

Report from your County Councillor, Cllr Steffan Aquarone



Campaigning to protect health and care services

Rural services are in dire decline, and I'm deeply worried about the lack of dentists, doctors' appointments, and mental health services in North Norfolk.

This is one of my central concerns and I've been campaigning on some of the most acute threats to our rural health and care services:

- Proposed closure of Blakeney GP surgery. Surgeries can't just open and close as they wish - they're contracted as part of an overall plan, managed by Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board (ICB), for meeting the health needs of the people in our area.

The initial request for closure put forward by Holt Medical Practice is, however, a worrying thing for our area as it could mean losing vital local surgery provision. I have corresponded with both Holt Medical Practice and Dame Patricia Hewitt, who is chair of the ICB, and will write to residents in the affected villages as soon as the ICB consultation is open to urge them to submit their views.

- Proposed closure of Benjamin Court in Cromer. This is one of only a small number of units where patients can be discharged from hospital to recover. The proposal to replace it with home-based care will lead to untold misery and suffering by those people whose homes are totally unsuitable for recovery.

The ongoing call for Bank Hubs

The closure of Lloyds branches in Cromer and North Walsham is yet another blow to our rural communities and leaves us with just one remaining bank in the towns.

I have already submitted a community request to Link (better known as the cash machine people) for one of their Bank Hubs for Holt, following the last branch (Barclays) leaving there in December.

Following the Holt submission, I'll be putting together proposals for our other towns in due course and see if we can secure a better, long-term solution than managed decline.

Future of Outdoor learning at Holt Hall

I had a positive meeting with the head of Greshams School, the new owners of Holt Hall, about their plans for the site. I'm optimistic that outdoor learning opportunities will continue to be made available to a wide range of young people there.