

## Report from your County Councillor, Cllr Steffan Aquarone



### **Affordable homes**

I have received an unprecedented amount of difficult casework in the past few months concerning the chronic lack of housing in North Norfolk. Under recent legislation changes there are no lawful routes by which councils can finance homes themselves.

Having worked closely with the District Council's housing team to ensure the most urgent housing cases - including those involving abuse, racism and violence - are appropriately prioritised, it is clear that a change in the law is needed to allow councils to control the rapid expansion of second homes (which has a knock on effect on affordability away from the hotspots) and mandate affordable housing beyond their currently limited powers in considering planning applications from developers.

I have written to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to ask about his department's plans on this important issue.

### **Footpaths**

I am working on bringing together everything that has been learned about this project so far, in order to create a County Council backed support kit to help parishes identify circular walks, create permissive path agreements with landowners, and document, publish and promote routes. I hope to have more information to share about this later in the Spring.

### **Mobile phone coverage**

Around  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the division has experienced improvements in the past four years and I have been working directly with the network operators to solve remaining issues.

Almost all devices that were capable of working with SureSignal boxes (which plug into Broadband) are able to support wifi calling, so this is now replacing the networks' default recommendation for improving at-home signal.

Elsewhere, more transmitters are planned in and around Saxthorpe in particular, and as the energy companies are now aiming for Smart Metering (which relies on mobile phone signal) targets. A new Telefonica mast is planned south of Hindolveston for this purpose, which will improve phone coverage for customers of Telefonica and their respective Mobile Virtual Network Operators - the ones that run on their network.

You may be aware that, by December 31, 2025, landlines for any home or business in Britain will only continue to work if they are hooked up to the internet. This is causing concern for a number of residents, and I have lobbied Openreach and regulator Ofcom to push back the deadline or do more to protect customers from scams, and compel the operators to provide 121 support to customers to ensure they don't lose their landlines.