

Dear All

First the response to your question regarding 40 mph restricted areas:

'Nothing more to report as yet. We (NCC) are still talking with DfT about a trial scheme and have stated our interest. In the event that DfT are willing to fund a scheme we would need to determine the precise details and there would be a public consultation.'

Next I promised to copy you a couple of items to which I referred and decided to give you a fuller report, please see below. (I attended the first session of the programme referred to at the end – believe it will be very useful for our mature residents.)

Finally, before it is too late, wishing you a happy and healthy 2017.

Marie

County Councillor Dr Marie Strong
Wells Division (Glaven, Priory, Walsingham Wards)

Flooding – Friday 13 January 2017: As far as I know there were no disasters along the coastal parishes of our division and I hope that is so. However all our coastal parishes were on a flood warning, and indeed waited anxiously to see if this would be upgraded to a severe warning with the ultimate threat of evacuation. I have yet to hear if anyone was moved from their homes as a precaution. As the joint co-ordinator for the Wells flood plan I have received praise for our flood wardens and as county councillor I would like to say a big thank you to all the flood wardens along the coast. The role flood wardens play allows the blue light services to be used where there are no wardens and/or greater risks. Volunteers receive no pay but a bright yellow jacket and the knowledge they are helping their community regarding what remains the greatest risk to Norfolk – coastal flooding.

Road Gritting: When freezing temperatures are predicted Norfolk County Council officers are on duty ensuring the gritting teams go out on time, and repeatedly if required. The County Council currently has around 13,000 tonnes of salt stocked in the county and is replenished throughout the winter. More than a third of Norfolk's roads totalling over 2,000 miles are on the council's 49 regular gritting routes, including all A and B-class roads and some C-class roads, and each route takes around three hours for a gritter lorry to treat. The A11, A47 and A12 are gritted by Highways England. You can check which roads are on the council's gritting routes by looking at the map at www.norfolk.gov.uk/gritting. On the same map you can find the locations of the more than 1,800 grit bins in the county that are filled by the County Council and which people can use on public pavements, cycle paths and roads. Now whilst over 2,000 miles are on the 49 gritting routes I realise there will be readers whose road is not gritted. Not that it is of any comfort but my road is not gritted and I do appreciate the concerns. Here is where your town or parish council comes into play. You can talk to your council and ask if the road you have in mind could be put forward to NCC with a request to have it included on the gritting route. This may not be successful and an alternative is to discuss the possibility of having a grit bin in the vicinity of the road. **Broadband:** I wrote a longer piece previously regarding broadband but thought to provide a short note regarding complaints made that Openreach excludes other Internet Service Providers (ISPs) from offering fibre broadband for several weeks after BT has had the opportunity. I have been informed that Ofcom regulates Openreach tightly on this matter. When a fibre cabinet becomes available the commissioning process means Openreach release the cabinet to all ISPs including BT ISPs at the same time. An ISP would definitely raise a complaint with Ofcom if it believed BT were not treating all ISPs in the same way. What differs is that different ISP internal processes means they all take different amounts of time to start offering services once a cabinet is live.

Mobile 'Phone Coverage: Because Wells division is particularly rural, covering some 35 parishes and

hamlets, and because I travel all around all these places I am acutely aware of the problems with mobile 'phone coverage. As Chair of the Broadband, Mobile Phone and Digital Working Group I, along with fellow councillors, am also aware that the problem even exists in some of our towns. I hope the following update is useful: I am in regular contact with Mobile UK, which represents mobile operators, putting across our concerns and seeking information as to developments. Additionally the group has met twice with representatives from the four main mobile network operators (EE, O2, Three and Vodafone). We already knew that mobile operators have an agreement with government to achieve 90% geographic voice coverage across the country by the end of 2017. We have now been assured that operators are on track to meet this commitment which should also result in an increase in 4G data coverage. In turn the government is reviewing the Electronic Communications code to help operators deploy new infrastructure – particularly important in rural areas. (And please remember that at present infrastructure means masts.)

The government will review the coverage situation once the 90% coverage target has been achieved and the new Emergency Services Network (ESN) has been deployed. (The ESN is the new communications system which will be used by the Police, Fire & Rescue, the Ambulance Service and other public safety users. Where public money is used to subsidise ESN expansion in rural areas the infrastructure will be made available to all mobile operators.) Network operators are working together to share sites and improve infrastructure. However they are still commercially independent so the operators will not publically share future coverage plans.

However, whilst not a universal solution, you can use a coverage checker to determine the best network for the places where you will be mainly using your mobile phone. Most mobile phone operators have a coverage checker available on their own website but there is also a coverage checker available on the OFCOM website. <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-internet/advice-for-consumers/advice/mobile-coverage-checker>

And whilst, as you will have read, the situation is improving and will continue to do so, concern remains. Therefore early in 2017 we will be writing to the Minister responsible for Culture, Media and Sport requesting intervention regarding Norfolk's access to mobile 'phone networks.

Dance Workshops at Wells Community Hospital: We members of Wells Dementia Friendly Committee are delighted to have persuaded Creative Arts East to bring the Green Candle Dance Company to Wells Community Hospital (Mill Road). The programme is called 'Improving Wellbeing through the Arts'. It will provide the opportunity for older people to make new friends, enjoy a 'cuppa and cake' in a fun and dementia friendly environment. Sessions are free but space is limited – to book a place call Lea on 01953 713390 or email lea@creativeartseast.co.uk. This is not overly energetic so no excuses!