

Your views on (a) Lockdown? (b) HMG Planning reforms? - GTG?

FREEMAN, George <george.freeman.mp@parliament.uk>

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To: FREEMAN, George <george.freeman.mp@parliament.uk>

📎 2 attachments (1 MB)

Changes to the Current Planning System - Letter.pdf; Planning for the Future consultation submission.pdf;

Morning,

**Your views on (a) Lockdown? (b) HMG Planning reforms?**

Given the importance of the Governments imminent decisions on (a) lockdown and (b) the Government's latest Planning/Housing proposals, I'm contacting all Town and Parish Council Chairs in the Mid Norfolk constituency to canvass your views.

In particular:

- **Covid:** how best to ensure that we get the right balance between protecting the NHS and the most medically vulnerable, without destroying local small businesses.
- **Planning:** how should Government build the homes that the country needs without dumping housing estates on rural towns and villages without the necessary infrastructure, or destroying good farmland.

I have set out below my instinct and thinking on both issues – but I'm very keen to hear from LOCAL community leaders on what you think the majority of people in your area would want to see.

**George**

### Covid-19 Autumn Lockdown

The decision to impose another lockdown is not one to be taken lightly. I absolutely share the concerns about the enormous social and economic damage of another lockdown: locally and nationally.

Having sat down with Norfolk health leaders yesterday and studied the data in detail, it's now clear though that this disease is on an autumn surge which threatens to overwhelm our NHS at its busiest time of the year, when it is also clearing a backlog of patients and operations from this spring. If we don't act we risk the NHS being overwhelmed (sometime in December) and a massively damaging later and longer lockdown with all the economic and social misery that means.

So. I think the Government has to act now to try and avoid that. But. Ministers **MUST** make sure they get the balance right so that the cure isn't worse than the disease.

That means **balancing** the risks – protecting the most vulnerable AND minimising the economic harm to local livelihoods – preventing the disease getting out of control **WITHOUT** totally shutting down our local economy.

The best way to do that I believe is by **LOCAL LEADERSHIP**: our local Norfolk Councils, NHS, public health and social care workers did an outstanding job this spring protecting the most vulnerable. No one is better equipped to make these difficult decisions than our local agencies and elected local councillors, accountable to local residents.

You, yourselves, as Parish Councils have also played a crucial role in identifying and supporting those in your communities that have needed extra help – and your support and feedback to our local Norfolk Councils and agencies should play a key role in forming our local Norfolk response.

I'm hugely worried about the wider impacts on peoples livelihoods and mental health, especially the freelance, self-employed and small businesses who don't have big company assets behind them, and our key sectors like tourism and the arts and hospitality who may never recover.

So, whilst I absolutely accept the case for Government to implement a "circuit-breaker" to prevent the disease spreading and forcing a longer deeper lockdown this winter, I am pushing Ministers to commit to:

- sensible rules which allow church services, funerals, outdoor sports like golf which can be socially distanced and other activities key to people's health and welfare to continue
- proper Review on Dec 2nd with another Vote in Parliament
- a clear Exit Plan from the lockdown and Strategy to get to next spring with minimum hardship
- much stronger LOCAL decision making by our Norfolk leaders
- proper compensation for local small businesses / freelance / self employed who face the biggest economic hardship
- additional furloughing, hardship funding like Free School Meals and Meals on Wheels for the most vulnerable.

In the end there are no easy decisions on this. But we must get the balance right.

To hear my interview about this on BBC Radio Norfolk this morning, please click [here](#)

### Planning

As you will all be aware, and as many of you have contacted me about, the Government has recently held two important consultations – the 'Changes to the Current Planning System' and 'Planning for the Future' consultations.

Please see my submissions to both consultations attached.

Whilst the reforms proposed contain **some** good measures (primarily on design codes and trees, and the desire to look at speeding up the entire planning process as a whole), I fear the proposals in general are undeliverable and will in fact worsen the situation – failing to address the real problems with our current planning system and instead creating a host of new issues.

As you can see, in each submission, I have outlined in detail the problems I see with the proposals being put forward by the Government and, in my 'Planning for the Future' consultation submission, I have set out how I believe the current planning system should in fact be improved.

Please do have a read through and let me have your thoughts.

Rest assured, as I have done with planning matters throughout my time as the MP for Mid Norfolk, I will continue to actively campaign on this matter – and fully intend continuing to speak in the House and lobbying Ministers hard to get the right outcome for our area.

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I hugely value and look forward to your feedback.

Yours,

**George**

**P.S More details on both these, and other local issues, can be found on my website here:**  
<https://www.georgefreeman.co.uk/>





**George Freeman MP**  
MP for Mid Norfolk

8 Damgate Street | Wymondham | NR18 0BQ  
01953 600 617

[www.georgefreeman.co.uk](http://www.georgefreeman.co.uk)

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**George Freeman MP**  
Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk  
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA  
Tel: 01953 600617

## Changes to the Current Planning System

While I have long argued that our planning system is broken (and am therefore very pleased indeed to see the Government's recognition that it needs significant reform), I am writing to outline my concerns (and the concerns of many within my constituency and elsewhere across the country) with regards to the reforms proposed in the Government's 'Changes to the Current Planning System'.

The Public rightly expect planning to be just that: the co-ordination of the location, layout, design, mix – and associated physical and public service infrastructure – of housing and commercial development.

There is widespread public anger about the lack of real local planning in recent years and the move to a system in which local council control and discretion is reduced, infrastructure funding is cut, and large scale out-of-town volume housebuilders are able to make billions from lazily dumping large scale commuter housing on the outskirts of villages and towns with wholly insufficient infrastructure.

Whilst these reforms contain *some* good measures – especially on design codes and trees – the disproportionate concentration of massive numbers of houses in rural areas, on greenfield farmland, AND the removal of the local infrastructure levy, is a recipe for infrastructure chaos.

These reforms, I believe, serve to strengthen the hand of those aggressive development companies and fail to address the fundamental issues that the current planning system perpetuates, and which have been/continue to be the basis on which I, and so many others, have called for proper reform.

Left unchecked, these proposals will worsen the situation and, despite some minor positives, add a plethora of new problems to our planning system – at the great detriment of communities across the country, as well as the Government and Party politically on an enormous scale.

Here I shall set out the reasons why I have reached these conclusions.

### **1. The reforms target significantly, and disproportionately, rural areas**

The proposed new algorithm will result in some of England's most rural districts seeing an average of 59% increase in their housing need calculation – compared to a much more modest average of 20% in our major urban areas.

In my own largely rural constituency of Mid Norfolk, it is in fact even worse for the two districts: Breckland and South Norfolk.

As Lichfield have calculated, under the current Standard Method, Breckland is required to deliver 661 new homes (and has delivered, on average over the last three years, 692 homes a year – some 80 homes more than the current Local Plan requirement). The new Standard Method would increase the number of homes Breckland must deliver to 1,070 – which equates to a **c.62% rise**.

Under the current Standard Method, South Norfolk is required to deliver 893 properties a year (and has delivered, on average over the last three years, 1,164 a year – some 301 homes more than the current Local Plan requirement). The new Standard Method would increase the number of homes South Norfolk must deliver to 1,832 – which equates to a **c.105% increase**. (Although South Norfolk is considered part of the Greater Norwich development area, this represents a startling figure).

### **Constituency Office**

8 Damgate Street, Wymondham, NR18 0BQ

Website: [www.georgefreeman.co.uk](http://www.georgefreeman.co.uk)

Telephone Number: 01953 600617

Email: [george.freeman.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:george.freeman.mp@parliament.uk)



**George Freeman MP**  
Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk  
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA  
Tel: 01953 600617

Having spoken to district councillors, officials, parish councillors, residents and business groups (not to mention planning experts and colleagues across the House), I am struck by the level of shock and concern about the impact that the new algorithm will have on rural districts across England.

Rather than tackling the issues that have seen the planning system used by aggressive developers to lay siege to rural land that they would otherwise not have had any chance of developing, these hugely increased figures will give them renewed strength and pave the way for development that fails to actually address the national crisis we face.

While targets might be met, the proposals will not encourage the proper planning development this country so desperately needs – instead incubating a whole host of social and economic problems for the not so distant future.

## **2. A liberalisation of permissions does not guarantee supply**

Despite 80 per cent of residential applications being granted, between 2010 and 2017 nearly half of all permissions remained unbuilt. There are currently up to 1m permissions not yet completed. This is outrageous.

Not only does the evidence suggest that the increase in permissions has *not* led to a corresponding increase in starts, I know first-hand from conversations with the leadership and officials at Breckland and South Norfolk in my constituency that this is indeed the case.

As I and many across the House have been arguing for years, we **need to incentivize building out**, ending disincentives, **not reward developers for their behaviour**. This should be combined with other strategies including compulsory purchase of empty homes, and brownfield development priority.

The new proposals completely fail to address this problem.

## **3. The new Standard Method perpetuates historic inequity and imbalance in development and misses a historic opportunity to change it.**

The new Standard Method does not take local policy objectives, supply constraints, or environmental impact into account. It pressures authorities to meet the calculated housing need forced on them by the Standard Method algorithm, but does not look at factors that might constrain the ability to deliver those targets.

Indeed, over my decade as the MP for Mid Norfolk, I have seen how such factors have at times, and in different ways, constrained Breckland, South Norfolk and countless other districts as they sought to deliver housing in their communities. A failure to recognise this will seriously undermine any reforms to the planning system.

The new proposals should consider additional and constraining factors, including:

- National landscapes and environmental designations; support for landscape conservation
- Land constraints, such as floodplain
- The democratic mandate to prevent urban sprawl and greenfield development, or to change approach to housebuilding
- Demographic factors and varying components of household projections, which can skew the circular algorithm, and result in flawed affordability calculations
- Unsustainable pressure on infrastructure and services

Planning authorities facing these constraints need sensitive local assessments and more flexibility to change their method of assessing housing need.

**Constituency Office**  
8 Damgate Street, Wymondham, NR18 0BQ

Website: [www.georgefreeman.co.uk](http://www.georgefreeman.co.uk)

Telephone Number: 01953 600617

Email: [george.freeman.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:george.freeman.mp@parliament.uk)



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House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA  
Tel: 01953 600617

**4. As a result of these failings, the new Standard Method exacerbates infrastructure and environmental pressures in both rural and urban constituencies**

The targets outside of London see many of the most acute step-changes in housebuilding in areas constrained by environmental designations. Those land-constrained authorities may be forced to pave the way to car-dependent housing estates, away from jobs and services, as the only means of meeting their target.

In Norfolk (and particularly in Breckland and South Norfolk), we are increasingly seeing huge housing estates dumped on communities without the necessary jobs and services to support them. Rapidly, public anger is rising – with existing residents upset at seeing their rural town or village transformed into a commuter/dormitory settlement with little community spirit and unable to cope with the influx of new residents, while new residents find they have spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on a property somewhere unable to properly support them. The social impacts of this will be far-reaching – and neither forgiven nor forgotten.

In London, the targets add a whole new degree of extraordinary pressure which would see the equivalent of several new towns built in urban central/West London and suburban outer London. When considered overall, the ten biggest absolute increases in housing need in England, as compared to current local plan targets, are Tower Hamlets, Westminster, Barnet, Camden, Hackney, Greenwich, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark and Kensington and Chelsea. Several analyses find that the new targets in London are not realistic.

At the same time, Northern towns and cities are rightly demanding attention and investment to regenerate large-scale urban, brownfield sites. The clear danger is that, despite Government reassurances, infrastructure money will continue to flow to the shires and the South to support housebuilding there, rather than deliver much-needed regeneration to the North.

**5. Nationally, the affordability adjustment is considered to have little to no impact on affordability or supply of homes for those in a housing crisis. Again, this effects both rural and urban constituencies.**

The new Standard Method inflates the baseline housing need in areas with worsening affordability, with no moderation for delivery constraints. However, recent increases in housebuilding have had “little discernible impact on prices.” It is far from evident that simply increasing the housebuilding target, and thus supply, will result in a meaningful increase in affordability, or the *types* of houses needed most. **This applies to all areas and all constituencies to varying degrees.**

Indeed, in areas like Norfolk, two of the key problems is the amount of affordable housing and the lack of the *types* of houses most needed. As a result, we are increasingly seeing our young, and families that have lived in the area for generations, forced to move away because they can neither afford the housing in the area nor find the *types* of houses they need. The social and demographic challenges this is creating are profound. We cannot afford for rural regions like Norfolk to become giant ‘retirement homes’.

**6. The targets for housing need undermine the ‘levelling up’ agenda across England, damaging both Northern and Southern constituencies.**

Despite some improvements in the North as a whole, the proposed new algorithm concentrates the biggest falls in requirements in the urban North and Midlands – the very areas we pledged as a Party to ‘level up’ (an agenda which I, myself, am hugely supportive of and a passionate advocate for).

By comparison, the algorithm puts many of the biggest increases in requirements in London and the South. The new Standard Method “will lead to London and the South seeing a housing boom while swathes of the North will see fewer homes built” according to the Local Government Association (LGA).

**Constituency Office**  
8 Damgate Street, Wymondham, NR18 0BQ



**George Freeman MP**

Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk  
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA  
Tel: 01953 600617

Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle upon Tyne districts, for example, have declined in population by 22.9%, 36.8% and 15.8% respectively since 1961. Their new housing need targets (by local planning authority) are not just lower than those produced by the *Standard Method*, but 30%, 48% and 56% lower respectively than the *2018/19 delivery rate* in each authority.

If 'levelling up' means anything, it means an integrated Government plan to support infrastructure, job creation and housebuilding to revive the Midlands and North, especially towns overlooked in recent decades, and to stop the endless drift of jobs and people to the shires and to the South and South East specifically.

### **Conclusion**

While the desire to reform a long broken planning system is welcomed by myself, the proposals here fail to properly address the fundamental issues at hand – and in fact serve to exacerbate the current situation and existing frustrations by creating additional problems.

I would like to request that the proposals are paused, reconsidered (in consultation with MPs and others) and amended before they are taken any further.

**George Freeman MP**  
**Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk**

**Constituency Office**

8 Damgate Street, Wymondham, NR18 0BQ



## **Planning for the Future: consultation submission.**

While I have long argued that our planning system is broken (and am therefore very pleased indeed to see the Government's recognition that it needs significant reform and a number of welcome and important measures on design codes, leisure space and trees), and support the Government's commitment to build significant new housing, I am writing to outline serious concerns (expressed by many within my constituency and elsewhere across the country) with regards to a number of the reforms proposed in the Government's 'Planning for the Future' consultation – in particular:

- the extraordinarily disproportionate allocation of the new housing to rural greenfield agricultural land instead of brownfield urban / suburban sites
- the replacement of the local infrastructure levy for a national levy only payable AFTER development (when the key is to build it BEFORE)

This consultation is closely associated with the 'Changes to the Current Planning System' consultation and I have therefore included my submission to that consultation again here – as the vast majority of points there remain pertinent here.

As I made clear previously, and have stated consistently throughout my time as the MP for Mid Norfolk, the public rightly expect planning to be just that: the co-ordination of the location, layout, design, mix – and associated physical and public service infrastructure – of housing and commercial development.

There has been widespread, and ever growing, public anger about the lack of real local planning over recent decades and the move to a system in which local council control and discretion is reduced, infrastructure funding is cut, and large scale out-of-town volume housebuilders are able to 'bank' permissions and exploit the 5 year land supply rules in the NPPF to force large scale housing – without infrastructure – on the outskirts of villages and towns with wholly insufficient infrastructure.

Whilst these reforms contain \*some\* good measures – especially on design codes and trees, and in their desire to speed up the entire planning process – they, like the reforms proposed in the 'Changes to the Current Planning System' consultation, fail to actually address the real issues that the existing system of planning in this country perpetuates and which have been/continue to be the basis upon which I, and many others, have been calling for proper reform.

Without changes, I fear these proposals will prove to be both undeliverable AND worsen the situation and, despite some minor positives, add a plethora of new problems to our planning system and serve to strengthen the hand of those aggressive out-of-town developers intent on dumping large volumes of housing on communities – with little consideration of the welfare of residents or the sustainability of the developments themselves.

I have set out here the reasons why I am so concerned.

### **1. The reforms will significantly, and disproportionately, impact rural areas**

As I outlined in my previous submission to the 'Changes to the Current Planning System' consultation, the proposed new algorithm detailed within it will result in some of England's most rural districts seeing an average of 59% increase in their housing need calculation – compared to a much more modest average of 20% in our major urban areas.

In my own largely rural constituency of Mid Norfolk, it is in fact even worse for the two districts: Breckland and South Norfolk.

### **Constituency Office**

8 Damgate Street, Wymondham, NR18 0BQ





As Lichfield have calculated, under the current Standard Method, Breckland is required to deliver 661 new homes (and has delivered, on average over the last three years, 692 homes a year – some 80 homes more than the current Local Plan requirement). The new Standard Method would increase the number of homes Breckland must deliver to 1,070 – which equates to a **c.62% rise**.

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**These levels of additional housing are in addition to the existing targets which already represent a major phase of housebuilding in our area. The proposed targets are over 50% higher than the highest year of housebuilding achieved in our area in the last 20 years. They are simply undeliverable as proposed.**

As I have stressed before, I and many colleagues across the House have been struck by the sheer level of shock and concern among district councillors, officials, parish councillors, residents, business groups and planning experts about the impact of the new algorithm on rural districts.

It is within this context that we must consider this latest White Paper consultation.

When combined with the new algorithm, the system of designating land in one of three categories (Growth, Renewal and Protected) will, I and many others, believe exacerbate the problems being faced in rural constituencies like my own – where aggressive out-of-town developers have manipulated the Planning system to lay siege to rural land that they would otherwise have had little to no chance of developing.

With the continued failure to properly define “sustainable” and “affordable” housing, these developers will have renewed strength to dump large volumes of wholly inappropriate and unsustainable housing on communities. When the removal of the local Infrastructure Levy is then also taken into account, we really will have the perfect storm: a Planning system that completely neglects the citizens it is supposed to serve by encouraging bad development that incubates the social and economic problems of tomorrow.

Furthermore, I would add that these proposals will worsen the pitting of North against South that I explained in my previous submission and, as a result, further undermine the ‘levelling-up’ agenda that the Government so boldly, and correctly set out.

## **2. A liberalisation of permissions does not guarantee supply**

Despite 80 per cent of residential applications being granted, between 2010 and 2017 nearly half of all permissions remained unbuilt. There are currently up to 1m permissions not yet completed. This is outrageous.

Not only does the evidence suggest that the increase in permissions has *not* led to a corresponding increase in starts, I know first-hand from conversations with the leadership and officials at Breckland and South Norfolk in my constituency that this is indeed the case. In Breckland alone, I understand that there are currently **14,000 unbuilt, permitted homes**. In the Greater Norwich area (of which South Norfolk is part), that figure stands at **30,000!**

As I and many across the House have been arguing for years, we **need to incentivize building out**, ending disincentives, **not reward developers for their behaviour**. This should be combined with other strategies including compulsory purchase of empty homes, and brownfield development priority.

The new proposals completely fail to address this long-standing problem and continue to assume, for the most part incorrectly, that Local Government is to blame for many of these permissions remaining unbuilt.

### **Constituency Office**

8 Damgate Street, Wymondham, NR18 0BQ



A proper solution to this “land-banking” is much needed and would unlock thousands of houses rapidly.

### **3. A step backwards for the “spirit of Localism”**

As a newly elected MP back in 2010, I understood the need to get Britain building again post-Crash and embraced the Government’s desire to put in place a new model of “Localism” as a means of delivering that. Indeed, I strongly supported the 2011 Localism Act and have advocated for the “spirit of Localism” consistently over the last decade – certain that, while the Localism Act has its loopholes, reform could adequately address its weaknesses, empower local communities and pave the way for increased numbers of new housing in a way that ensured communities were on the whole happy with how they would grow, having had proper consultation and involvement.

(Although often slow at times, this “spirit of Localism” has, I have found, been widely popular. Popular frustration has been directed at its weaknesses, but the principle of “Localism” has been broadly accepted and embraced. There has been a desire for its weaknesses to be strengthened and improved, but never a strong view that it should be abandoned)

While the desire to simplify and speed up the process of producing Local and Neighbourhood Plans is correct and should be applauded, the proposals in their current form are completely unacceptable and will only serve to dramatically heighten Public distrust of the Planning System and, in turn, the Government.

Even were much improved resourcing and methods of publicising consultation be put in place, the proposed timeframes for public consultation are far too short. A total of 6 weeks in the entire 30 month Local Plan making period is appalling. Vast swathes of people will miss out on having a proper say in the Plans that will be used to dictate how their communities will grow over the coming decades.

(I would also stress that, with all of this public consultation proposed to take place online (most likely via an App), a still significant section of society will be disenfranchised. Not only will many vulnerable and elderly be unable to properly engage with the process, but many living in rural areas like my own, who still do not have sufficient broadband provision or speed will be seriously adversely affected. Despite the progress that has been made, my constituency of Mid Norfolk continues to lag way behind much of the rest of the county and country when it comes to Broadband. Written consultation must remain for the foreseeable future).

The principle that once land has been designated in one of the three categories, the sites within it can be deemed and viewed the same is also deeply flawed. In reality, no two sites anywhere (no matter how similar) are the same. The idea that, for example, a site on land designated ‘Growth’ can have applications brought forward, no matter how controversial, with no further consultation of local communities is ridiculous – especially if the public has only had 6 weeks to be consulted previously, when they would have still had no idea about the specific applications that will be put forward for those sites.

Such an approach will rapidly escalate public anger and frustration. Alternative methods for simplifying and speeding up the process for creating Local Plans need to be looked at. Those set out in this White Paper consultation cannot be allowed to be carried forward.

(One example that immediately jumps to mind is the inspection of Local and Neighbourhood Plans. Often when communities or districts have been innovative and ambitious when creating Plans that look to deliver development in a manner that properly respects existing communities and provides the infrastructure and services required to sustain it (and often at a greater volume than initially set out), the inspection process sees their work grind to a halt and substantially watered down as the Inspector repeatedly calls Plans back in and pulls them up on quite logical, but forward looking policies that are not ‘tradition’. The inspection process is of course hugely important, but it cannot continue to be a barrier to progress and ‘good development’).

### **Constituency Office**

8 Damgate Street, Wymondham, NR18 0BQ



#### **4. Pressure on local services.**

The proposals do not properly address the need for a much more integrated approach to local public services. Too often we see new housing come with no extra capacity in GP surgeries, schools or other local facilities – simply adding to the existing pressures and resentment.

#### **5. An alternative approach. How we SHOULD be building the levels of housing needed.**

I would suggest a far better and more successful approach to the building of the homes we need would be:

1. **Levelling Up.** The Government has rightly committed to a programme of major regeneration in areas “left behind”. I wholeheartedly agree. So let’s focus the major construction boom of new home building in the Northern cities and conurbations, and in our deprived coastal communities to help reduce cost, spread growth and level up.
2. **Concentrate the housing in a network of New Towns.** We will never deliver the volumes – or affordability – required by incremental house-dumping on every town and village in the South East. Here in the East there are two or three places where you could build a New Town of c 50,000 houses on low price land without triggering major opposition, and ensuring infrastructure: at Mildenhall/ Lakenheath on the railway line on the Cambridge - Norwich growth corridor, and in NE Cambs on the grade 3 fenland around Wisbech. I dare say each county could happily find a location for a New Town.
3. **Use incentives not punishments.** Give LAs the incentive of retaining more of the income generated by house building locally so there is an incentive to build.
4. **Infrastructure first.** Instead of allowing developers to build first and add infrastructure later, we should mandate that it is the other way around.
5. **Distinguish between Affordable and Social housing.** Too often developments are built with commuter homes at maximum price point and then a bit of “social housing” at high density in the corner with no facilities. This model doesn’t work for anyone. Vulnerable low income families need access to services not being stuck in a car-dependent corner of a commuter estate.
6. **Support the good rural affordable housing Associations** like Hastoe and others who have pioneered successful models of rural affordable housing.
7. **Build more houses closer to railway stations** to reduce congestion, pollution and support public transport. We are still running a 1950s model of daily one person car commuting which is increasingly not what today’s young families want or the country can sustain.
8. **Self-build.** Why on earth are we still subsidising house-builders to build slow expensive old fashioned energy inefficient houses of brick when the modular and self/build sector can deliver so much quicker and more cheaply?
9. **Energy efficiency.** Housing must be aligned to our wider Net Zero ambitions. We are still building in the car-dependency and energy inefficiencies which we know aren’t sustainable.

#### **Conclusion**

Whilst I welcome the desire to reform a long broken planning system, the proposals here fail to properly address the fundamental issues at hand – and will for the most part worsen an already dire situation at the considerable detriment of communities and the Government politically. I fear the proposals will prove impossible to deliver, create a license for more of the lazy house-dumping by the big out-of-town developers without proper planning or infrastructure, reduce public trust in the planning system, backfire on local councils, damage rural areas and fail to deliver the Governments manifesto promises to level up areas left behind and cascade power out from London.

As with the ‘Changes to the Current Planning System’ consultation, I would like to request that the proposals are paused, reconsidered (in consultation with MPs and others) and amended before they are taken any further.

**George Freeman MP**  
**Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk**

**Constituency Office**  
8 Damgate Street, Wymondham, NR18 0BQ

## Norfolk launches winter support package to help feed those in need this Christmas

Norfolk County Council <pressoffice@news.norfolk.gov.uk>

Fri 20/11/2020 15:49

To: hinghamtc@hotmail.com <hinghamtc@hotmail.com>



01-12-20  
ITEM  
10-2

### NEWS RELEASE

20 November 2020

## Norfolk launches winter support package to help feed those in need this Christmas

Norfolk County Council is developing a package of support to help give families peace of mind in the run up to Christmas and over the winter months by helping those who need it to have food on the table and other essentials, so every child will be warm and well-fed this winter.

A key part of this support package is about food and the council is working with food voucher company Edenred to provide support for all those eligible for free school meals, children in the early years who receive pupil premium and all of the council's care leavers during the Christmas holidays.

The voucher scheme will form part of a wider package of support for families experiencing hardship this winter, details of which will be announced next week.

Cllr Andrew Proctor, Leader of Norfolk County Council, said: "We know that this is going to be a tough winter for many people in Norfolk, with the impact of Covid hitting many in the pocket.

"There are people in our county who have never needed help before but who have been left experiencing hardship because of the virus.

"The voucher scheme is important, but we know hardship right now is being faced by a wide range of vulnerable households across the county worrying about paying the next utility bill or the next food shop due to the pandemic. Therefore, we will also be launching a wider package of support for winter over the coming weeks.

"I would encourage anyone not to wait if they need support now. Information on how to access support is available at [www.norfolk.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/coronavirus) or by calling 0344 800 8020."

The council and Norfolk schools are encouraging more families to register and apply for free school meals, so that they begin to receive support in time for the school holidays."

To find out if you are eligible and to register for free school meals visit:

<https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/education-and-learning/schools/school-meals-and-milk>.

As part of the wider package of support for families this winter, the council will be further extending the Norfolk Assistance Scheme, which already provides support for food, fuel, clothes and other essential household items to Norfolk's residents experiencing hardship.

The easiest way to get in touch is to visit [www.norfolk.gov.uk/NAS](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/NAS). Those who cannot access the internet, can call 01603 223392 (option 5). If the line is busy, they can leave a message and the team will call back.

**Notes for editors**

Funding for winter support schemes has come from a range of sources:

- A £1m grant from Defra. £200k of this has been allocated to Norfolk Community Foundation and the remainder has been used to supplement the Norfolk Assistance Scheme (NAS).
- £500k of additional government Covid grant.
- £2.7m of Covid Winter Grant, which will be used to fund the Edenred scheme and extend the reach of NAS.
- £1.15m of the council's core budgets – including funding for NAS.

**ENDS**

**For political comment**

For details of cabinet members, committee chairs and agendas, please see:  
[[www.norfolk.gov.uk/cabinetandchairs](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/cabinetandchairs)]  
Group leaders' and councillors' contact details are available at:  
[[www.norfolk.gov.uk/countycouncillors](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/countycouncillors)]

**For further information please contact:  
Communications Team at Norfolk County Council  
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Norfolk County Council, County Hall, Norfolk, Norfolk, NR1 2DH, United Kingdom