

Report from your County Councillor, Cllr Steffan Aquarone



Sale of Holt Hall

I'm sure you'll agree that the next generation of young people will play a crucial role in solving some of the challenges of our time.

This is partly why I was so disheartened when I learned that the County Council decided to sell Holt Hall - a priceless community asset - to a mystery bidder for private use, rather than as an educational facility.

Many constituents and parish councillors have spoken to me and shared their memories of outdoor education at the site. The fact that it was loss making is of no significance when there were two viable final-stage bids that would have seen a continuation of outdoor education being provided there. In the end, it seems money is all that talks for the County Council - and instead of going towards funding another public service, the proceeds will be used to reduce the incredible debt burden built up by Norfolk County Council over the years.

This historic building, with dozens of acres of grounds, is being sold off to a wealthy buyer to use as a home. It wasn't tendered publicly as being available for private use - so whatever this mystery buyer has offered is likely to be cheap, and means the method of sale is far from above board. The fact the bidder's identity remains shrouded in mystery is all the more worrying.

Scrapping of free school meal vouchers

And if that weren't bad enough, Norfolk County Council is one of only two councils in the whole of the East of England to scrap free school meals this Easter holiday.

This has made me very frustrated, as I feel the County Council is letting people down badly. Since we are nowhere near any elections I hope you won't mind me pointing out that these are yet more heartless cuts against a backdrop of financial mismanagement by the County Council, compared to North Norfolk where the books are balanced and no services have been cut, even with a council tax freeze last year. I believe you'll feel the same, whatever you vote, if you see some of it for yourself, which you can do here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjOPtfCGcco>.

I spoke passionately about these issues on BBC Radio Norfolk breakfast last week: <https://soundcloud.com/steffan-aquarone/taking-food-from-children-and-selling-off-outdoor-learning-facilities>

Climate Strategy

Last Monday's Full Council was pretty galling on all fronts, including the climate emergency. The Council has at least confirmed that it will be bringing a climate action plan to a future meeting. Whether or not to declare a climate emergency aside, my aim has been to ensure that Norfolk County Council takes the lead on tackling climate change across Norfolk, not just on its own estates. I will continue to work constructively and in a cross-party capacity on this aim. I know there are people on all sides who are deeply worried about the lack of urgency and action - not least when considered in the context of the cost of living crisis we're facing, much of which would be mitigated if we switched to more sustainable sources of energy, food and transport.

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