

**Motion to:** Council

20 June 2023

**Subject:** Rights of the River Wensum

**Proposer:** Councillor Schmierer

**Seconded:** Councillor Hoechner

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In April 2022 a celebration of the rights of the river Wensum took place in Wensum Park. Many hundreds of people attended and heard the informal but powerful declaration of its rights.

Our freshwater environments and waterways are facing numerous pressures from pollution, climate change, land management practices, development and amenity use. It is clear that our environmental laws and regulations are failing to prevent the destruction of nature, often simply regulating the rate of destruction. The United Nations has called for the human race to rethink its relationship with the natural world in order that we might enable the recovery of nature upon which humans and all species are dependant: ('Solutions for a Planet in Crisis' speech from Inger Anderson in January 2021).

At the same time there is an emerging global movement of governments recognising the Rights of Nature and in particular the rights of rivers. Rights of Nature is a way of re-thinking our relationship with nature - from one of dominance to one of interdependency requiring a respectful, holistic and empathic approach.

It can also act as a catalyst to shift our thinking from an extractive economy towards a regenerative economy. The idea of nature having rights is not new. Nature has rights. What is new is how we can intervene using a rights of nature lens to protect nature and to give the river a voice as a single entity, from source to sea. We have extended rights to corporations globally – a company which is a wholly fictional entity has gained legal rights and is recognised as a legal entity distinct from its individual decision makers.

If we can define a corporation as having the rights of personhood, then we can imagine a River having these personhood rights?

The Universal Declaration of River Rights establishes that all rivers shall possess, at minimum, the following fundamental rights: (1) The right to flow, (2) The right perform essential functions within the river's ecosystem, (3) The right to be free from pollution, (4) The right to feed and be fed by sustainable aquifers, (5) The right to native biodiversity, and (6) The right to regeneration and restoration.

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This approach is supported by many local wildlife bodies. It offers an enormous opportunity to help develop a River Wensum Charter over the next 2 years which establishes the rights listed above.

### Council **RESOLVES**:

- 1) to acknowledge the growing global movement of 'rights of nature' as a framework for rethinking its relationship with the environment.
- 2) that there is a case to be made for considering our interactions with our local waterways in the context of 'Rights of Rivers' and through which the health and wellbeing of the River Wensum can be addressed.
- 3) to explore with local communities and relevant stakeholders the implementation of Rights of Rivers along the River Wensum. This will involve working towards the production of a 'Declaration on the Rights of the River Wensum' by relevant stakeholders for possible endorsement by the council within 2 years.

**Motion to:** Council

20 June 2023

**Subject:** Local Traffic Schemes

**Proposer:** Councillor Stonard

**Seconded:** Councillor Hampton

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Council welcomes the proposals from Norfolk County Labour councillors to devolve local traffic schemes and road maintenance to joint bodies consisting of district and county councillors. Council believes this will give our communities a greater say, enable this council to involve more local people and integrate local traffic schemes into other local initiatives and neighbourhood plans.

Council **RESOLVES:**

To engage with the county council to discuss the best way of setting up a joint body, governance and budgeting arrangements and all associated matters with a view to including considering any financial consequences as part of our 2024 budget and starting such joint arrangements from April 2024 or soon thereafter as possible.

**Motion to:** Council

20 June 2023

**Subject:** Sewage discharges in rivers and coastal waters

**Proposer:** Councillor Mike Sands

**Seconded:** Councillor Hampton

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Council believes sewage discharges in rivers and coastal waters is unacceptable. There is a direct and indirect adverse impact on water quality, the environment, human health, amenity, and businesses. It also damages the reputation of our beautiful city and county. Council regrets the lack of urgency and meaningful sanctions for sewage discharges and recognises increased development in Norwich and Norfolk will add to the problem in future unless action is taken at source.

Council **RESOLVES:**

- 1) Welcome the government's intention to consult on the introduction of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water management Act 2010 and urges government to expedite the process. Council believes water companies should be held automatically liable for any sewage discharge. In addition to fines levied upon them, water companies should automatically be liable for compensation for direct and indirect impacts on those, particularly businesses, near to or affected by the discharge assessed by an independent body funded by water companies but not appointed by or accountable to them.
- 2) Support all options to bring water companies back into public, municipal or co-operative ownership whereby profits can be put towards much needed infrastructural improvements rather than going to shareholders as dividend payments, and to ensure greater adherence to regulation as well as opportunity to enhance environmental protection.

**Motion to:** Council

20 June 2023

**Subject:** Protection and recovery of the swift population

**Proposer:** Councillor Champion

**Seconder:** Councillor Fox

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Swift populations are rapidly declining across the UK. Between 1995 and 2016, numbers of the birds declined by 53%, with first-year survival of the fledgling birds being similarly in decline. In 2021, they were added to the Red list on the UK Conservation Status report.

A simple action that can be taken to support swift populations is the addition of swift boxes or swift bricks across urban areas, providing homes for the birds when they arrive back in the UK in the spring to nest. Without homes they can return to each year, swifts will not nest, as they return each year to the same locations.

Local projects such as Wild King Street and the Norwich Swift Network have been working to make sure that homes exist for returning swifts; multiple swift boxes have gone up on sites across the city. Norwich City Council owns residential and commercial property across Norwich that would be suitable for aiding in this endeavour, and with local planning policies, can influence the provision of swift homes on many more buildings in our city.

Council **RESOLVES** to:

- 1) require its wholly-owned company, Norwich Regeneration Limited, to include swift bricks or swift boxes as standard on all its new properties, and to, where practicable;
- 2) require Norwich City Services Limited to install swift boxes onto current council-owned properties when roof repairs or similar at-height works are carried out;
- 3) update planning policies to include a requirement for swift bricks to be used in all new buildings;
- 4) as part of the Love Norwich scheme, arrange for the council's at-height working equipment and staff trained in the use of it to be available to help put swift boxes onto private properties at intervals through the year;
- 5) use Citizen magazine and the council's social media accounts to raise awareness about swifts, inform residents how to install their own swift

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boxes, and publicise other appropriate actions members of the public can take; and

- 6) work with the Norwich Historic Churches Trust and the caretakers of other tall buildings in the city to find appropriate ways church towers and other high places can be used to support swift colonies.

**Motion to:** Council

20 June 2023

**Subject:** Worker representation on boards

**Proposer:** Councillor Schmierer

**Seconded:** Councillor Hoechner

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Worker representation on boards has a long tradition in many European countries. A number of studies have highlighted beneficial outcomes for both companies and workers associated with worker representation on boards. These benefits include increased firm market value and capital formation, more effective governance due to the valuable operational knowledge workers hold, higher engagement and motivation of workers and more career opportunities. It is rightfully argued that *'Employees are key stakeholders whose contribution is necessary for the success of innovative enterprises'* and that *'Workforce relationships are central to company success, and worker board representation would help boards to manage these key stakeholder relationships more effectively.'*

Council **NOTES** that:

- 1) as part of the recent LGA Corporate Peer Challenge peers have recommended a further review of the governance arrangements in line with best practice.
- 2) The council has committed to addressing peer recommendations in the coming months.

Council **RESOLVES** to ask cabinet to restructure the NCSL Board of Directors to include direct worker representation on the board.

**Motion to:** Council

31 January 2023

**Subject:** National Housing Crisis

**Proposer:** Councillor Jones

**Seconded:** Councillor Huntley

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The worst cost of living crisis since the 1950s is coinciding with a national housing crisis. The result of this will be an increasing number of our residents deprived of one of the most fundamental pillars to a healthy and happy life – a secure, stable, and affordable home.

Homeownership is in decline following a period of rising house prices that has made buying a home unaffordable for too many. This combined with a drastic depletion in social housing stock has forced an increasing number of Norwich residents into the private rented sector and at the mercy of rising rents and under-regulated tenancies. Worse still, many are left without a permanent residence at all, as levels of homelessness remain high.

Whilst this Council has welcomed the Norwich Council Housing Strategy 2020-26 it is now calling for the acceleration of its delivery to increase the provision of affordable, secure, high-quality, and energy-efficient housing across the city to tackle the root of the housing crisis locally.

However, in the face of a worsening national economic crisis, urgent action is needed to protect our residents, especially those in the most precarious living circumstances, from its severest impacts.

To support residents through the immediate and acute period of the cost-of-living crisis, this Council **RESOLVES** to call upon Government to:

- 1) Increase Local Housing Allowance rates in line with rising private market rents - making these more affordable and reducing the proportion of income spent on rent at a time when household budgets are increasingly squeezed.
- 2) Introduce rent reforms and delegate powers to local authorities to set rent caps to protect private tenants from further rental increases or exploitative charges at a time of crisis.
- 3) Legislate a no winter evictions guarantee to protect private tenants from homelessness through the most challenging period of the cost-of-living crisis.



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- 4) Abolish the Right to Buy in favour of expanding the provision of high-quality, energy-efficient, and environmentally sustainable social housing stock providing homes for residents and their families.
- 5) Expand pathways to homeownership so that owning a home can still be a realistic aspiration for any residents.
- 6) Prioritise the passing of the Renters' Reform Bill that seeks to improve standards and regulations across the private rented sector to better protect tenants.

**Motion to:** Council

31 January 2023

**Subject:** Norwich Bus Fares

**Proposer:** Councillor Stonard

**Seconded:** Councillor Hampton

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This council recognises the vital importance of affordable, reliable, and high-quality public transport to the functioning of Norwich. We therefore strongly welcome the recent IPPR research on public transport, published on 6 October 2022 under the title "To support low-income households, it's time to reduce the cost of daily bus travel". While the report makes clear that reducing fares is not the only issue needed to increase bus patronage – interventions to improve speed, reliability and the experience of passengers are all required as well - reductions in the costs of public transport for passengers are essential for a fair transport system.

Council **RESOLVES** to

- 1) note that; -
  - a) Low-income households are the most likely to use buses, while research by the RAC Foundation shows that since 2013 the cost of bus travel has risen by a greater extent than all other forms of transport. It is the poorest households, without access to other forms of travel, that have borne the brunt of these increases driven by de-regulation and lack of long-term funding.
  - b) Any reduction in bus fares would therefore be of the greatest benefit to those least well off. Capping bus fares at no more than £1 per day would save the poorest 20% of households in England £0.8bn a year. Making all bus fares in England free would save the poorest 40% of households £1.5bn a year.
  - c) This Council notes that a policy of making bus fares in England entirely free would cost £2.3bn a year, with the greatest benefits going to the least well off. For comparison, the recent 'fiscal event' in September 2022 proposed £40bn worth of tax cuts, mostly to the most well off. The current proposed Government funding for new roads is £27bn, for schemes that are likely to increase pollution and make the climate and biodiversity crises worse. For the same money, bus travel could be made free for at least ten years, helping to reduce car journeys, and making progress towards a net zero transport system.

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- 2) ask that the Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary of State for Transport, the Shadow Secretary State for Transport, Norwich's two MPs and to the Leader of the county council expressing this Council's support for making public transport in Norwich free of charge; and
- 3) Use its existing partnerships and relationships with the county council and bus operators, to work to promote this objective.