

December 2020

END OF YEAR UPDATE
GEORGE FREEMAN MP
Working for Mid Norfolk



A MESSAGE FROM GEORGE

Dear Constituents,

Christmas 2020 MP Report

What a year!

The Covid19 pandemic has left us with 60,000 dead, the highest debts since 1776, and a massive wave of business bankruptcies and redundancies (50,000 forecast here in Norfolk).

As the nation and our county reels from all this, never has it been more important for our Government to lead in the national interest: to be able to reunite, reenergise and renew our nation. The challenge we gave in 2021 is every bit as big as that faced in 1945. We may not have bombed out cities, but we face a combination of:

- An ongoing pandemic (this isn't over yet)
- Economic crisis: massive debts, bankruptcies and a forecast c.2million unemployed who we need to rapidly help retrain and get back to work
- A climate emergency
- A massive backlog in our NHS
- A growing crisis in social care where a tsunami of illness linked to our ageing society cardio-respiratory, dementia and a growing epidemic of obesity, diabetes and cardio-metabolic disease; is generating huge pressures.

To get our economy back on its feet, to create the 2m new jobs we need, to create the growth and earn the revenues to pay off the debts and restore the prosperity we need will require a renaissance of enterprise, innovation and entrepreneurship.

The arrival of the vaccine means that in 6 months we should be able to get the country back on the path to prosperity again. But real LOCAL prosperity - for vibrant villages, thriving towns, secure jobs and long term opportunities for our young - can't just mean massive housebuilding in our countryside, and a boom in retail and the City.

We need long term sustainable growth: creating the new technologies, businesses, jobs and careers this country has real expertise in. And planning a local economy based not on mass commuting and dormitory villages in Norfolk, but a renaissance of small businesses in converted farm buildings and more people working from or close to home. This is the Vision I have long championed as local MP - through The Norfolk Way and my work as Minister.

That's why, back on the backbenches this year, I have recommitted myself to "Regeneration & Renewal": helping Boris and Ministers put in place the bold reforms to unlock the renaissance of local enterprise we need. I've set out below a headline summary of some of the Highs of 2020 in Mid-Norfolk. We have so much as a constituency, county and country to be proud of. Thank you for your support for my work this year.

With best wishes from me and Fiona, for a very Happy Christmas.

George

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MID NORFOLK HIGHS OF 2020



✓ **My 5-year campaign for an Offshore Wind “Ring main”:** to avoid the planned construction of TEN substations the size of Wembley stadium - like the one at Necton - has now been accepted by Ministers

✓ **Agri Food Standards Bill:** my work with the NFU and local farmers and growers and people in the food sector to protect UK farm standards and ensure a level playing field for UK farmers has been successful

✓ **Norfolk Covid / Care homes / Community volunteering:** it has been humbling to see and be able to support the extraordinary community work done by our frontline health and care workers, as well as local residents

✓ **Norfolk Life Science leadership:** Having worked in the LifeScience sector and been 1st Minister for Life Science it was wonderful to be able to work with the NRP, Earlham Institute and local biomedical companies to help support the Norfolk Covid testing regime

✓ **Disposable Laundry bags:** I was delighted to be able to source and supply local NHS and care homes with disposable PPE laundry bags, supplied by a local Mid Norfolk business

✓ **World Horse Welfare w Princess Ann:** It was a huge honour to be invited back to chair the World Horse Welfare annual conference with HRH Princess Anne

✓ **Bridge of Hope:** I'm delighted to report that although this has been a terrible year for so many charities, the Bridge of Hope project I set up in memory of my late father, HRH The Queen Mother's jump jockey in the 1950s, has been able to raise £100,000 to help more people find work

WORK IN PROGRESS

A47

After all the delays and Highways England attempts to delay the A47 dualling for even longer, I was pleased to be able to ensure the DfT Minister committed publicly to NO further delays.



RAT RUNNING

It's vital that the A47 works don't create a new rat/running problem to the South of the 47 between Honingham and Wymondham. I continue to work with NCC officers, Councillors and Parish Councils on getting proper mitigation.

SEN

The level of Special Educational Need in our schools continues to grow hugely. Having led the campaign to secure the £7m relocation and upgrade of the Chapel Road School in Attleborough (now the world class Chapel Green) I am working with NCC leader Cllr Andrew Proctor to get the Dereham Fred Nicholson school similarly upgraded.



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OFFSHORE WIND ENERGY

The existing plans for connecting offshore wind energy to the national Grid propose c 000's Km's of cabling across our coastline to 10 massive substations (each the size of Wembley Stadium) down the Norfolk and Suffolk coast.

This is bonkers.

That's why I've been campaigning for an offshore Ring Main to connect the Offshore wind farms and bring the electricity ashore in one or two places not 10.

If accepted this proposal would save huge areas of the Norfolk and Suffolk coastline from unnecessary violation.



MENTAL HEALTH

For far too long, Mental Health has been viewed as the 'Cinderella' of health provision in this country. That's why I have always striven to do all I can to speak up for mental health services and, while much still needs to happen, have welcomed the Government's work since 2010 to give Mental Health treatment parity with Physical Health.



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Recently, I have taken part in webinars and roundtables hosted by Lloyds Banking Group to highlight mental health in Agriculture - one of our biggest industries in the East, but one often overlooked on such issues (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

I also participated in NACOA's #LunchtimeLives to support their work to help the children of alcoholic parents (see [here](#)) and have consistently spoken out about the need to think of mental health as so many struggle to navigate Covid this year, and the huge difficulties that has presented.

DISABILITY SUPPORT

Although we have got better as a society since the Paralympics, ours is still a hard county and country in which to be disabled. Our wounded veterans, children born with disabilities and those who find themselves for whatever reason in a wheelchair or living with a disability face real hurdles getting around - and sometimes real hardship coping. That's why I continue to work on:

The Wymondham station access:

Delighted that through the Task Force I set up with South Norfolk Council we have got funding for a disabled access ramp at Wymondham station.



Veterans

For too long too many of our Armed Forces veterans have suffered from terrible post-conflict trauma, physical and often mental injury.

They should not also have to live in fear of lawyers chasing for criminal convictions and compensation for things soldiers were doing for their country. Of course genuine illegal war crimes must be dealt with properly. But there is a balance. Those who put their live on the line to fight for us in Afghanistan or Iraq or Kuwait or Northern Ireland deserve some support.

Free School Meals

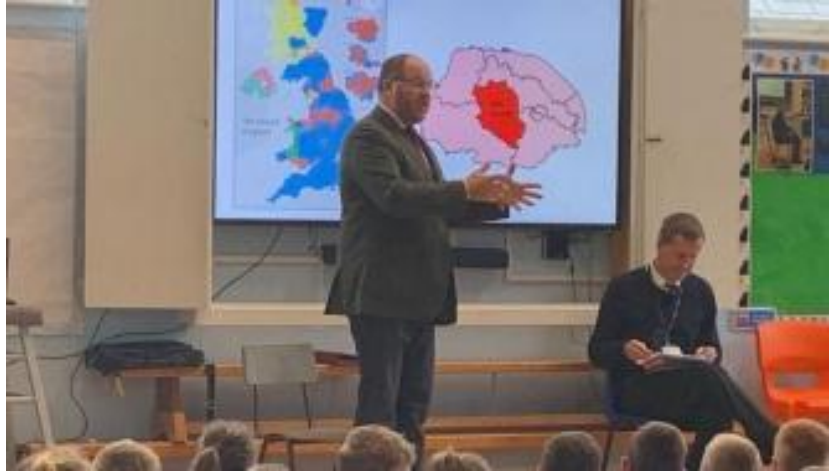
The Covid pandemic has shown the most inspiring and the most saddening aspects of our society.

While millions volunteered as community responders behind the scenes criminals exploited the crisis.

And Covid revealed how dependent so many low income working households are on benefits & free school meals. It's morally indefensible when we are rightly spending billions on business support - for children to suffer educationally (and nutritionally) because of the school shutdown.

Hungry children can't learn. That's why I supported the Free School Meal campaign in the summer by Marcus Rashford, and am delighted Ministers have committed to ongoing FSM and out of school support.

For more details click [here](#).



BREXIT

We are now in the very final stages of the EU post-Brexit trade negotiations. I'm still quietly confident that the negotiators will find a basis for agreement.

I deeply hope so. After the economic carnage of Covid, our national economy & local businesses need some stability and confidence on which to plan.

We must avoid a chaotic NoDeal trade war, tariffs and customs hold ups for our trade. We need EU & UK negotiators to find a sensible way to step back from the brink. We have 3 weeks to Jan 1st. Ministers & MPs - all of us - should work through Xmas to avoid a NoDeal Tariff Trade War which would damage the EU & UK post-Covid recovery.

Everyone needs to keep working to find a sensible & fair deal on behalf of the people we serve. If the EU refuse us the FreeTrade Agreement we promised in the election 12months ago we would deliver, we need a PlanB.

The British people deserve better than:

- ✗NoDeal WTO Brexit
- ✗Tariff Trade War with the EU
- ✗massive disruption & costs to British business

So we need a Plan B that honours the 2016 EUref 48:52 vote to Leave the EU, + our Manifesto promises.

To me the only off-the-shelf solution is #EFTA - the European Free Trade Area.

- ✓ex EU
- ✓In SingleMarket
- ✓ex CustomsUnion
- ✓ex CAP CPF
- ✓Free to do TradeDeals
- ✓Ex-EU jurisdiction



I hope and believe we will get a good Trade Deal with the EU, but if not I will be backing EFTA as the most sensible Plan B.

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OUR MARKET TOWNS

Traditional market towns face massive challenges adapting to the falling footfall from online retail, dependence on out-of-town Supermarkets for household supplies, and the now the damage of Covid.

Covid has accelerated the steady decline of so many of our market towns. We will need to make sure it also accelerates our help for them to adapt and find new retail and consumer roles as the beating hearts of our rural communities.

I continue to work on various projects:

Dereham

- Working with new young Mayor Cllr Stuart Green and AboutDereham Partnership to establish the new Dereham Town Partnership I proposed in 2017.
- Ensuring the necessary Southern road link to the A47 to ease the terrible traffic gridlock in Toftwood.



Watton and Wayland

- Working with local Councillors Cllr Tina Kiddell and Cllr Claire Bowes, the Town Council, Breckland DC and the Wayland Partnership to try and establish a Watton and Wayland Regeneration Partnership.



OUR MARKET TOWNS

Wymondham

- Working with local business leaders to ensure a stronger voice for local traders on the High St and Market in the Town Council / Town Plan.
- Leading the successful campaign to secure £600,000 from HMG to make access at Platform 2 of Wymondham Station step-free - as part of the £32 million package DfT has given Norwich, and the surrounding area, as part of the Transforming Cities Fund.



Attleborough

- Working with the new Mayor Phil Leslie and Breckland DC Town Team to promote a proper Town Plan to provide for proper traffic management, railway station refurbishment & improvement of ten historic town centre.
- Working with Network Rail and Abellio to secure enhanced frequency of services.



Hingham

- Working with local Councillors on traffic management through this beautiful and historic town centre.



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COVID-19: LESSONS LEARNT

INTEGRATION OF CARE AND NHS:

This years emergency has forced the joint working of NHS and social care which is so overdue.

For far too long funding from London has tended to focus on the big expensive NHS Hospitals rather than the less glamorous but equally important community care. Covid triggered joint working by Norfolk County Council Social Care and NHS in a way we have long needed.

We need to maintain it.



FOOD PROCESSING PLANTS

The outbreaks at Banham Poultry, Cranswick, Gressingham Duck and Bernard Mathews highlighted the importance of our farming and food sectors, the vulnerability of its supply chains to shocks, its reliance on low cost foreign labour and the difficulty of tracing staff.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP NOT NATIONAL BUREAUCRACY

Norfolk's leaders rose magnificently to the challenge of Covid. Our county won acclaim for its leadership.

But too often slow and bureaucratic centralised NHS and DHSC systems made local leadership hard. We need more local healthcare leadership and freedom.



Breckland



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INVISIBLE CRIME/ DRUGS/DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Behind the scenes during Covid our police were dealing with a massive surge in crime: Drug trafficking on County Lines. Human trafficking to feed the online porn and sex industry. And domestic violence.

In my weekly briefings with Chief Constable Simon Bailey and his team it is clear what an outstanding job our Police do. Often invisibly. Thank you.



HEALTH AND ECONOMICS: LIFE AND LIVELIHOOD

Covid has shown that as a country and Government we have for too long thought of Health and Economy as in separate silos: this year we have seen how fundamentally they are linked. And how ill equipped we are as a society to do health economics: to properly cost disease, value health and measure the impact of health and economy on each other.



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2021: A YEAR TO BUILD BACK BETTER

SMALL BUSINESS AND LOCAL ECONOMY

2020 has been a devastating year for small businesses - the smaller the hardest hit.

For many freelance, self employed and small business owners - especially in retail and hospitality - it has been a catastrophe.

For them - and for our local economy - and for our communities and society - it's vital that we put small business and enterprise at the heart of our recovery plans.

Nationally and locally.

Do you know how many small businesses there are in Norfolk? 30,000!

Imagine if we could help them all to take on one or two extra people.

That's how we will grow a fast recovery with opportunities for ALL.



If we support small businesses and provide the digital connectivity we need, our rural area is poised to see a renaissance of small businesses with more and more people working from or close to home and self employed - meaning more people of working age in villages and towns. That's the Vision I set up The Norfolk way to champion.

To ensure a strong voice for local businesses I've set up the Norfolk Enterprise Festival.

After This years event had to be cancelled we held a digital Festival as part of the LEP Restart programme.

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NEW GROWTH SECTORS

Covid has accelerated the changing working and retail patterns which have been driving the slow decline of our traditional High Streets.

To recover and Build Back Better we will need to unleash the fastest growing new sectors with the capacity to generate the jobs and prosperity we need.

How? To help shape the local economic recovery I've set up the Norfolk Magnificent Seven:

7 world class local business leaders in key high growth sectors:

- Agritech
- HealthTech
- GreenTech
- Smart Mobility
- Digital economy
- Arts&Culture
- Tourism



DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

We will never unlock this recovery or the rural renaissance without good digital connectivity which is KEY now to

- local businesses
- public services
- families and communities

That's why I'm continuing to campaign for the Rural Broadband Voucher scheme I successfully campaigned for in 2014 to be reinstated.

In Whitehall rural areas are called the "last 5%".

If you live here with poor connectivity it's 100% essential.

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RETRAINING AND RESUME FOUNDATION

With c 50,000 redundancies in Norfolk and c 2million expected nationwide as a result of Covid - it is VITAL that the Government turbocharge the UKs Skills and Training sector.

We need to invest in lifelong learning so that people from 16 to 60 can retrain for the new jobs being created in our new growth sectors.



PROPERTY REGENERATION FUND

We will never unlock this recovery or the rural renaissance without good digital connectivity which is KEY now to

- Local businesses
- Public services
- Families and communities

That's why I'm continuing to campaign for the Rural Broadband Voucher scheme I successfully campaigned for in 2014 to be reinstated.

So I've suggested and am working to set up a Norfolk Property Regeneration Fund - made up of local investors and builders and property developers - working with Councils and the LEP - to move in and convert sites fast. With a bit of creative thinking we could convert:

- Shops to flats
- Shopping arcades to low cost small business office incubators
- High St sites into managed sheltered care accommodation centres close to local facilities
- Land around railway stations into small business units
- Town centres and High Streets into more attractive visitor attractions

SOME APPEARANCES IN THE HOUSE THIS YEAR

Wednesday 11th March - [HERE](#)

Tuesday 17th March - [HERE](#)

Thursday 2nd July 2020 - [HERE](#)

Thursday 10th September - [HERE](#)

Monday 12th October - [HERE](#)

Wednesday 4th November - [HERE](#)

How to stay in touch



www.facebook.com/GeorgeFreemanMidNorfolk



<https://twitter.com/GeorgeFreemanMP>



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The screenshot shows the Facebook profile of George Freeman MP. The profile picture is a group photo of several men in suits. The cover photo is a blue sign that says "BRITAIN BEYOND BREXIT". The profile name is "George Freeman MP" with a verified badge, and the handle is "@GeorgeFreemanMP". The bio includes: "1NationTory| ExMinister DfT, BEIS, DHSC, @UKTradeEnvoy| Founder, @BigTentIdeas| Founder, @2020tories + @OneNationCons | Author/Editor #BritainBeyondBrexit|". Contact information includes the website "www.bigtent.org.uk" and "georgefreeman.co.uk", and the phone number "01953 600617". The page shows 2,497 likes and 2,697 followers. A recent post from 23 hours ago is visible, featuring a child's drawing of a reindeer and Santa Claus with the text "Stay safe this Christmas."

SPEAKING UP IN PARLIAMENT AND THE LOCAL & NATIONAL MEDIA

A large part of the job of an MP is to stand up and speak up for our area. No longer being a Minister in Government I have had more time to do that and to work with our local council leaders at NCC, BDC and SNDC to lobby Ministers and highlight the issues we need Ministers and Civil servants in London to understand about rural areas like OURS.



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Please note: if you have got in contact via a third party or campaign site such as 38 Degrees, Do-Gooder, Writetothem or similar, it may be the case that we hold a randomly generated holding address from one of these parties which then directs to your personal account. If this is the case, you will need to get in contact with the third party site or provide us with the holding address so that we can also remove this from our systems, as there is no way of us removing this without knowing the precise email contacted on.

BRINGING MY SURGERIES TO YOU!

With Covid having stopped my regular 1-1 surgeries, “Supermarket Surgeries” and “Politics in the Pub” events this year, I have been busy speaking to many of you over Zoom about some of the most serious/urgent casework matters brought to my attention during the pandemic.

Hopefully, next year will eventually see a return to something closer to “normality” and that I will be able to get “back out on the streets” for my usual programme of in-person surgeries and events. If you would interest in having me hold a Surgery or a Politics in the Pub! In YOUR neighbourhood, please drop me an email or call the office and I’ll organise it.

- ✓ Supermarket surgeries
- ✓ Zoom surgeries
- ✓ Visiting local shops



Reporting Back I continue to try and make my work accessible with my programme Digital Democracy, so that people who are busy and want to stay in touch easily online can do so at the press of a button:

- ✓ Email bulletins
- ✓ Surgeries
- ✓ Weekly Constituency

CASEWORK AND CORRESPONDENCE

Typically, my team and I respond to over 1000 casework emails and letters a week from constituents – covering a vast array of problems and topics. We prioritise the most urgent and try and deal with ALL constituency correspondence within 14 days maximum.

If YOU need my help with an issue, please do send me an email with your full name, postal address (including a post code) and a detailed summary of your case. My team and I will then come back to you as soon as we can.

Yours With best wishes for a happy Christmas!

George.

George Freeman MP
Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk



P.S. Congratulations to the winners of this year’s Christmas card competition, Ethan Matheus (Age 6) from Wicklewood Primary School – with his design “Stay Safe at Christmas”

Many thanks to all those that submitted entries, it was a very strong field this year. Special thanks go to the runners up: Toby Aldridge (Age 10) of Lyng C of E School, George Ball-James (Age 6) of Great Ellingham Primary School and Isaac Mountfield-Smith (Age 4) of Old Buckenham Primary School.