

Update on Roadworks, closures and traffic management in Harleston

A message to residents and local businesses from the Town Clerk

Over the past several weeks, many of you have contacted the Town Council to express frustration, worry, and at times genuine distress about the scale and impact of roadworks taking place across Harleston. Your messages have been clear: businesses are struggling, day-to-day travel has become unpredictable, and the sheer volume of closures has created the impression that the town is “shut”.

I want to begin by acknowledging those feelings directly. You are not overreacting. The disruption has been real, significant — and you deserve to understand what has happened, why it has happened, and what we are doing to ensure the next phase is better.

Why the disruption became so severe

What we have experienced in recent weeks was, in the words of NCC Highways, a “perfect storm” of overlapping activity:

Emergency works by Cadent – gas

These works are legally required and must begin immediately when a leak is detected. Crucially, Highways are often notified *after* the crews have arrived, and the law requires that Cadent is permitted onto the highway without delay. This means no coordination is possible, and roads can suddenly become blocked with very little warning.

In Harleston, multiple emergency gas leaks occurred at the same time as...

Scheduled gas main replacement

Cadent has been carrying out a long-term upgrade of local pipework, including hydrogen-ready replacements. This work is essential, but highly intrusive, and the teams carrying out emergency repairs and planned replacements are not the same crews, nor do they always communicate with one another.

A road network not designed for modern utilities

Harleston’s historic layout with narrow junctions, limited alternative routes, and constrained footways means even small works can cause major delays. Multi-way temporary lights then amplify those pressures dramatically.

When all these factors collided, the result was unprecedented disruption. Every agency recognised the severity of the situation, and so did we.

What the Town Council has done

As soon as there were indications that the disruption might exceed what the town could reasonably tolerate, we had already begun taking action.

We convened an urgent multi-agency meeting

Representatives attended from:

- Norfolk County Council (Highways and Street Works)
- South Norfolk & Broadland District Council (Economic Development and Tourism)
- Our District Councillors
- The Town Council

We presented residents’ and businesses’ concerns in detail

Including:

- Contradictory or inaccurate signage
- Road-closed signs when the road was, in fact, open

- Temporary lights operating when no crew was present
- Difficulties for carers, service providers and deliveries
- The widespread perception that the town was inaccessible
- Significant loss of footfall for traders.

We challenged the causes of poor coordination

Highways acknowledged gaps in communication between utility contractors, inconsistencies in signage, and delays in removing unused equipment. They committed to tightening inspections and escalation.

We secured a major change to upcoming works

CityFibre's Broadband rollout, originally due to begin during the ongoing Cadent works, has now been postponed.

This avoids two large-scale projects running simultaneously and reduces the risk of further gridlock.

We pushed for better business-protection measures

Including:

- Greater use of "Businesses Open As Usual" signage
- Special signs showing exactly *which section* is closed
- Improved notification tools for residents and businesses
- Guidance on setting up One.Network alert accounts.

We secured an offer for direct public engagement

Highways officers have agreed to attend an open meeting for residents and businesses to explain:

- what is happening
- why it is necessary
- how decisions are made
- and how future works will be managed
- take questions directly.

Reporting issues directly on-site

NCC emphasised that every roadworks site should display a board showing:

- the utility company responsible
- a permit reference number
- a telephone number for reporting problems.

Any issues, including temporary lights not working, barriers left out unnecessarily, or unsafe layouts, should be reported directly using this number.

Even NCC rely on this mechanism; traffic-management contractors are required to respond promptly when calls are logged. We will be encouraging residents and businesses to use this reporting route wherever possible, as it leads to faster on-site action.

We also raised the serious concerns about drivers jumping red lights when delays are long or when a site appears inactive. NCC confirmed that this is a recognised safety risk and will be fed back urgently to the relevant traffic-management operators.

What will change going forward

As a direct result of the multi-agency meeting, residents and businesses should begin to see improvements:

1. Fewer overlapping closures

Emergency works may still arise, but planned works should no longer coincide with major projects unless unavoidable.

2. Better clarity around signage

Inspectors will challenge incorrect or misleading signs and emphasise accuracy for both emergency and planned works.

3. Greater accountability for unattended sites

Where possible, Highways inspectors will gather evidence when crews are absent for unreasonable periods, allowing them to shorten permits or issue penalties.

4. Improved access for businesses and pedestrians

Special signage and modified traffic-management layouts will be prioritised wherever possible to maintain access and protect footfall.

What is still outside our control

It is important to be honest:

- Emergency gas and telecoms works will always take priority.
- Utility companies operate under national legislation, not local discretion.
- Some works may pause for days while specialist parts are sourced or engineering approvals are obtained.
- Harleston's narrow roads limit alternatives when deep excavations are required.

But acknowledging these limits does not mean accepting poor communication, and communication is where we will continue to press for improvement.

How you can stay informed

The **One.Network** website shows live and upcoming works, including emergency notices.

Residents and businesses are encouraged to create a free account and set-up email alerts for the areas most relevant to them.

We will also continue to share updates promptly via our own website and usual communication channels.

Working together through the next phase

Harleston has been hit harder than many towns recently. That is not your imagination. It is the result of multiple systems intersecting – some controlled locally, many not – and a series of unexpected emergencies arriving at once. But we are moving in the right direction.

The worst of the “perfect storm” is now behind us.

All agencies involved are now far more alert to the pressures you face because *you* raised them, and because *we* took those concerns into the room where decisions are made.

We will continue to push for accountability, clarity, and genuine respect for the lived reality of those who rely on Harleston's streets every day.

Thank you for your patience, your honesty, and your determination to support our town through a challenging moment.

Clare Crane

Town Clerk

Redenhall with Harleston Town Council