

Councillor Joshua Osborne: Report for Downham Old Town 3 March 2026

Ryston End School Update

It was great to see approval of the Ryston End SEND School last month from Norfolk County Council. Now that the funding is in place it will be about making sure a strong application is put forward so that the process can be as swift and smooth as possible.

West Norfolk Budget

Last week, councillors met to decide the Borough Council's Budget for 2026/2027. All those at the Council have worked hard to find savings of £2.78 million although Council Tax has needed to again rise to help protect the many vital services that we deliver, from bins to planning.

The Labour Government has delivered a multi-year settlement for the first time in more than a decade which will help with future planning, and the Council did receive more than it had provisionally been expecting from the Government, which is great news. I joined most councillors in approving this Budget.

Labour councillors like myself have been pushing for some more of the money available to be spent on our communities, and our proposed amendment has emerged in a different form in the new £500,000 Community Project Fund that Council will be looking at soon. Councillors will be able to put forward the case for worthy projects to help their residents, so do let me let know if you have any ideas for Downham.

Ward Work

I have been in consultation with residents around a garage application in Ryston End. I called in the application and I was informed yesterday that it has been withdrawn, although it is likely it will come back in some form.

I have had some correspondence regarding the Willows that obviously many residents from across Downham visit, particularly South and Old Town, and am meeting the biodiversity ranger there in the coming weeks to talk over the works that are going on.

I have continued engaging with the Foodbank and am pleased to see that they are here at the meeting tonight. They have been the largest recipient of the money I have pledged to donate from my councillors' allowance, because they are doing vital work in Downham and across the wider area of our hinterlands.

Local Elections Back On

We had a motion come to the Borough Council in January regarding the postponement of the 2026 Norfolk County Council Elections. While acknowledging some of the challenges local authorities face at the moment, I and all other councillors speaking were in favour of them going ahead because ultimately four year terms elected in 2021 becoming practically seven year terms ending in April 2028 is a bit too far. The County's response to the Government was mostly listing reasons why

elections should not happen, and then one reason why they should, so it is very likely they did want the postponement.

These terms will be severely truncated, being just less than two years in length with local government reorganisation, but it is right that a fresh democratic mandate is sought as the important work of creating the (hopefully) three unitaries goes ahead in the next two years. I am pleased that they will be going ahead and that the people of Downham Market have a chance to vote.