

English Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

Town and Parish Council Briefings
18th & 25th February 2025



NORTH
NORFOLK
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Devolution

Devolution is the transfer of powers, functions and budgets from Whitehall into the English regions

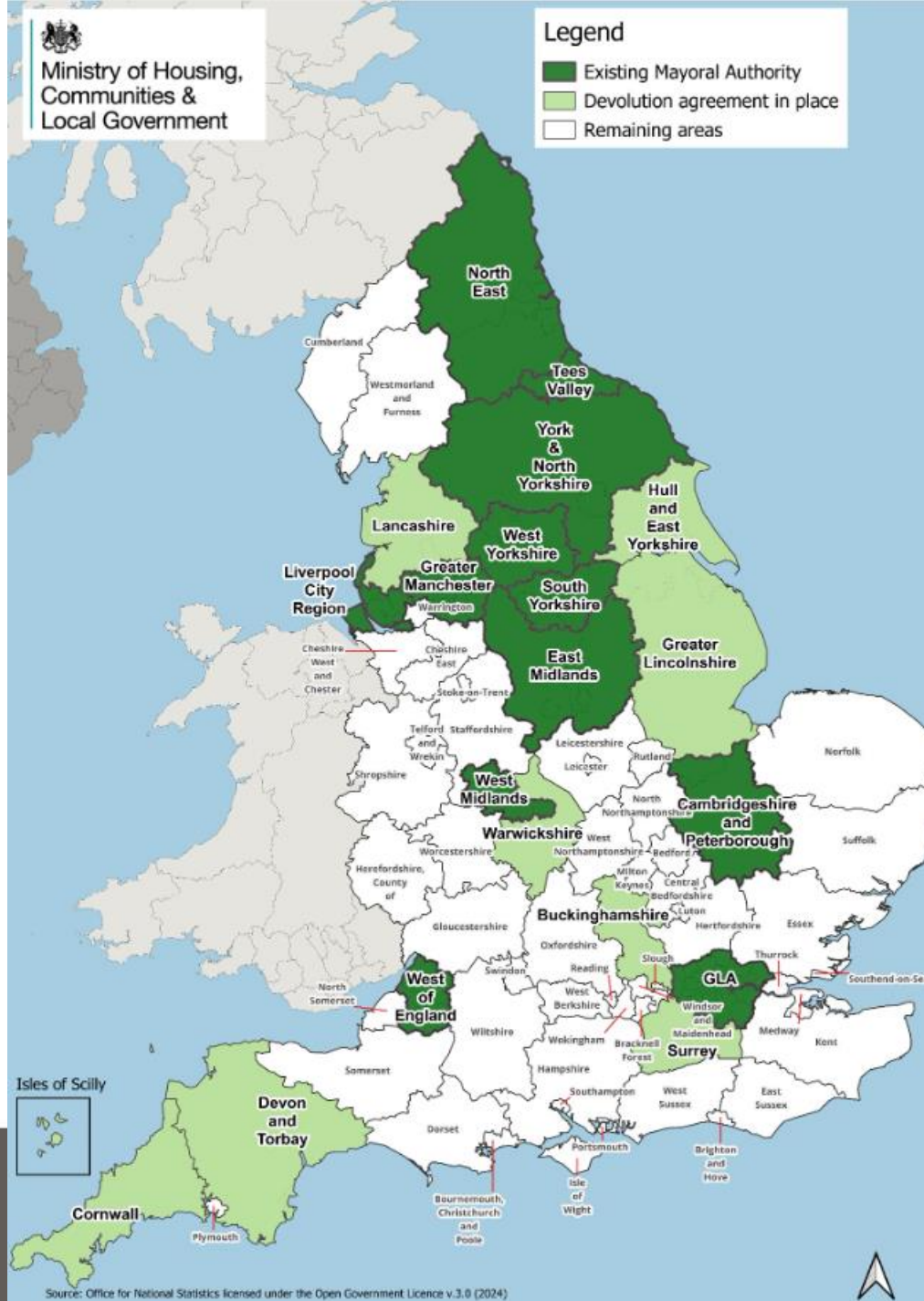
- Transport
- Strategic infrastructure
- Strategic Planning and Housing Numbers
- Economic development and planning
- Environment and climate change
- Skills and employment support
- Health, wellbeing and public sector reform
- Public safety

These responsibilities are discharged through the “establishment” of Combined Authorities

This isn't new -

- The London Mayoralty was established in 2000
- Greater Manchester Devolution Deal agreed in 2014
- Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Teeside and West Midlands Deals agreed in 2015
- Deal agreed for “West of England” – essentially Bristol and Avon in 2016
- North of Tyne Deal agreed in 2017, but in 2024 expanded to become North East Mayoralty covering all of Northumberland, County Durham and five Tyne and Wear authorities.
- West Yorkshire Deal signed in 2020
- York and North Yorkshire and East Midlands (Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire) Mayors elected 2024
- With Conservative Government announcing that Hull and East Yorkshire and Greater Lincolnshire would each elect mayors under Devolution Deals in May 2025

This isn't new -



So, what is proposed now?

- English Devolution White Paper published on 16th December 2024 proposed that Devolution Deals would be agreed across the whole of England during the current Parliamentary term – i.e. by summer 2029.
- Proposals invited from across the whole of England based (ideally) on minimum populations of 1.5 million people with no “orphan” areas – i.e. small areas left out through not being able to agree to work in areas of scale.
- Where local agreement cannot be reached Government will agree or impose “Strategic Authorities”.
- White Paper also proposes that, whilst a separate process, the Government expects that areas where Devolution Deals are agreed will move to a unitary form of local government structures “below” the Combined Authorities.

So, what is proposed for Norfolk and Suffolk?

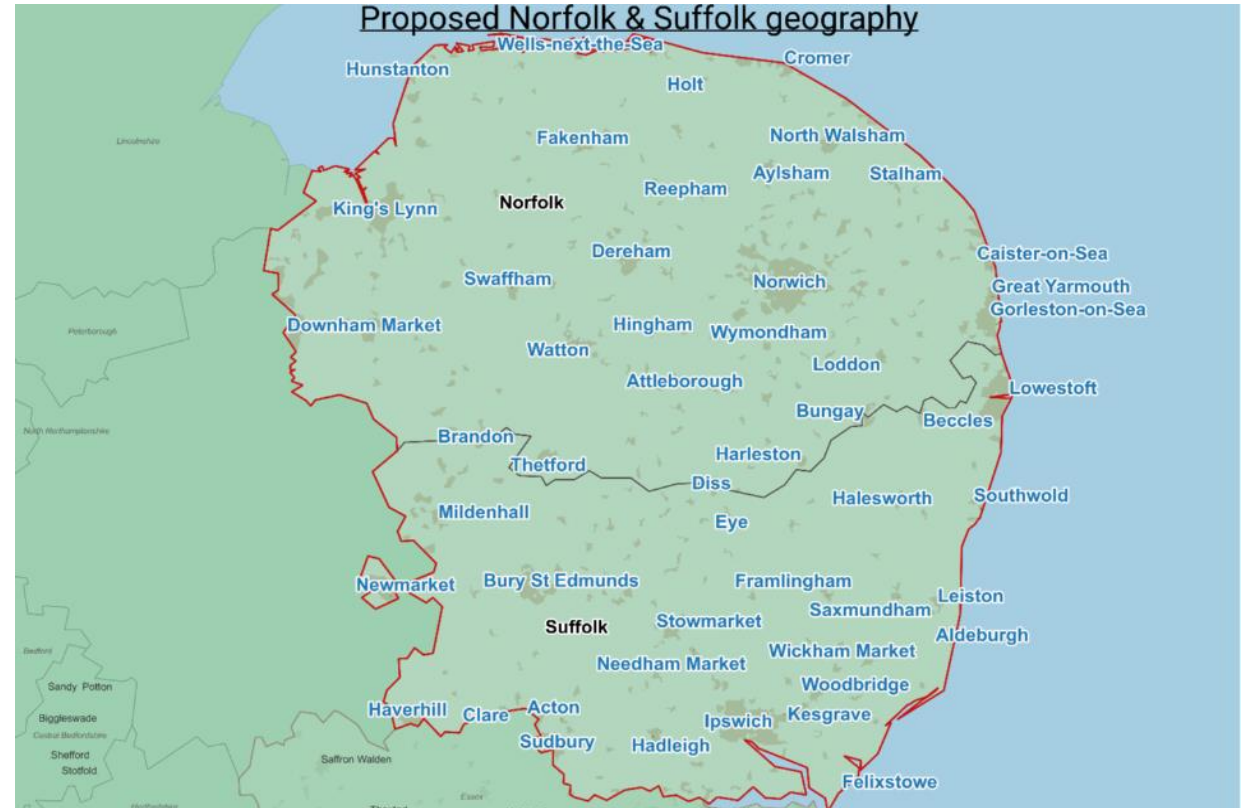
- White Paper invited proposals for Devolution Deals to be submitted by upper tier authorities (County Councils) by 10th January 2025
- Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils submitted a joint Expression of Interest
- The 12 District Council Leaders expressed support for the EoI recognising the opportunities which Devolution presented and that compared to those areas with Deals Norfolk and Suffolk were being “left behind”.
- 5th February – Government included Norfolk and Suffolk in its Devolution Priority Programme meaning that we are in the next phase of Devolution Deals to be taken forward.

So, what does that mean and what happens next?

- Government will work with Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils to “agree” a Combined Authority over the next twelve months and the terms of a Devolution Deal covering the next five years.
- New “body” to be created by end of the year and a mayoral election to be held May 2026
- At the present time no details of the discussions being held between the Government and the two county councils are known – in terms of the responsibilities the mayor will have – but it is thought that the first “deal” will focus on housing growth, transport schemes, economic growth and skills development with future consideration being given to assuming the responsibilities of Police and Crime Commissioners

Consultation process

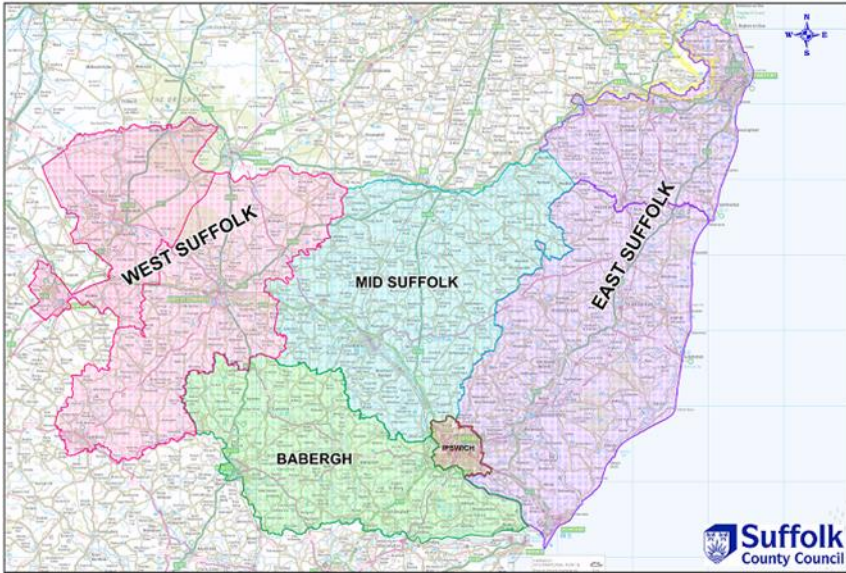
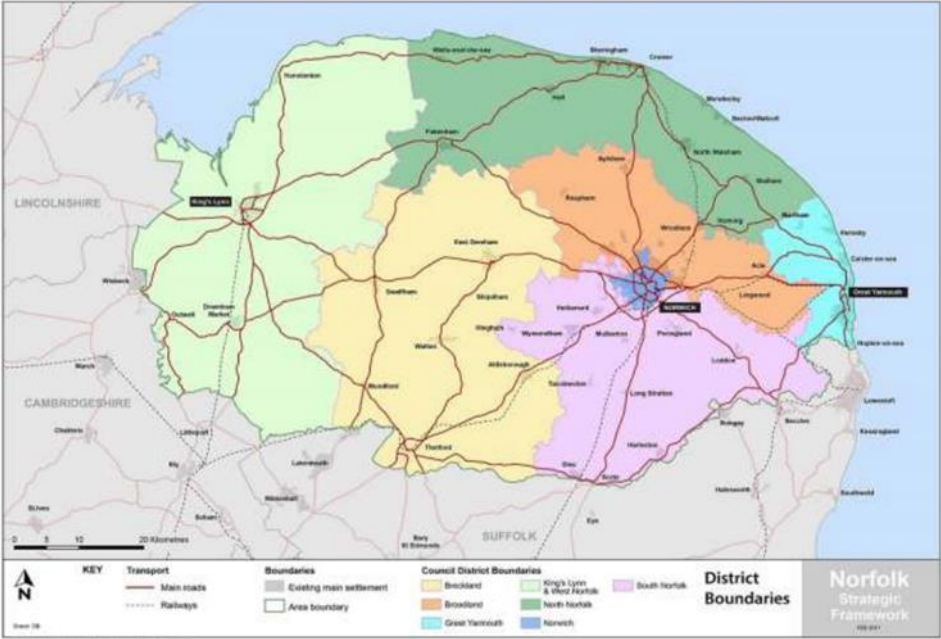
- Establishing a Mayoral Combined Authority across Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council
- Published 17th February – with comments invited until 13th April 2025
- <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/lggc/norfolk-and-suffolk-devolution-consultation>
- Would appreciate you sharing any comments made to the consultation with the District and County Councils



Local Government Reorganisation

- Related to Devolution and the establishment of a Combined Authority across Norfolk and Suffolk, the Government has an expectation that unitary councils will be established “below” the Combined Authority - replacing the existing 2 county councils and 12 district councils.
- The Government confirmed its position in this regard by inviting the existing County and District authorities in Norfolk and Suffolk to put forward proposals for unitary councils in response to some published criteria – which for our rural counties might be challenging

Current Norfolk and Suffolk districts



Criteria for LGR

A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.

- Including being for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area and for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.

Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.

- As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population **of 500,000 or more**; but there may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area.
- Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.
- Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.
- In general, as with previous restructures, there is no proposal for council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation.

Criteria for LGR Cont/.....

Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.

- Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.
- Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money.
- Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.

- It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.
- Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.
- Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed.

Criteria for LGR Cont/.....

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.

New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

- Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.

Process

- Being in the Devolution Priority Programme also fires the starting gun on the local government reorganisation process....
- With initial proposals having to be submitted to Government by 21st March 2025
- And detailed Business Cases being prepared and submitted to Government by 26th September 2025
- Possibly with elections to “shadow” authorities in May 2027 and new authorities coming into being from 1st April 2028.
- Little detail provided as yet in terms of timescales or what powers and functions might pass to Town and Parish Councils.

So, what happens now or next?

- The District Councils in Norfolk have appointed Deloitte to advise us on the development of proposals for unitary proposals
- Now reviewing large range of data, holding conversations with Leaders and Chief Executives
- Will model and assess 1, 2 and 3 unitaries for Norfolk
- Understood that the County Council is developing proposal for a single county unitary
- Six of the seven districts understood to support three unitaries – probably Norwich, East and West? – recognising that the size of Norfolk, in terms of area and population is very large; but three authorities might not be financially viable

Issues for NNDC (1)

- Leader has written to Secretary of State at DCMS to ask about how tourism assets such as Cromer Pier should be treated – perhaps placing in a Trust
- Leader has written to Secretary of State at Defra to ask about coastal protection and management responsibilities are to be addressed as the White Paper is silent on this.
- We have highlighted the particular challenges of the district's housing market
- We have raised the issue of the lack of any real integrated Older Persons health and wellbeing service under the current County Adult Services structure and through the Integrated Care Board leaving Benjamin Court empty
- Issues of accessibility and cost of post-16 education and the impact that this has on career choices, social mobility and life-chances.

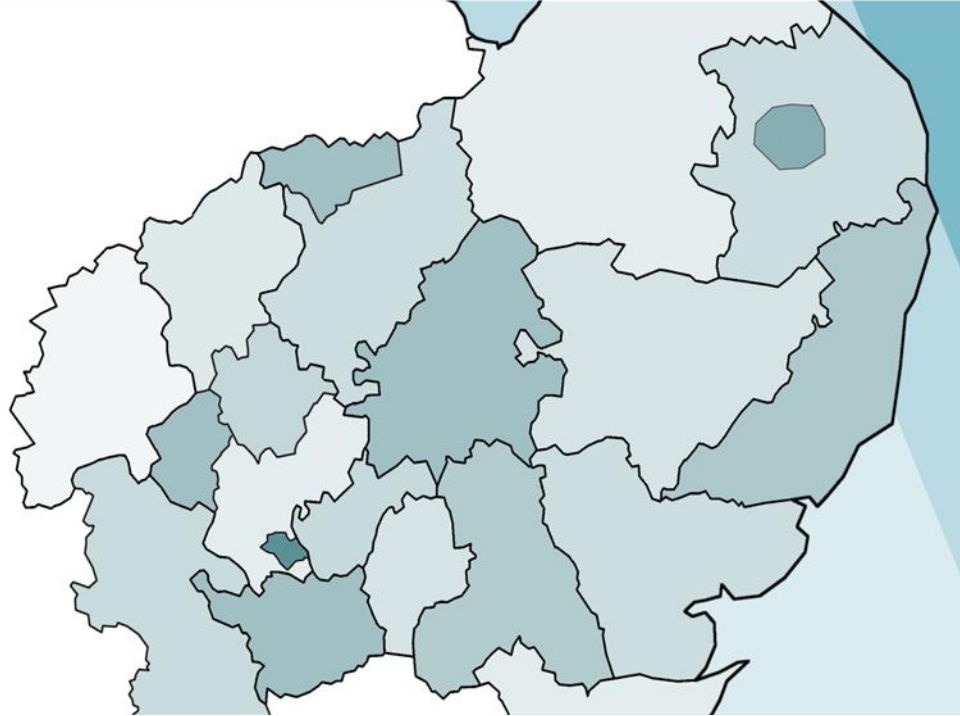
Issues for NNDC (2)

- Whilst the Government has said it would prefer to see new unitary councils made up of existing districts as building blocks – in Norfolk this is considered challenging because of size of county, populations of existing districts, pattern of settlements and large rural areas.
- Geography and sense of community and place is a big issue for Norfolk
- Issues of a democratic deficit – currently there is 1 district councillor for 2,200 electors in North Norfolk and 1 county councillor for 8,858 (2026) electors in Norfolk
- Most rural unitary councils have an average of 1 councillor to every 3,800 / 4,500 electors, but North Yorkshire 1 councillor to 5,373
- compared to more urban unitary authorities – Oldham – 1:2,850; Tameside – 1:3,157; Islington LB – 1:3,301; - so what does that mean for Norfolk?
- Norfolk is expected to have 744,000 electors in 2026 – at 4,000 electors per councillor this would mean Norfolk would have 186 councillors

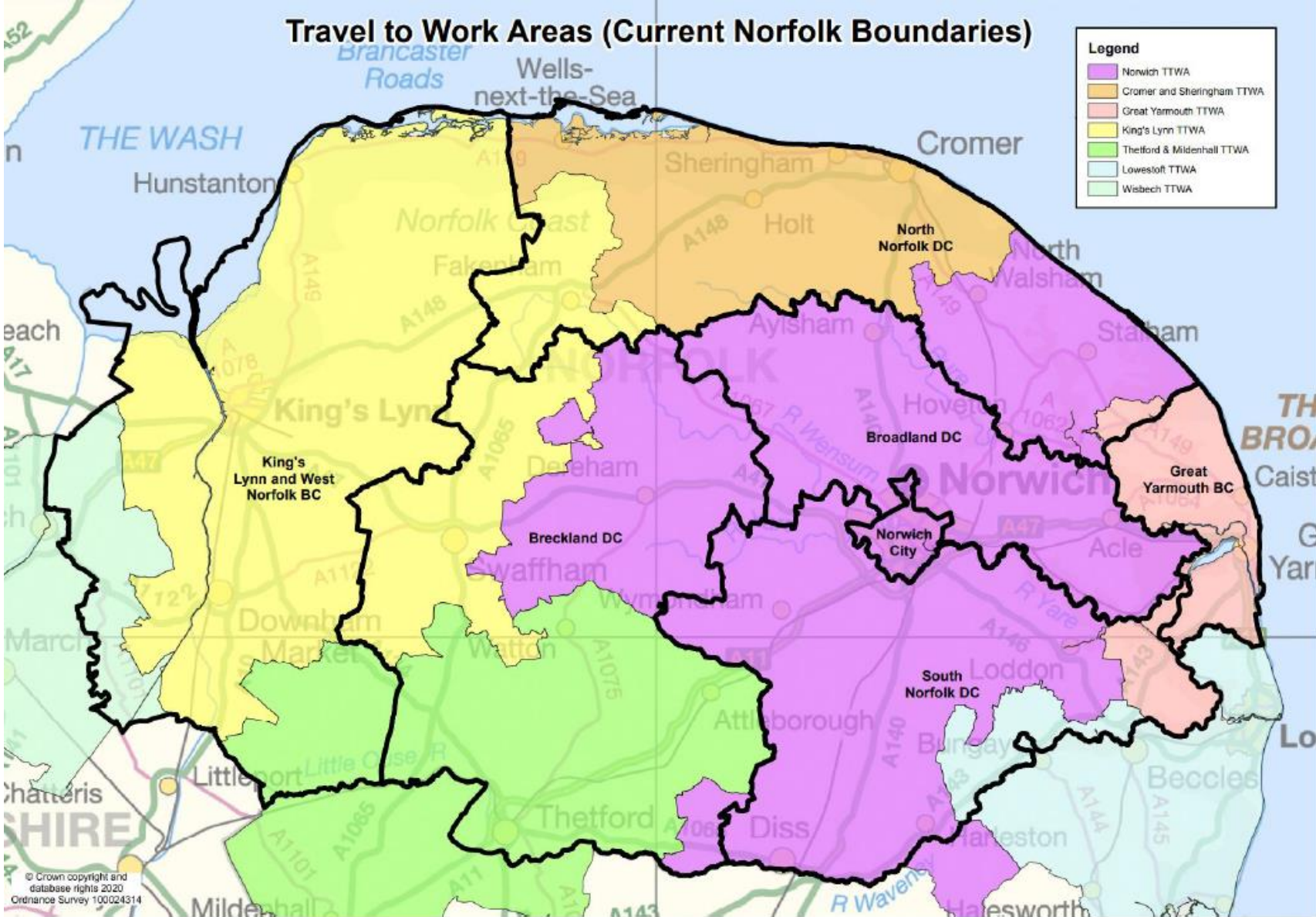
Issues for NNDC (3)

- We are working with other Norfolk and Suffolk districts
- We are seen as a positive partner with approaches from West, East and South!!
- Key issue is will Government support a unitary Norwich City authority on extended urban boundaries?
- What does that mean for the rest of the County?
 - If there are then two other authorities likely the existing North Norfolk district will be “split” – but unsure where any line might be drawn.....
- But the BBC has published this map – so a point of discussion?

A vision of the future by the BBC?



Geography using Travel to Work Areas?



Issues for Town and Parish Councils

- White Paper makes brief mention of Town and Parish Councils

“Local government plays an essential role in convening local partners around neighbourhoods to ensure that community voices are represented and people have influence over their place and their valued community assets. We want to work with the sector to ensure that the existing structures and mechanisms for community partnership enable them to fulfil this role. **We will also work with the town and parish council sector to improve engagement between them and local authorities.**”

- View that some assets could pass from district authorities to Town and Parish Councils but little detail – play areas, public toilets....but Government has said there should be “no asset sales” before LGR.
- Current consultation on “Strengthening the Standards and Conduct framework for local authorities in England” – ends 26th February.

Issues for Town and Parish Councils

- Uncertainty in short-term around existing relationships and future issues of representation within much larger authorities.
- Uncertainty around issues of asset transfer, additional responsibilities and capacity of town and parish council sector
- Do town and parishes have any views as to “where they see themselves” in the future?
- If you have concerns you can write to your Member of Parliament or to the Minister of State, Jim McMahon at MHCLG

Upcoming Dates

11th February – NNDC Member briefing

18th and 25th February – Town and Parish Council briefings

19th March – Report to Full Council

21st March – comments on initial or interim proposals to Government

26th September – Full Business Case to Government

Questions and Discussion