our community and ensure a brighter future for everyone in the new villages and across the wider constituency.



DEREHAM AND SURROUNDING VILLAGES

SUPPORTING DEREHAM AID CENTRE

Following the Ukraine War - the people of Mid Norfolk pulled together from taking refugees into their homes or driving aid over to war torn regions of the Ukraine.

That is why I was delighted to hear the Dereham community had got together and opened the Ukraine Aid Centre in Wrights Walk to provide support and friendship to people who have settled in Norfolk.

The centre led by Ian Odgers now supports anyone in aid and it has become a real community hub in the heart of the town.

Rest assured I will continue to support the efforts made in the community however I can.

To find out more information about how you can help please visit: <https://aboutdereham.org/member/dereham-aid-centre/>



FIGHTING FOR A TOFTWOOD HEALTH HUB

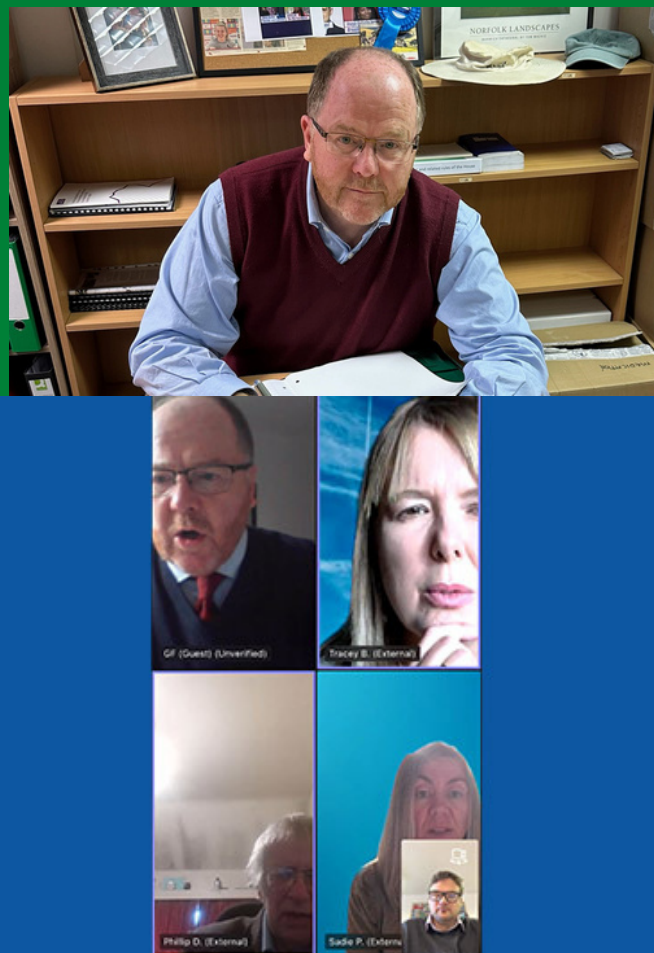
I am deeply disappointed that despite my best efforts - working with Cllr Alison Webb and Cllr Phillip Duigan - the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the landlord of Toftwood Surgery were unable to reach an agreement, resulting in the recommendation to close the surgery on 31 March 2025. This decision affects 4,000 patients, who will be redistributed between Theatre Royal Surgery and Orchard Surgery.

I chaired two meetings between the ICB and the landlord and held numerous discussions to try to broker a deal. Unfortunately, NHS surgeries rely on lease agreements between GP businesses, landlords, and the NHS, and a resolution was not possible.

I remain highly concerned about whether the alternative surgeries can handle the additional patient pressure, given current difficulties in accessing appointments. I have made it clear to the ICB that this cannot be a long-term solution for Dereham and Toftwood.

To address this, I am launching a campaign for a Community Health Hub in South Dereham and will explore potential sites in the coming weeks. With new housing developments expected, this must be treated as a priority.

Campaign page [here](#).



INSISTING ON A STRONGER VOICE FOR DEREHAM

To secure Dereham's future success, we must strengthen the local community and business voice, attract new investment, and create jobs and opportunities.

By building on Dereham's heritage and culture, and working together, we can unlock the town's full potential and ensure long-term prosperity.

- I set up the Dereham Action Partnership - bringing together public, private, and voluntary sector leaders.
- The group is working on key initiatives, including Breckland Council's Dereham Town Delivery Plan.

We need more local leaders and businesses to join us! If you love Dereham and want to contribute, please contact me to get involved.



PROTECTING OUR HIGH STREETS

Breckland Council currently spends £450,000 a year maintaining free car parks, a cost that is no longer sustainable without cuts to vital services. With inflation and rising costs, change is unavoidable.

Market towns like Dereham, Watton, and Attleborough rely on passing trade and local shoppers. Poorly implemented parking charges risk harming small businesses and slowing economic recovery.

If charges are introduced, they must:

- Include free parking, such as the first hour free, to protect trade.
- Be introduced sensitively, with affordable rates and minimal disruption.
- Offer loyalty schemes, like a Breckland Loyalty Card for regular shoppers.
- Pair with town centre regeneration to keep high streets vibrant.

Initial plans suggest one-hour free parking and affordable rates (50-80p per hour or £3 daily), which is a positive step. Breckland Council has supported our towns well with free parking and community projects. This transition must protect businesses and ensure high streets thrive.



CELEBRATING DEREHAM DAY

Dereham Day is one of our town's standout events, showcasing everything the town and surrounding area has to offer. As MP for Dereham and the surrounding villages, I'm proud to represent such a vibrant community. The event brings people together for a fun, free day out for all ages.

A huge thank you to Tim Cara (Friends of Dereham Memorial Hall) and everyone involved in organising this fantastic day. It was an honour to open the event, with highlights including:

- Bagpipes played by Bill Millin's grandson, Jacob
- Beverley Cooper, veteran campaigner and local historian
- Audrey Foster, WWII Auxiliary Territorial Volunteer

Save the date for next year's event: Saturday, 10th May 2025, at Dereham Neatherd High School.



CAMPAIGNING TO SAVE OUR POST OFFICES

I am taking action to stop the proposed closure of Dereham Post Office and others across Mid Norfolk. This essential service supports a growing town, new housing developments, and a large retired population. Its closure would disproportionately affect the elderly and vulnerable, making this an unacceptable and illogical decision.

The Post Office is more than a convenience; it's a cornerstone of our community. Losing it would disrupt essential services and highlight ongoing failures in Post Office leadership, following years of mismanagement and scandals like Horizon.

I am actively campaigning to protect Mid Norfolk's Post Offices, as I have done since first being elected as your MP. I've written to the Post Office requesting an urgent meeting to challenge this proposal and will keep you updated with developments.

How You Can Help: Sign the petition: **Save Dereham's Post Office** and visit the campaign page:
<https://www.georgefreeman.co.uk/save-derehams-post-office>



WATTON AND WAYLAND

SECURING A NEW BANKING HUB

Access to cash and banking services remains vital for many in Mid Norfolk, especially the elderly, vulnerable, and small businesses.

I'm proud to have helped secure the funding from the last Government for the new Banking Hub on the High Street. It is now open at 56 High Street, Watton, IP25 6AF. This is a huge win for the town, making banking more accessible after several branch closures in recent years.

- Post Office Counter Service: Open Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm, offering regular cash transactions for major bank customers.
- Community Banker Service: On-site bankers from major banks are available on specific days to help with more complex issues:
 - Monday: Halifax
 - Tuesday: NatWest
 - Wednesday: HSBC
 - Thursday: Lloyds
 - Friday: Barclays

This Hub is a testament to the collaborative efforts of LINK, Cash Access UK, local councillors, and Breckland Council. It's a vital resource for the Watton community and will make a real difference for those in need of accessible banking.



PROTECTING FREE PARKING FOR WATTON

Following Breckland Council's consultation on car parking charges, Watton Town Council have requested that they take over the running of the car parks in order to keep them free at the point of use in the town.

As MP, I have held meetings over the last few months to support those efforts to lease the car parks from Breckland. If this isn't possible, there must be a tailored scheme for Watton and Wayland to support town centre regeneration.

I'm working closely with the Town Council and Breckland to find a solution—watch this space for updates.

ATTLEBOROUGH

TACKLING FLOODING

Last winter, flooding caused significant disruption to Attleborough and elsewhere. After convening the Mid Norfolk Flood Partnership, and working with Norfolk County Council and Cllr Taila Taylor to set up the Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance (NSFA) - I am pleased all the agencies continue to work together - Attleborough Town Council, Breckland Council, Norfolk County Council, and Anglian Water addressing the ongoing issues. Collaboration across agencies is crucial to prevent it from happening again.

Working together we have now cleared both culverts, and have had the long awaited new trash screen installed on Mill Lane.

Meetings with riparian owners have also been held, where positive discussions have taken place about setting up a residents' association to fund future maintenance now that the culverts have been restored.

I'm continuing work on my Flooding Bill, which proposes changes to planning and flooding liabilities, holding developers, water companies, and others accountable.

The Flooding Prevention Summit will now take place on 31 January 2025. This will provide an opportunity for MPs and the NSFA to hold flooding authorities to account and ensure better coordination in supporting communities affected by flooding.

Updates [here](#).



CHAMPIONING LOCAL BUSINESSES

Having run my own business before entering Parliament I try every week to visit, support and promote small local businesses. They are the lifeblood of our local economy and community.

Recently, I had the pleasure of visiting We Three Bears in Attleborough, a fantastic new shop on 10 Church Street. They specialise in personalised gifts and clothing for babies, children, and adults.

If you're in town, I highly recommend paying them a visit—perfect for quality items and gifts.

Best of luck to Jessica and Paul with their new business. To explore their products and place an order, visit their website here: [We Three Bears](#)



HELPING KEEP HINGHAM A BEAUTIFUL, THRIVING LOCAL MARKET TOWN



The three key issues that are being raised with me in the smallest of the four towns I represent are:

Traffic Concerns: The growing volume and speed of traffic in the area is becoming a major concern for residents and visitors alike. I'm engaging with local authorities to explore possible solutions to improve road safety and ease congestion.

Car Parking: The lack of sufficient car parking is deterring visitors and shoppers from coming into town. We need to find ways to increase parking availability to support local businesses and encourage foot traffic.

Impact of Budget Changes: Small businesses are feeling the pinch from rising National Insurance contributions and wage tax increases. I'm raising these concerns with the Government, advocating for policies that support our local employers and protect jobs in Hingham.

I'm committed to addressing these challenges and ensuring Hingham continues to thrive.



SUPPORTING GRASSROOT SPORT

Millions across the country play, watch, and enjoy sport every day. As your MP, I've always supported the fantastic community sports clubs and facilities in Mid Norfolk, run by generous local people who make our area great.

I'm delighted to have secured that Mid Norfolk has received £35,037 so far as part of the Government's Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme.

Local assets like these are vital to our communities, and I will continue working to ensure they are maintained for future generations to enjoy.

To read about where else in the constituency monies were received, please visit:

<https://www.georgefreeman.co.uk/news/grassroots-sports-investment-mid-norfolk>



[illegible]

I'm privileged to represent 130 villages, each with its own unique character and challenges. Here's a brief look at some of what I've been doing to ensure every village is heard and supported.

I've been working closely with parish councils and local councillors to address key issues, from improving broadband access in rural areas to tackling road maintenance concerns. My office in Dereham is now fully operational, ensuring I can stay connected with constituents across all the villages I represent.

Community engagement remains at the heart of my work. I've hosted regular outreach events like Supermarket Surgeries and Politics in the Pub sessions, giving residents a chance to share their views directly with me. I'm also championing local projects, supporting village halls, community groups, and initiatives that bring people together.

If there's an issue in your village that needs attention, I'm here to help. Whether it's by raising matters in Parliament, working with local authorities, or simply offering support and advice, I'm committed to being an active and accessible advocate for every one of our 130 villages. What follows is a snapchat of what I've been up to. To see more please visit my website [here](#).

PROTECTING GRISTON & RURAL COMMUNITIES FROM INAPPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT

We all value vibrant local businesses that provide employment and strengthen our communities. However, this must not come at the expense of Mid Norfolk's rural quality of life, road safety, or local services.

I take seriously the concerns of residents in Griston and surrounding villages about proposals to transform a light industrial unit into a much heavier industrial site—just meters from homes. Following my site visit to meet parish councillors and residents, I formally submitted objections to Breckland Council. I've also written to the Secretary of State, urging stronger protections for rural villages and ensuring national planning policy prevents unsuitable heavy industry in our communities.

In light of an appeal, an in-person planning inquiry will take place early in the New Year. I'll continue working with councillors and residents to ensure these concerns are heard and to protect our rural landscape and heritage.

To keep up to date with the campaign see [here](#).



TACKLING LOCAL FLOODING IN OLD BUCKENHAM AND BANHAM

Flooding in Norfolk has worsened due to climate change, inadequate drainage in new housing developments, poor maintenance of rivers and ditches, and unclear legal responsibilities. No one should live in fear of flooding every time it rains.

That's why I joined Cllr Stephen Askew in Old Buckenham to convene a meeting with Anglian Water, parish council representatives, and residents from Old Buckenham and Banham. Both communities have faced significant flooding issues, which have worsened since Christmas 2020.

The meeting allowed us to share local knowledge and secure Anglian Water's commitment to help create a Multi-Agency Group to find long-term solutions. Together with Stephen, I'm now working to ensure this happens.



I remain committed to supporting these communities and my wider Mid Norfolk Flooding Campaign, including the Flooding Bill I'm bringing to Parliament and the Norfolk Flood Prevention Summit being developed with Norfolk County Council.

SUPPORTING SNETTERTON BUSINESS PARK



Snetterton Business Park is strategically located with excellent access to major transport routes, making it a thriving hub for businesses seeking prime commercial space. With its modern infrastructure, high-tech facilities, and dynamic business community, it's an ideal environment for innovation and growth.

I was delighted to meet with the park's CFO to discuss their exciting future plans and explore how we can collaborate to drive economic development in the region. Key areas of focus included:

- Norfolk-Cambridge A11 Tech Corridor: Maximizing opportunities for businesses along this key route.
- Business Forum: Building stronger networks and support systems for local enterprises.
- Norfolk Way Enterprise Festival & Awards: Celebrating and promoting Norfolk's entrepreneurial talent.



I also visited Equipmake, a world-class engineering company at Snetterton developing electric vehicle powertrain systems. Founded in 1997 by Ian Foley, an engineer with global motorsport experience from Le Mans to F1, Equipmake provides electric solutions for automotive, aerospace, marine, construction, and bus markets. Snetterton is now part of my constituency due to boundary changes, and I look forward to supporting its continued growth and innovation.

BACKING BANHAM ZOO

Banham Zoo, located near the market town of Attleborough, is one of the country's most exciting wildlife attractions. With over 2,000 animals set in 50 acres of beautiful parkland and gardens, it's an award-winning family destination and a true gem in Mid Norfolk.

I'm delighted to support Banham Zoo, part of the Zoological Society of East Anglia, as it competes for the prestigious BIAZA Great British Wildlife Restoration Award. Their incredible 'Pool Frog Pods' project, focused on native species conservation, has been shortlisted for this national honour, which will be presented by Mr Speaker at a parliamentary reception in January 2025.

This recognition highlights the vital conservation work carried out by smaller zoos like Banham, often with limited resources but boundless dedication. I encourage my colleagues in Parliament to vote for this inspiring project and am proud to champion Banham Zoo's efforts to protect our precious wildlife.



SECURING FUNDING FOR AN EXPANDED MATTISHALL HEALTH SURGERY



The rapid growth of housing developments in Mid Norfolk has placed significant pressure on local GP surgeries and health infrastructure. Unlike education, the NHS is not a statutory consultee on new housing developments, meaning health services are often left scrambling to keep up with demand.

To address this, I've been working closely with GPs across the constituency to highlight the urgent need for better integration of health and social care within planning processes. This year I met again with the Practice Leadership at Mattishall Surgery and Pharmacy to discuss their plans for an expansion that reflects the scale of new housing locally and enables their team to deliver top-level care more efficiently.

I've written to ministers in Westminster to press this issue and will continue speaking up for our local GPs. Supporting Mattishall Surgery on this vital project remains a priority, with follow-up actions already underway.

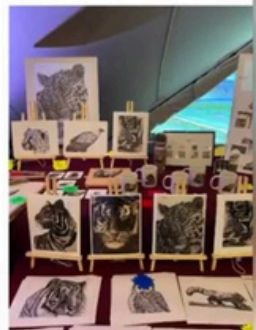
SUPPORTING OUR LOCAL SMALL BUSINESSES

Many rural areas in Norfolk face challenges with economic opportunities and business support due to their remote nature, limited infrastructure, and disproportionate impact from national issues like rising costs and regulatory burdens. This makes it harder for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to thrive, which are the backbone of our local economy.

As someone with 15 years of experience running my own small business, I recognise the untapped potential of Norfolk's rural economy in rebalancing the UK economy and revitalising our towns and villages. That's why I have consistently prioritised support for local businesses through initiatives like my Business Spotlight campaign and Small Business Saturday promotions. I also engage with local councils, including Breckland, South Norfolk, and Norfolk County Council, to coordinate support for SMEs.

Additionally, I've championed projects such as opening the Norfolk Christmas Enterprise Festival at Banham Zoo on Small Business Saturday, showcasing our region's entrepreneurial talent and driving economic growth. Visit [here](#) for more on my efforts.

SMALL BUSINESS
SATURDAY
7TH DECEMBER



WELCOMING MID NORFOLK COLLEGE STUDENTS TO PARLIAMENT

I am passionate about supporting and inspiring young people in our constituency. Engaging with the next generation is vital for building a stronger future, and I believe in encouraging their curiosity and interest in the issues shaping our society.

Recently, I was delighted to welcome Hallie Taylor, a third-year journalism student at UEA, to Parliament, where she interviewed me on the important issue of Assisted Dying. It's always a pleasure to see young people taking an active role in important debates. If you or your school would like to arrange a trip to Parliament, I'd be happy to help make that happen. I'll always do my best to meet with groups during their visit where my diary allows.

Encouraging young people to engage with politics and public life is something I'm deeply committed to.

Please email me at
george.freeman.mp@parliament.uk.



2024 General Election

I am truly honoured to have been re-elected as the Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk for the fifth time. The recent election was a humble reminder of what public service is all about: listening, learning, and standing up for the issues that matter most to the people I am privileged to represent.

Over the course of six weeks, I knocked on more than 29,000 doors with my small dedicated team. We braved all weathers and traversed every corner of this wonderful constituency. What struck me most during these conversations was how deeply disillusioned many of you are with national politics. I heard your frustrations loud and clear, and I remain steadfast in my commitment to restoring trust and delivering for you here locally in Mid Norfolk and as your representative in Parliament.

My campaign and election address focused on key local issues that affect us here in Mid Norfolk. I promised to fight for:

- Flood prevention
- Fair rural funding
- Better healthcare with improved GP access and mental health support.
- Stronger public services for our growing communities.

As your MP, I've already been working on these priorities (and many more), and I will continue to press for real progress over the course of this Parliament. You can read about this over the next few pages of this bulletin.

I want to thank you again for placing your trust in me. Being your MP is a responsibility I take very seriously, and I promise to remain accessible, responsive, and committed to delivering for Mid Norfolk. Over the next five years, I will continue to be a strong and vocal advocate for our communities—listening to you, championing your concerns, and working to make Mid Norfolk an even better place to live, work, and thrive.



MY KEY CAMPAIGNS

CHANGING THE LAW ON FLOODING

As your local MP, I have raised the growing issue of flooding in inland Norfolk, which is being exacerbated by climate change, aging infrastructure, and the fragmentation of responsibility for water management. I am pushing for Government support for the measures outlined in my Private Member's Bill, which includes clauses on clearly defining responsibilities, securing funding, addressing liabilities, and improving monitoring to better manage this pressing issue.

No one should live in fear of flooding every time it rains.

That's why:

- I am bringing a Flooding Bill to Parliament to change the laws on planning and flooding liabilities to ensure developers, water companies and other key stakeholders cannot shirk their responsibilities.
- I'm working closely with Norfolk County Council and their Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance to establish an annual Norfolk (Inland) Flooding Prevention Summit – at which the NSFA, with local MPs, will be able to hold the c.35 statutory flooding authorities more firmly to account and better co-ordinate the support that dozens of communities require across the county. The first summit will take place in the New Year.
- I continue to actively work through the Mid Norfolk Flood Partnership to support the dozens of households and businesses that have been affected by flooding over recent months and years.

To watch my recent speech in the House please see the video. To keep up to date with my campaign please visit: <https://www.georgefreeman.co.uk/flooding>



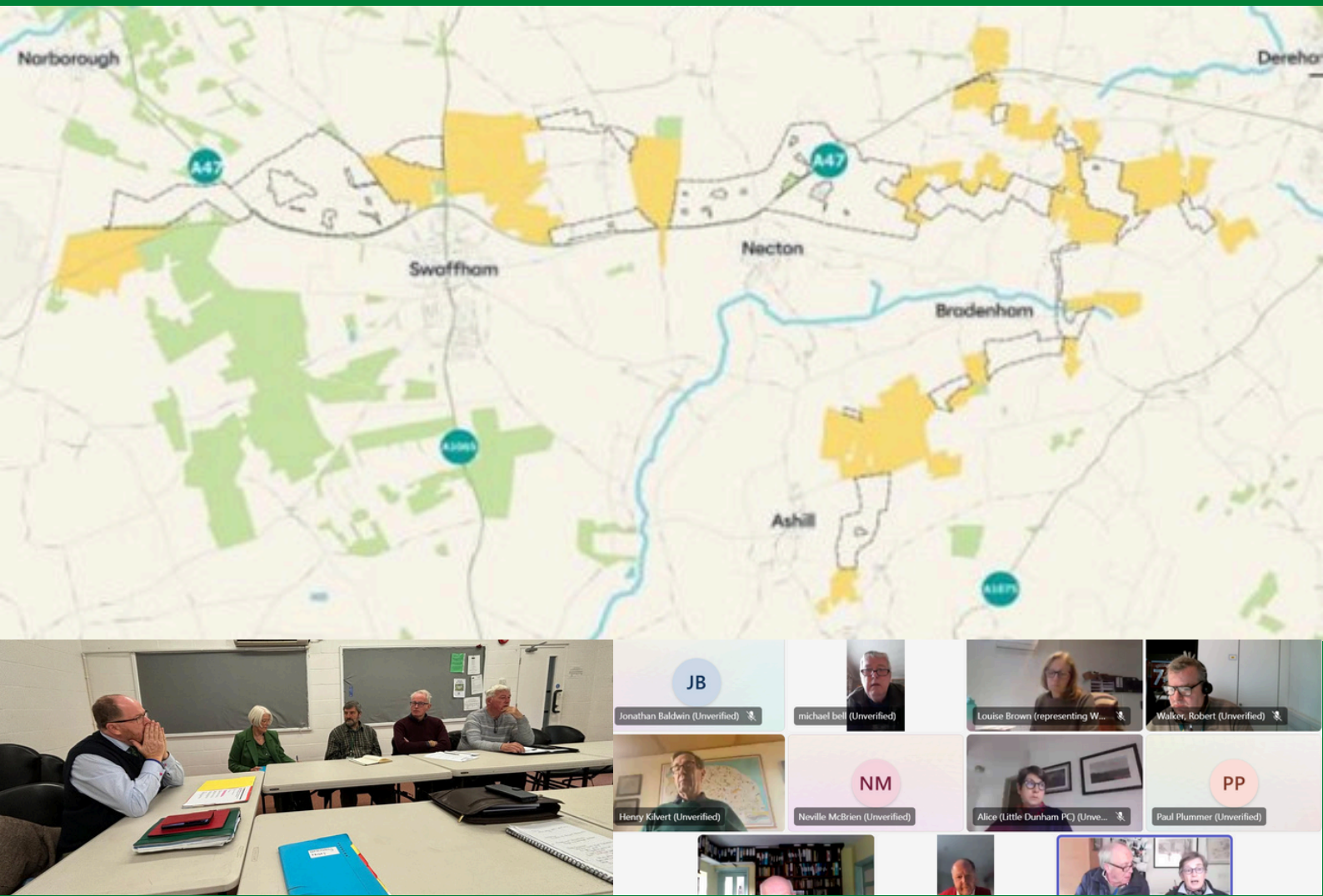
PROTECTING OUR COUNTRYSIDE - SOLAR FARMS

A new proposal by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) seeks to designate the Swaffham-Dereham-Norwich corridor as an energy infrastructure corridor, raising significant concerns about the lack of local consultation. This plan risks bypassing local planning systems, effectively excluding the input of the affected communities. The proposed massive pylon and cabling infrastructure threatens to impose considerable environmental, agricultural, and economic costs on Norfolk, particularly impacting two of the county's most vital industries: tourism and farming.

Tourism, the largest industry in Mid Norfolk, faces potential damage from this scale of industrial development, while the conversion of productive agricultural land into solar farms undermines the region's farming sector and food security. Norfolk is being asked to shoulder a disproportionate burden of the green energy transition, exacerbated by a flawed national grid system that incentivises overdevelopment. Promised offshore wind interconnectors, a more sustainable solution, are being overlooked in favour of disruptive projects.

To tackle these issues, I've met with the developers to voice concerns and set up the Mid Norfolk Solar Farm Action Group, which includes all parish councils in the affected area. We've also formed a technical subcommittee of experts to analyse the proposals and report back in the new year. Alongside these efforts, I will continue meeting with Ministers, raising the issue in Parliament, and working with local councils and residents. My commitment remains to push for a locally-driven Green Growth Transition Plan for Norfolk that achieves renewable energy goals without sacrificing our communities, environment, or rural livelihoods.

To keep up to date with the campaign visit here: <https://www.georgefreeman.co.uk/solar-farm>



FIGHTING FOR FAIRER FUNDING

Rural areas, already facing high energy and fuel costs, have been disproportionately impacted by the energy price surge caused by Russia's illegal war in Ukraine. This has put immense pressure on rural households, businesses, and public services.

- **Rural Homes:** Many are off the gas grid, relying on expensive fuel deliveries.
- **Transport:** Rural areas have limited public transport, increasing reliance on cars and higher fuel costs.
- **Lower Wages:** The average wage in rural areas is 7.5% lower than urban areas, making rural households more vulnerable to rising fuel prices.

This combination of factors has created a "triple whammy" that is devastating rural communities, with energy costs rising far more in rural areas than in urban ones.

I wrote to the Chancellor, along with other rural MPs, urging additional targeted assistance for rural communities. This includes calls for:

- Lowering electricity prices for households not on mains gas.
- Supporting insulation improvements for off-grid homes.

Without this support, we risk a wave of bankruptcies, repossessions, and further strain on vital rural services.

I will continue to fight for targeted relief to protect our rural economy and communities. Stay updated on the campaign at [my website](https://www.georgefreeman.co.uk).



George Freeman MP
Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk

Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road

Dear Chancellor,

Rural Poverty - Fair Funding for disproportionate energy costs in Rural communities

We are writing in advance of the forthcoming Budget to ask you to consider measures to help tackle the crippling impact of disproportionately high energy costs on rural communities.

We are conscious that you will have had many representations about the Winter Fuel allowance. This is not specifically about that but the underlying causes of the disproportionate impact of energy costs in rural areas - which has hit the most rural communities and councils very hard in the last few years as energy costs have surged, and risks entrenching both rural fuel poverty and an effective cuts to all rural public services, as well as a hammer blow to already fragile post-pandemic rural town centres, pubs & SMEs.

Rural areas have always suffered from disproportionately high energy and fuel costs - BUT the sudden energy price inflation caused by Russia's illegal war in Ukraine - and the inevitable rise in energy costs through the energy transition to Net Zero - has led to a massive increase in energy costs in the last two years which have disproportionately hit rural households, businesses, and public services very hard.

The disproportionate exposure of rural areas to high fuel costs is due to a number of key factors which are well chronicled and understood by HMG:

- Rural homes are **more exposed to cold weather & less energy efficient**. Many rural properties are **off the gas grid** and rely on buying one-off tanks of heating fuel.
- The rurality and scarcity of public transport in rural areas increases **rural dependence on cars** for transport, and therefore higher exposure to fuel costs for all activities in rural areas.
- The **average wage in rural areas is 7.5% lower** than in urban areas - leaving households even more vulnerable to rising fuel costs. In many areas like Mid Norfolk that figure is even lower with pensioners on fixed incomes (with interest rates very low for the past decade) and low-income workers in the public sector and food processing industry now spending a huge % of their income on fuel costs.

What this "triple whammy" means in practice is that the unprecedented surge in energy costs in the last 2 years has caused a cripplingly disproportionate spike in the rural cost of living which is hitting:

- **Rural Public Services** - Every unit of public service delivery (whether an ambulance trip or a school bus place or an NHS Community nurse visit) is costing more. Without relief that's a rural public service tax.
- **Rural Businesses** - Every business in rural areas is paying more compared to its urban competitors. Pubs, Cafes, Shops. All are being hit. And with the VAT threshold at £85k it's driving many small businesses - the backbone of our local rural economy - out of business. All of which will undermine the post-Ukraine post-Pandemic economic recovery.
- **Rural Households** - Every household in rural areas is paying this extra - effectively a "rural energy tax" surcharge compared to urban equivalents. This is tipping an increasing number of rural households in low-income areas into fuel poverty, increased benefits and for many a crisis of affordability and homelessness - putting further additional pressure on already stretched local councils.

The full extent of the disparity between urban and rural areas is verified by recent Government data which shows that the reduction in fuel bills needed to take rural households out of fuel poverty is **£677, c2.5x**



George Freeman MP
Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk

more than compared to urban households, (which is **£265**). So, on the Governments own figures the differential impact of fuel costs on low income households in rural areas is **c.2.5x or 150% higher**.

This is effectively a **'Rural Energy Tax'** - which has been exacerbated by the Ukraine war energy cost spike, crippling the rural economy, rural communities, and public services in all the most rural areas. And

Across rural constituencies we are seeing the effects as rural high streets, pubs and businesses face energy cost inflation and commensurate economic hardship which is crippling the rural economy in many of the most rural areas where tourism, commuting and holiday homes are not prevalent.

As you know, Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) the national charity representing and supporting rural communities, who are supporting the Fair Funding Campaign, are calling for continued assistance from the public purse to support rural communities by:

- **Targeting** support for local households that are not on mains gas by bringing the price of electricity per kWh down to the same as that for mains gas.
- **Supporting** households that are not on mains gas to improve the insulation of their property and prioritise these properties.

We are writing to you as MPs with rural communities across the country to ask to meet and that you consider providing additional targeted one-off assistance for those being hit by this in rural communities as you finalise your Budget proposals.

Without some targeted relief, we fear we will see a continuing run of rural bankruptcies, home repossessions, rising benefit claims for low income households, as well as continued pressure on rural schools, GPs, pharmacies, care homes and all other services which are required to operate in the higher cost rural areas and have no way of avoiding cutting local outreach to be able to pay this rural energy tax.

Without some one-off help we fear serious long term economic scarring of the private and public sector in rural communities which will cost far more in long term damage than short term relief now.

As you consider the forthcoming Budget, we ask as rural colleagues that you take all possible steps to help with the devastating impact of the energy crisis in the last two years with a **Fair Fuel Premium Tax Cut** targeted at those in rural postcodes. A tax cut focused on SMEs & households in rural postcodes would be a powerful signal of the commitment to the wider rural economy in line with the PM's welcome recent commitments to rural areas.

We would welcome a meeting with you so that we can make representations to you and look forward to hearing from you at the earliest opportunity.

Yours,

George Freeman MP
The Rt Hon Sir Edward Leigh MP
The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Cox KC MP
Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP
Sir Bernard Jenkin MP
Patrick Spencer MP
Jerome Mayhew MP
Alberto Costa MP
Dr Caroline Johnson MP
Aphra Brandreth MP
James Cartledge MP
John Cooper MP

Cc.
ACRE
CPRE
Countryside Alliance
Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Citizens Advice Bureau
Rural Councils Network

STANDING UP FOR OUR FARMERS

The Government's recent policy targets family farms in Mid Norfolk and across the country, putting them at risk of crippling tax bills. This move is not in the Labour manifesto and has not been thoroughly explained. It threatens small family businesses and the rural economy.

The policy was designed by the Treasury, not DEFRA, and was aimed at closing loopholes for land speculators and hedge funds. However, it unintentionally harms small family farms, which are already operating in a challenging environment with fixed costs and unpredictable weather. The policy risks pushing family farmers out of business and selling their land to large developers.

What I'm Doing:

I am working closely with fellow MPs to call on the Treasury to u-turn this policy and ensure it supports small family farms rather than undermining them. I am committed to protecting our rural economy and standing up for family farmers in Mid Norfolk.

Over the last few weeks I have met with many farmers across Mid Norfolk in Westminster and the Constituency. To watch my recent speech please see below and to keep up to date with the campaign please see here: <https://www.georgefreeman.co.uk/family-farm-tax>



Farming and Inheritance Tax, 4 Dec 2024



George Freeman MP

Farming and Inheritance Tax

Watch on YouTube



SUPPORTING OUR PENSIONERS

Mid Norfolk, a predominantly rural constituency, is seeing a growing divide in energy costs, with rural residents facing a significant surcharge due to colder weather, reliance on expensive heating fuels, and limited access to mains gas. These challenges are worsened by the area's lower average incomes and a significant elderly population who are particularly vulnerable. As energy costs continue to rise, rural households are facing the harsh reality of fuel poverty.

According to Treasury figures, rural households are 2.5 times more likely to fall into poverty due to higher energy costs. Despite these risks, Labour's recent policies threaten to add to the financial burden on rural families, particularly pensioners and low-income households, by disregarding the unique challenges faced by these communities.

I've joined forces with other MPs to establish a Fair Funding Alliance, supported by Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) and the Countryside Alliance, to ensure rural communities receive fair treatment in the face of rising energy costs. I am pressing the Government to reconsider these policies and introduce targeted support for vulnerable rural households, to prevent further hardship and ensure a fairer distribution of resources.

Thank you to everyone who wrote to me on this matter. I know that you will not forget this betrayal by the Government. It's unfair, unjust, unprecedented and I urge ministers to think again in the next budget on this issue.

To watch and read my speech click [here](#)



SUCCESSFULLY SECURING FUNDING FOR NHS DENTISTS

Access to NHS dental services has been a growing issue, with many in our community unable to secure appointments and forced to seek expensive private dental care for serious complications. This leaves patients facing massive one-off bills, which can be financially crippling.

Despite efforts to improve the system, long waiting times and a shortage of NHS dentists have left many people with no choice but to go private, leading to significant financial strain. The introduction of the new Dental Recovery Plan and the UEA Norfolk Dental School is a step in the right direction, but more must be done to address the immediate challenges facing patients.

Having worked tirelessly to secure the £200m Dental Recovery Plan and the UEA Norfolk Dental School, I'm pleased that the new Minister, Stephen Kinnock, has shown support for the bid. I raised the issue of fair pricing with him, emphasizing the need for fair payment plans for those who cannot avoid private treatment. I will be continuing to push the new Minister to advocate for the introduction of fair payment options, ensuring that no one is left financially burdened by necessary dental care.

To watch me asking questions on this in the House, please see below and to keep up to date with the campaign please see here: <https://www.georgefreeman.co.uk/nhs-dentists>



FIGHTING FOR INTEGRATED HEALTH CARE

For too long, our area has suffered from fragmented planning across various councils and organisations, particularly in health and care services. NHS England focuses on healthcare, County Councils on social care, and District Councils on housing, resulting in disconnected services that fail to meet the needs of our growing population. With an aging population and increasing housing development, we need a more integrated approach to planning and delivering services.

Our public services are being planned and delivered in silos, without sufficient coordination between NHS services, social care, and housing development. This lack of integration makes it harder to meet the growing demand for healthcare, especially in communities with large elderly populations. If healthcare can be provided more locally, we can reduce pressure on expensive hospitals and improve care.

I'm advocating for three key changes to address these challenges:

1. Greater integration of NHS and social care services.
2. Better coordination between local councils' housing and care planning.
3. Increased efficiency in back-office functions to protect frontline services.

I believe that by putting NHS and care professionals at the heart of this planning, we can build a more effective, cost-efficient, and patient-centered system.

To keep up to date with the campaign please see [here](#):



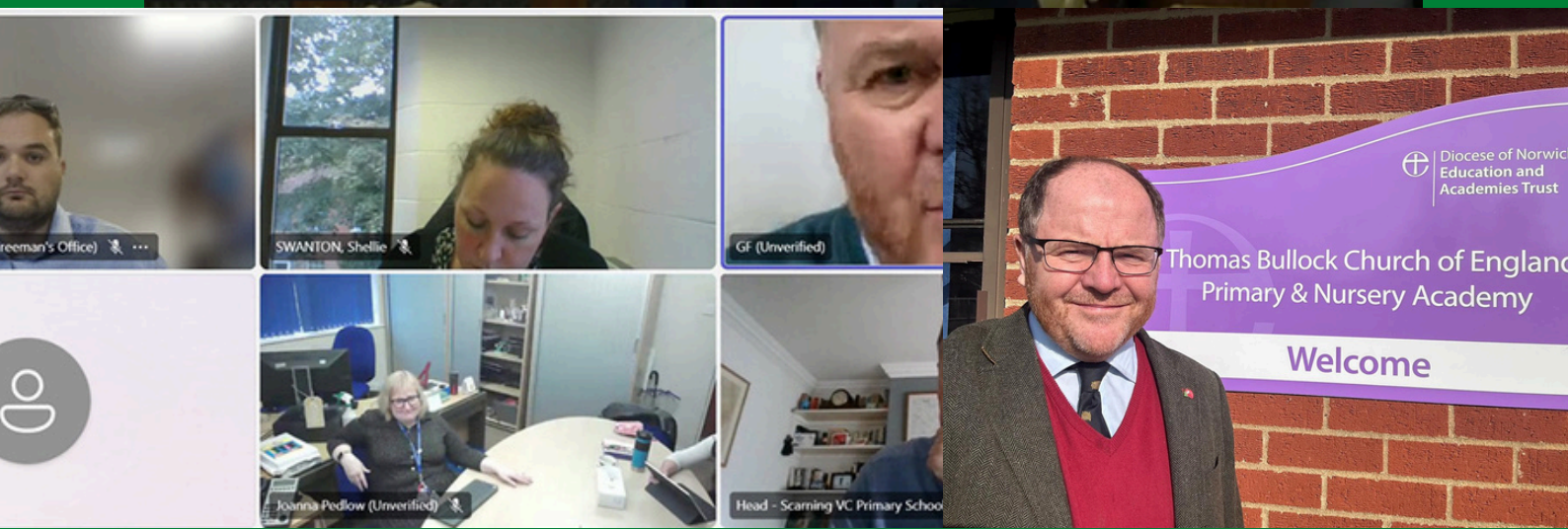
HIGHLIGHTING THE NEED FOR MORE SEND+ INVESTMENT

The surge in demand for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision has overwhelmed schools in Mid Norfolk. Many parents struggle with the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process, leaving children without the support they desperately need. Rural areas, in particular, face significant underfunding, with smaller schools hit hard by rising costs and lacking the resources to meet growing demand.

How we support our most vulnerable children reflects the health of our society. The rise in SEND cases—driven by better diagnosis, post-pandemic pressures, and reduced early-years support—has left families battling a system ill-equipped to cope. Despite increased SEND funding, half a million children still lack proper support, disproportionately affecting rural areas.

I've highlighted this issue in Parliament, championed funding for Chapel Green and Fred Nicholson schools, and urged Ministers to review the national funding formula to address rural under-provision and prioritise SEND support. I also regularly meet with Headteachers so that I can hear first hand the issues on the ground - which I can then use to feed back to the Government.

To see me speaking in Parliament on this important matter (please see below) and to keep up to date with the campaign please visit [here](#).



WORKING WITH OUR LOCAL DISTRICT AND COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Here in Mid Norfolk, we are fortunate to have an incredible team of County, District, Town, and Parish councillors who are deeply committed to their communities. Their dedication and tireless work to improve local areas make a huge difference to residents' daily lives.

I greatly value the regular conversations I have with councillors and the opportunity to work alongside them on a wide range of campaigns, projects, and casework. Whether it's addressing local concerns, tackling community challenges, or driving forward important initiatives, their insights and partnership are invaluable.

Together, we've organised Community and Supermarket Surgeries across our market towns, visited local businesses, walked high streets to meet residents, and supported numerous grassroots projects. Their proactive approach plays a vital role in delivering meaningful change for Mid Norfolk.

To find out more about my work with our dedicated councillor teams and the campaigns we're supporting, please [click here](#).



HOME IN MID NORFOLK

Although my role as an MP means spending Monday to Thursday afternoon in Westminster, returning home to the constituency from Thursday night to Monday is a vital part of being a local representative.

It's not just about conducting my Constituency Friday visits and Supermarket Surgeries but also being part of the community, sharing in its joys and challenges—from potholes to floods, power cuts, and gale-force winds that are part of rural life.

Weekends here at home in Norfolk with my wife Fiona and our fox red lab, Jassy, are always the highlight of my week, whether in the depths of midwinter or the heights of midsummer.

We are incredibly fortunate to live in this special place called Norfolk, and it's up to all of us to ensure it remains so for generations to come.



A NEW ROLE IN PARLIAMENT - OUT OF GOVERNMENT - WORKING CROSS PARTY

As an MP and, until recently, in my former role as Minister for Science, Innovation and Technology, I work hard each week in Westminster on the issues of most importance to us here in Mid Norfolk.

Following the election I am now for the first time in opposition. I was honoured to be elected as Deputy Chair of the Science Innovation & Technology Select Committee and am the Chair of the All Party Science in Parliament Committee set up by Clement Attlee and Winston Churchill.



Amongst my work this year, I have led campaigns on:

- ✓ **SEND Support & Funding:** Advocating for fairer SEND funding in Mid Norfolk, focusing on the rural impacts and securing vital resources for local schools
- ✓ **Local Banking Services:** Continued support for community banking hubs (like in Watton), addressing the needs of rural communities with improved banking services
- ✓ **More Health Care provision** - continuing to make the case that with a growing population we need more GP surgeries not less. E.g. Toftwood I shall be pushing for a new 'Community Health Hub'
- ✓ **Rural Road Infrastructure:** Advocating for better infrastructure, particularly in upgrading roads like the A47 to improve connectivity for rural areas
- ✓ **Fairer Rural Funding:** Led campaigns for fairer funding formulas to address the challenges faced by rural schools and communities, ensuring equitable support
- ✓ **Support for Local Businesses:** Focus on backing local businesses, from rural retail to agriculture - fighting the 'Family Farm Tax' and the National Insurance rises
- ✓ **Flooding and Rural Resilience:** Continuing my work with the Mid Norfolk Flood Partnership, working on tackling local flooding and improving rural resilience through my upcoming Flooding Bill
- ✓ **Solar Farm Developments:** Leading the Mid Norfolk Solar Farm Action Group - highlighting our concerns over planning and development in rural areas.
- ✓ **Campaigns for Post Offices:** Ongoing support for local post offices, including efforts to protect and enhance services in rural locations
- ✓ **Public Services Campaigns:** Advocating for better public services, including mental health support, social care, and rural infrastructure to ensure that rural communities have access to essential services

These represent just some of what I have done over the course of the last year to improve the quality of life in Mid Norfolk and ensure that the region receives fair treatment in terms of resources and services. For more details on specific initiatives, you can visit the full website here.

THIS YEAR'S MID NORFOLK PRIMARY SCHOOL'S CHRISTMAS CARD COMPETITION WINNERS

Each year I invite all of the primary school children in Mid Norfolk, including those at Chapel Green and Fred Nicholson SEND schools, to submit Christmas Card Designs. The wonderful array of pictures sent is always a joy for my wife Fiona and I to look through.

Thanks and congratulations go to this year's winner:

Mason Lynch

Age 8

Thomas Bullock CE Primary and Nursery Academy



and a huge well done to Runner Up:

Emelie-Diane Ribeiro, Age 7, Necton Church of England Primary School



YOUR ACCESSIBLE AND ACCOUNTABLE LOCAL MP

I'm committed to making my work as accessible as possible through my #DigitalDemocracy initiative, ensuring that anyone can stay updated and in touch online with just a click.

I strongly believe MPs should be visible and approachable within their constituencies. That's why I use a variety of channels to stay connected, including social media, my website, email, and direct calls to my offices in Dereham and Westminster.

At the end of each week, when I return from Westminster, I make it a priority to visit as many towns and villages as possible. I also host community outreach events such as my Supermarket Surgeries and Politics in the Pub sessions to hear directly from local residents.

Staying engaged with the community is essential to my role, and I'm always exploring new ways to ensure I remain accessible to those I represent.



With 4 towns and 130 villages spread across a constituency with a 90-mile boundary, it's not possible to visit every community regularly.

That's why, each Friday and Saturday, I prioritise visiting as many places as possible, moving my surgeries around to make it easier for people to meet me. I also focus on digital outreach through my website, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and targeted bulletins for key interest groups.

Each week, my team and I deal with over 1,000 pieces of correspondence from constituents. Fiona, Estelle, Shellie, Robin and I work hard to sort, prioritise and respond, focusing on those most in need or with genuine policy concerns.

This year, I've:

- ***Helped approximately 8000 individual constituents with new casework.***
- ***Managed hundreds of ongoing casework issues.***
- ***Progressed over 30 important local projects and campaigns.***

As a rural community, we know there can be silent suffering from isolation and loneliness. Let's all look out for vulnerable neighbours this Christmas.

Thank you to the many volunteers, carers, and unsung heroes who make a difference behind the scenes.

Wishing you all a very Happy Christmas!

George



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