North Norfolk District Council has been proactive in offering support to local residents and businesses in response to COVID19. During 2021 the Government initiated opening up strategies and NNDC implemented the “you are welcome” campaign during the summer months – enabling locals and tourists to enjoy parts of North Norfolk while feeling safe. Various measures introduced included street decals and mitigations to encourage social distancing. COVID marshals were sent out across the district to help support businesses and local communities. NNDC has issued out Government business grants and its own tailored discretionary grants to local businesses.

NNDC has continued to improve functions and resources for North Norfolk residents. We have launched a customer service strategy. The newly introduced measures include simplifying the options for the menu on the telephone line – ensuring that it is easier and quicker for residents to speak with an officer and get their issue addressed. During this time period, there has been a significant rise in residents undertaking “self-service”, via using online forms to register or make payments etc. We have ensured that there are more specific web-forms which can be used and raised to the correct department. Face to face appointments have been limited this past year and we have introduced a video call appointment option. This will not replace face to face meetings but allows our residents a range of choice in the accessibility of reaching officers to discuss issues.

Our new leisure centre, The Reef, opened in Sheringham in November 2021; this has replaced Splash swimming pool. The Reef Leisure centre is one of the biggest and most ambitious projects undertaken by the council and has been met with positive feedback from both residents and tourists. The Reef offers a diverse range of facilities, including the main pool (built to Sport England’s high standards), learner pool with adjustable depth floor, splash pad, fitness and gym studios and multi-purpose activity studios. The Reef is accessible for all users – there is a poolpad which allows wheelchair users to enter the pool. There are also changing place facilities. The Reef is innovative and addresses the climate emergency and our focus on environmental policies – this facility is heated through solar thermal energy, meaning energy from the sun directly heats the water and reduce the reliance on gas.

On March 16th 2022, Natural England issued guidance to over 70 planning authorities across the the country (NNDC included) regarding the implications of planning towards nutrient neutrality and water quality. There are large areas within the North Norfolk district which have been affected – the catchment areas of the River Wensum Special Area of Conservation and the Broads Special Area of Conservation and RAMSAR. This guidance from Natural England has major implications on a range of development types within those catchment areas that include overnight accommodation. Natural England state that Councils are required to consider the impact of nutrient neutrality before planning permission can be granted. During this year there has been 38 NNDC validated planning applications for Ludham (dated: June 2021 – April 2022), and since the issuing of this guidance these later applications will need to be reviewed carefully to ensure that this is not detrimental to water quality. Applicants will be updated on this process.

We are continuing to work towards achieving key aspects within our corporate plan and focusing on measures in the COVID recovery phase, ensuring that businesses and local residents have the necessary support.

Cllr. Adam Varley