



September 2024

Norwich Economic Barometer



NORWICH
City Council

Norwich Economic Barometer – September 2024

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Business news

Economy

- According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) the UK economy returned to growth in August after flatlining for two months. Gross domestic product rose by 0.2 per cent in August, after zero growth in June and July. In August, accountancy, retail and many manufacturers had strong months, while construction also recovered from July's contraction. These were partially offset by falls in wholesaling and oil extraction.
- UK inflation fell unexpectedly to 1.7 per cent in the year to September, the lowest rate in three-and-a-half years. It means inflation - the rate prices rise at over time - is now below the Bank of England's 2 per cent target, paving the way for interest rates to be cut further next month.

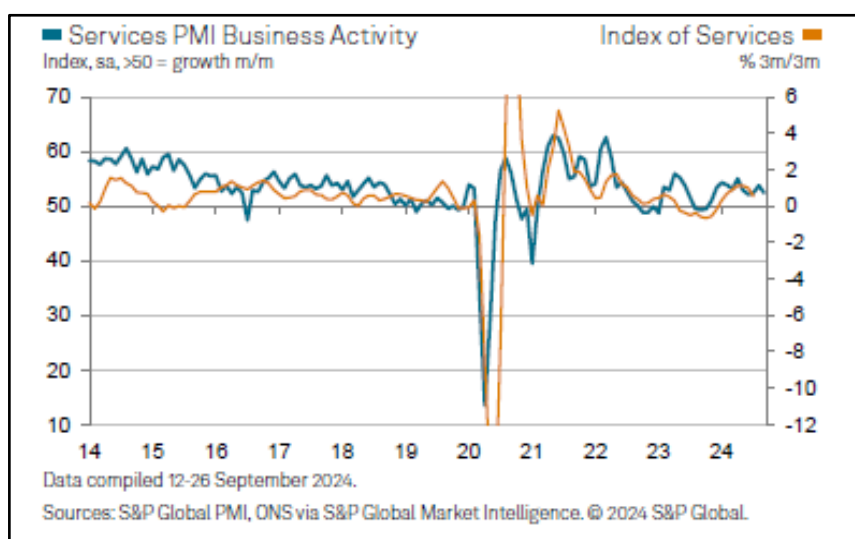


Figure 1 S&P Global/CIPS UK Services Business Activity Index

- Business activity expansion lost momentum across the UK service sector, according to the latest PMI® survey data from S&P Global. At 52.4 in September, the headline seasonally adjusted S&P Global UK Services PMI Business Activity Index was down from 53.7 in August but still above the crucial 50.0 no change threshold. The headline index has posted positively during each month since November 2023 and the latest reading signalled a moderate expansion of service sector output. Anecdotal evidence suggested that business activity was boosted by rising domestic demand, especially in relation to spending on technology, real estate and leisure services. A number of firms nonetheless cited cautious decision making among corporate clients and the impact of stretched household disposable incomes. September data pointed to another robust increase in new business volumes and the rate of growth held close to the 14-month peak seen in July. Some firms commented on support from lower borrowing costs and domestic economic stability. However, service providers also noted that policy uncertainty ahead of the Autumn Budget had encouraged a wait-and-see approach to major investment

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decisions among clients. Export orders continued to rise at a slower pace than total new work, suggesting a headwind to sales from subdued overseas demand. Survey respondents often commented on challenging market conditions and the adverse impact of EU trade frictions.

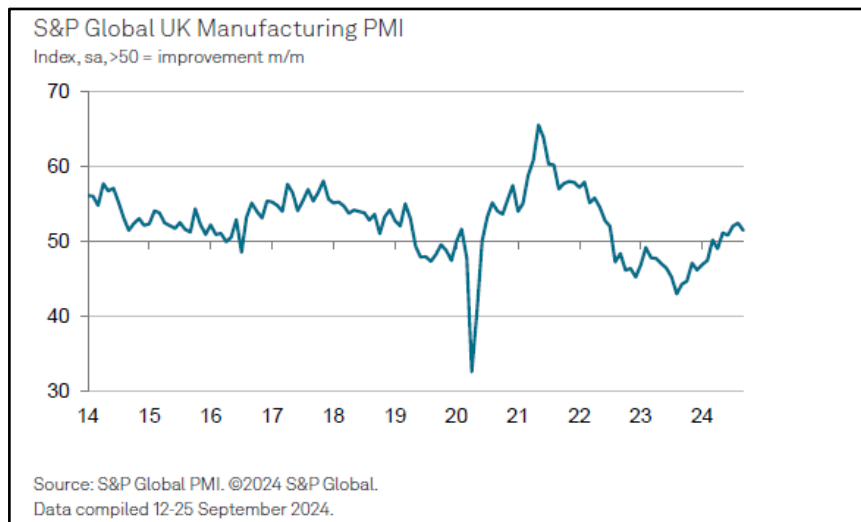


Figure 2: S&P Global/CIPS UK Manufacturing PMI

- The UK manufacturing sector saw a further solid increase in production volumes at the end of the third quarter. Output and new orders both continued to rise, as the domestic market remained the main propeller of growth. There were signs of a wait-and-see approach entering decision-making, however, with the forthcoming Autumn Statement in particular leading to slower gains in both production and new business and a dip in future expectations to a nine-month low. The seasonally adjusted S&P Global UK Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) posted 51.5 in September, down from August's 26-month high of 52.5. The PMI has remained above the neutral 50.0 mark for five successive months. Three out of the five PMI sub-components – output, new orders and suppliers' delivery times – were at levels consistent with improved manufacturing operating conditions. In contrast, levels of employment and stocks of purchases both declined, as manufacturers looked to mitigate rising input costs by reducing expenditures in other areas. Manufacturing production rose for the fifth consecutive month in September, as companies responded to improved intakes of new work. The main drivers of the latest expansion were the consumer and intermediate goods sectors, both of which registered stronger increases in output and new business. In a reversal of fortunes, the investment goods sector (which had been the best performing sub-industry in recent months) slipped back into contraction, with production and new work inflows contracting for the first time in five months. September data signalled a further decrease in incoming new export business, the thirty-second in as many months. UK manufacturers reported that subdued market conditions in Europe were the main factor weighing on overseas demand, with France and Germany the principal concerns. Lower demand from US clients was also cited.

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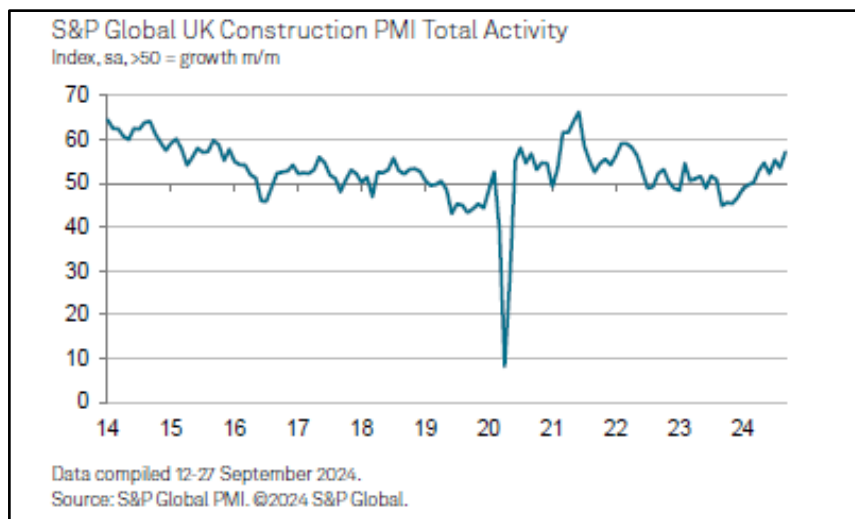


Figure 3: S&P Global/CIPS UK Construction PMI

- September data indicated that business activity growth across the UK construction sector accelerated to its fastest for nearly two-and-a-half years. New work also expanded markedly, with rising demand attributed to increased willingness-to-spend among clients and a more supportive economic backdrop. The headline S&P Global UK Construction Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) posted 57.2 in September, up from 53.6 in August and above the neutral 50.0 threshold for the seventh successive month. The latest reading signalled a strong upturn in total construction activity and the steepest rate of growth for 29 months. Faster rates of output growth were seen in all three sub-sectors monitored by the survey in September. Civil engineering (index at 59.0) was the best-performing category. Survey respondents commented on robust demand for renewable energy infrastructure and a general uplift in work on major projects. Commercial building (55.2) also gained momentum in September, with output levels rising to the greatest extent since May. A number of firms noted that lower borrowing costs and domestic political stability had a positive impact on client spending, although survey respondents also noted tight budgets. Improving market conditions and rising confidence helped to boost house building in September (54.3). The latest upturn in residential work was the fastest since March 2022, but still softer than seen elsewhere in the construction sector. Total new orders expanded at the strongest rate for 30 months in September. Greater workloads encouraged additional staff recruitment, despite some firms noting that cost pressures had led to delays with the replacement of voluntary departures. Employment levels have now increased in four of the past five months.
- Growth in employee annual earnings in Gt. Britain has fallen below 5 per cent for the first time in more than two years, closing the gap between wages and inflation. Staff pay, excluding bonuses, rose by 4.9 per cent in the three months to August compared with the same period a year earlier, down from 5.1 per cent

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in the three months to July, according to the ONS. Annual growth in total earnings including bonuses was 3.8 per cent in the three month to August, down from 4.1 per cent for the equivalent figure in July.

- Escaping low pay has become harder in the last decade, with the proportion of people moving out of the bottom 10 per cent of earners falling since 2015, a new London School of Economics' analysis shows. The pattern reverses the trend over the previous ten years, when the proportion of people who moved out of the lowest-weekly-paid each year rose from around 20 per cent to 27 per cent. The latest estimates show that around 21 per cent had moved out of the bottom pay bracket over the course of a year. The minimum wage has helped raise the pay of the lowest-paid workers in relative terms. When the minimum wage was introduced 25 years ago, the highest paid earned four times as much as the lowest paid, now that ratio is 3.5 times as much. But the absolute gap has widened over the same period. Adjusting for inflation, top earners were paid £22 more an hour in 2024, compared to £16 more in the 1990s.
- The number of UK companies in 'significant' financial distress jumped by nearly ten per cent to 601,950 businesses in the second quarter compared to the previous three months, according to the latest "red flag alert" from Begbies Traynor. Financial distress rose sharply at businesses involved in travel & tourism, hotels & accommodation, health & education and bars & restaurants. Meanwhile, 'serious concerns' remain over the state of the construction, real estate and support services sectors.
- Business sentiment among chief financial officers edged lower in the third quarter although confidence is still above the long term average and most firms plan to invest in digital tech such as artificial intelligence to drive performance. A net 6 per cent feel more optimistic about the financial prospects of their businesses now than they did three months ago; then the figure stood at a net 23 per cent following a bounce in optimism after the general election. CFOs also report a modest increase in uncertainty, particularly over geopolitical concerns, low UK productivity and a potential 'hard-landing' in the US. But CFOs expect wage growth to slow from 4.6 per cent in the last 12 months to 3.2 pc in a year's time and interest rates to fall from the current 5 per cent to 4 per cent by next September. The majority (net 95 per cent) of CFOs expect to raise spending on digital technology and assets such as software, IT and AI, both over the next 12 months and the next five years.
- Two-fifths of East Anglian mid-sized businesses together plan to invest more than £5 million in expansion over the next five years, according to BDO's bi-monthly economic engine survey. Nearly half of firms in the region plan to direct their investment mainly to the UK. Priorities include developing new products and services and investing in AI. Meanwhile, firms' wish-lists from government

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include policies to ease workforce pressures, including reform of the apprenticeship levy or more support on skilled worker visas and better access to finance.

- Business growth in the East of England slowed sharply in September and workforce numbers fell but firms remain positive on the outlook over the next year. The NatWest East of England growth tracker business activity index fell sharply from August's 28-month high of 53.9 to 50.9 in September signalling only a marginal rate of expansion. New business growth also slowed and employment numbers fell for the first time in four years. Cost pressures in the private sector picked up in September and remained strong, driven by wages and shipping. Sentiment was the weakest since the end of 2022.
- Confidence amongst manufacturers in the East of England is climbing as many firms believe greater political stability will improve economic prospects although recruitment intentions and investment have dipped, according to a third quarter manufacturing outlook survey from Make UK and BDO. Some 58 per cent of firms believe that the recent change in government will lead to better economic growth in the next 12 months. Confidence has reached levels last seen at the beginning of Covid recovery. The balance on output in the East was +12 per cent and is forecast to jump to +47 per cent in the next quarter whilst orders are set to increase from +18 per cent to +53 per cent over the same period. But a mixed picture for the region is reflected in a dip in both recruitment intentions (-24 per cent) and investment (-12 per cent).

Local Business

- The former home of the Colman family is now occupied by a local charity, thanks to a creative solution brokered and agreed by the city council. Councillors approved a detailed agreement for Norwich Unity Hub (NUH), a charitable incorporated organisation, to take up a three-year lease on the grade II listed property, Carrow House. This will act as a meanwhile use for three years while redevelopment options come forward as part of the wider East Norwich project – a brownfield area of the city earmarked for comprehensive regeneration to realise thousands of new homes and jobs. A core aim of NUH is to provide affordable rented accommodation to charitable organisations in Norwich and fostering collaboration among their members.
- Norwich-based Biosopic, a pharma startup researching the use of bacteria for cancer treatment, won both the audience favourite and judges awards after pitches at a showcase event for Anglia Capital Group's Halo Programme. The programme, sponsored by British Business Bank, is an intensive two-month series of workshops preparing smaller businesses in the region to get investment ready.

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- Norwich has been named the UK's "surprise artisan coffee hub". A study by the hot chocolate brand Before Chocolate has found Norwich to be one of the UK's best cities for coffee enthusiasts. The research team made a list of the UK's 400 largest towns and cities and analysed the ratio of independent coffee shops compared to large chains in each. Each location was then given a grade of A, B or C - with A meaning customers are more likely to have access to good-quality independent coffee spots. According to the findings, Norwich has 60 independent coffee shops which equates to one for every 2,400 people living there. This earns it an A grade, ranking it higher than several metropolitan cities such as Bristol, Manchester and Liverpool.
- Revolution Norwich in Queen Street has revealed it will be closing after 14 years in Tombland. It comes after Revolution launched a sale process and significant restructuring plans last month amid efforts to stay afloat. The company's restructuring plans include £12.5 million in fundraising and the closure of 18 venues.
- Norwich-based wine retailer Virgin Wines has been crowned Wine Club of the Year by the International Wine Challenge (IWC). The accolade was bestowed on the company's WineBank membership, at the highly competitive industry awards in its 40th year. With more than 130,000 customers, the WineBank scheme rewards wine enthusiasts with considerable benefits, including 20pc interest on money saved into their accounts each month.
- The UK's leading provider of firefighting nozzles has opened a new £5.5m design and manufacturing facility at Broadland Business Park in Norwich. Delta Fire has been based in Norfolk for more than three decades, supplying bespoke fire nozzles to more than 75 per cent of the UK's fire and rescue services. Delta Fire also provides fire safety equipment to more than 70 countries worldwide
- Plans for an Everyman Cinema in Chantry Place shopping centre have taken a step forward as the cinema chain has requested permission from Norwich City Council to open between the hours of 9am and 2am every day - as opposed to the previously permitted hours of 10am and 10pm. The chain of boutique cinemas is hoping to open its new screens in three units in Chantry Place, including the former Cafe Rouge and Pizza Hut restaurants. It will become the fourth cinema in Norwich.
- Royal Arcade Norwich is the new home of e-Velo, a specialist e-bike store which started in Halesworth in Suffolk nine years ago. The family-run business sells a range of European brands.
- A luxury watch shop selling watches with a value of up to £400,000 is set to open in the city. The shop will be in the Union Building in Rose Lane and work on an appointment-only system.

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- A homeware store specialising in glassware, prints and more is coming to the Royal Arcade. Lazy Lobster is set to open in the former Langley's unit next month.
- A new darts venue, ArrowHeadz, with a bar, café and shop has opened on the ground floor of Castle Quarter, next to Putt Putt Noodle. The venue features three bookable dart lanes, each hosting up to four players at a time, with two of the boards having a state-of-the-art automated scoring system.
- One of the region's largest housing associations has delivered a record number of affordable homes in the last year to tackle the housing crisis in the east. Flagship Group, based in Norwich, provided 688 affordable homes over the course of the financial year to March – with plans to build thousands more over the next three decades. The group also reported a strong financial performance, with its operating surplus growing to £90.1m.
- Norwich's Castle Quarter shopping centre has been put on the market for £23.5m. Estate agent Savills is seeking offers in excess of £23.55m for the city shopping and leisure centre. Castle Quarter, which covers more than 385,000 sq. ft across five levels, generates a net operating income of £2.5m a year. The site has 75 retail and leisure outlets.
- Virgin Wines has launched a unique wine label range, the 'Young Artists Collection', featuring designs from city art students. This range was created in collaboration with third year BA (Hons) Illustration students from Norwich University of the Arts.
- Norwich-based design agency Bleat Creative has acquired Focal Point Digital, a long-established Norfolk photographic and video production business, through a management buy-out. Founded in 1976, family-run Focal Point Digital offers a wide range of services, including commercial photography, video production, and digital content.

Education

- Hewett Academy in Cecil Road is to undergo a major revamp including demolishing several buildings and constructing a sports hall. Work is soon to begin as Norwich City Council approves plans for redeveloping some of its buildings. The proposal includes the redevelopment and refurbishment of the school, including the construction of a new sports hall, refurbishment of the swimming hall and the Walter Roy Theatre and the demolition of buildings next to the Hewett Academy.
- Norwich University of the Arts has been named the inaugural Arts University of the Year by the Daily Mail University Guide. The Daily Mail University Guide highlights the University's exceptional success in preparing students for high-

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skilled careers in the creative industries. The University's Profile system, which integrates employability skills with artistic creativity, was particularly praised for its effectiveness in fostering graduates' progression into successful careers.

- Norwich-based charity, the St Edmunds Society, has partnered with Grayson, a company providing construction consumables. This will provide the charity with new materials and equipment to give construction training to students aged 16-18 years. The St Edmunds Society supports young people who find mainstream education challenging and offers courses and qualifications in areas including carpentry, bricklaying, painting and decorating, plastering, tiling and plumbing.
- The £2.2m Apprenticeships Norfolk levy support scheme has supported 220 new apprenticeships at more than 120 local businesses. The scheme enables unspent funds, which would otherwise be returned to the Treasury, to be transferred to employers to use to fund apprenticeships for new or existing staff. Aviva, the University of East Anglia (UEA) and the BBC are just some of the organisations that have transferred their unspent levy to the Apprenticeships Norfolk programme, which has reached a £2m milestone in transfers in its second financial year.
- Insurance broker and financial planners Alan Boswell Group has appointed seven new apprentices to its Norwich head office. They will work towards the level 3 insurance practitioner - junior broker apprenticeship and will work across different departments, gaining experience and insight into the industry and benefitting from the experience of the group's 400-strong employees. The group's apprenticeship scheme was launched in 2010 and 24 of those who have completed the scheme, still work for the group.
- A new report published by Norwich City Football Club in collaboration with the University of East Anglia reveals its socio-economic impact on the region for the 2022/23 season. Headlines from the first iteration of the report include:
 - £88.7m gross value added, calculated as direct, indirect and induced effects of the club's existence.
 - £11.4m generated in revenue for local businesses in Norwich and wider Norfolk areas.
 - By fully utilising the stadium as a resource for the community to come together, the club has been able to create 886 casual jobs for local people at these non-football events.
 - In total, 265 suppliers from the wider Norfolk area provided goods and services to the club generating over £11.4m in revenue for local businesses.

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- £227k was paid in apprentice levy tax which goes towards funding training for employees in the UK, £144k of the apprenticeship levy contribution was used by the club to train 45 employees, giving them valuable skills.

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Claimant count unemployment

Figure 4 summarises the trend in claimant count unemploymentⁱ. The 2020 impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was one of steep growth. However, claimant count rates have fallen across each of the reported areas since that time. Currently the rate in the Norwich city council area is level with that of the national level; this rate is considerably higher than rates in the urban area, the county and the region.

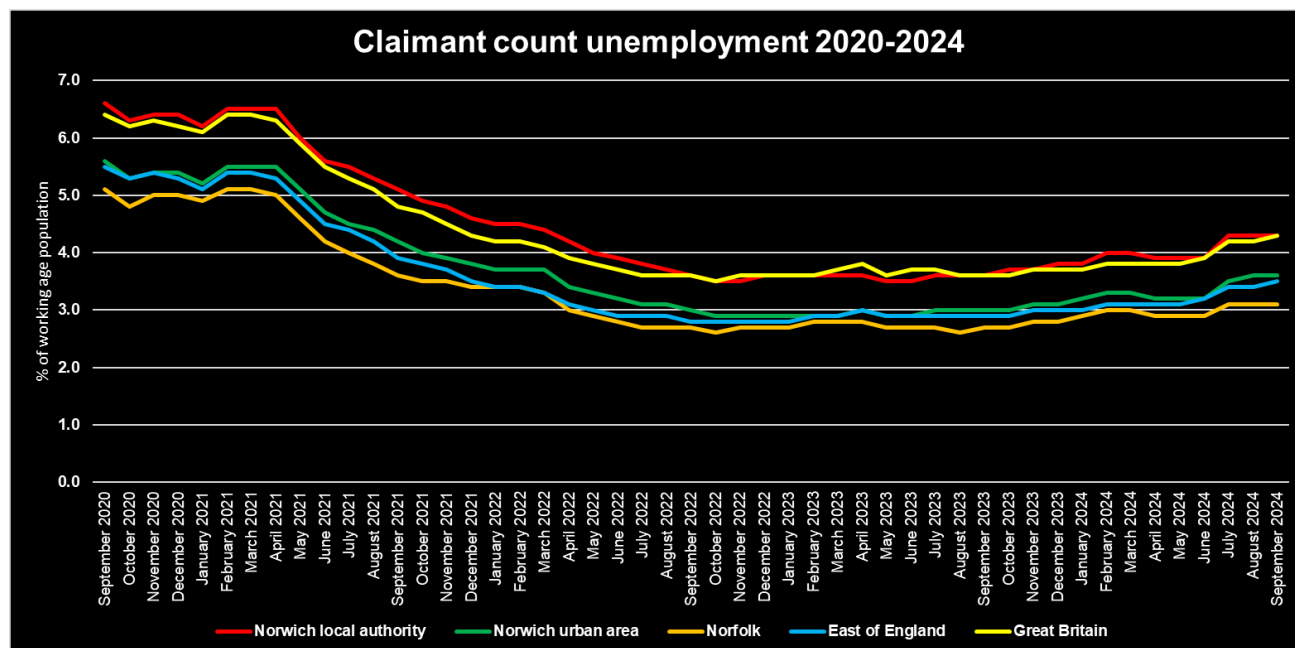


Figure 4 Claimant count unemployment 2020 to 2024

Table 1 Claimant count unemployment rate

	September 2023		August 2024		September 2024		Monthly change	Annual change
Gt. Britain	1,486,320	3.6%	1,730,555	4.2%	1,749,920	4.3%	+ 0.1%	+ 0.7%
East of England	113,830	2.9%	134,505	3.4%	135,970	3.5%	+ 0.1%	+ 0.6%
Norfolk	14,470	2.7%	16,925	3.1%	16,920	3.1%	0	+ 0.4%
Norwich urban area	4,495	3.0%	5,340	3.6%	5,375	3.6%	0	+ 0.6%
Norwich city council area	3,580	3.6%	4,215	4.3%	4,275	4.3%	0	+ 0.7%

Table 1 shows the claimant count unemployment rate increase across each of the reported areas relative to the same time last year – the strongest growth took place at the national

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level and city council area. Over the month of September, rates were static against the previous month across Norfolk, the urban area and the city council area; regionally and nationally rates increased.

Ward level claimant count unemployment

Table 2 shows that during the month of September, unemployment rates in Catton Grove and Thorpe Hamlet were unchanged. Rates in Crome, Eaton, Lakenham, Nelson, Sewell and Town Close wards saw a marginal increase. Unemployment rates fell in the remaining wards relative to the previous month.

Compared to the same time last year, unemployment rates in each of the wards saw an increase bar Sewell ward where the rate was unchanged. The strongest growth took place in Lakenham ward.

Table 2 Claimant count unemployment

	September 2023		August 2024		September 2024		Monthly change	Annual change
Bowthorpe	240	3.8%	285	4.5%	280	4.3%	- 0.2%	+ 0.5%
Catton Grove	300	4.2%	375	5.2%	370	5.2%	0	+ 1.0%
Crome	335	4.8%	360	5.1%	390	5.6%	+ 0.5%	+ 0.8%
Eaton	85	1.6%	110	2.0%	110	2.1%	+ 0.1%	+ 0.5%
Lakenham	265	4.4%	355	5.9%	375	6.2%	+ 0.3%	+ 1.8%
Mancroft	395	5.5%	465	6.4%	450	6.3%	- 0.1%	+ 0.8%
Mile Cross	380	5.3%	445	6.2%	435	6.1%	- 0.1%	+ 0.8%
Nelson	195	2.5%	220	2.8%	240	3.0%	+ 0.2%	+ 0.5%
Sewell	285	4.0%	280	3.9%	285	4.0%	+ 0.1%	0
Thorpe Hamlet	265	3.7%	300	4.2%	300	4.2%	0	+ 0.5%
Town Close	235	3.3%	275	3.9%	295	4.1%	+ 0.2%	+ 0.8%
University	250	1.9%	310	2.4%	310	2.3%	- 0.1%	+ 0.4%
Wensum	345	4.2%	440	5.4%	435	5.3%	- 0.1%	+ 1.1%

Figure 5 demonstrates the wide variation in ward claimant count rates across the city council area. The differential between the lowest rates (Eaton ward) and the highest rate (Mancroft ward) currently stands at 4.2 percentage points.

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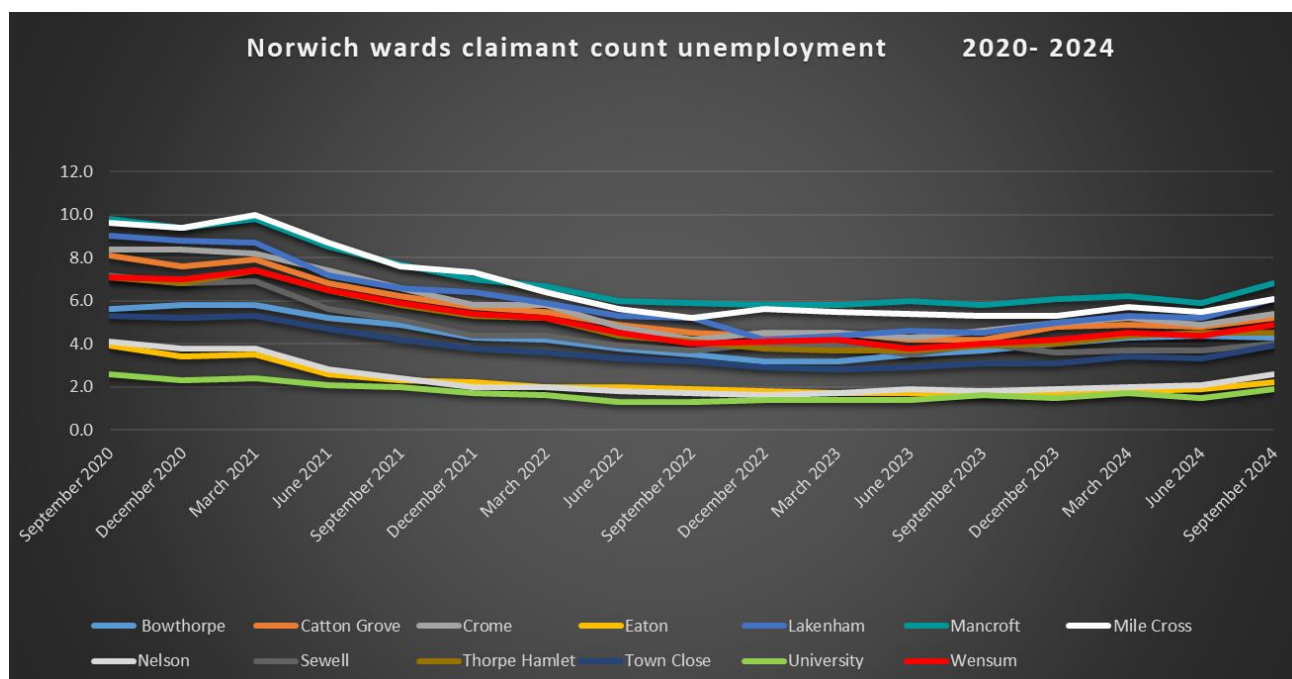


Figure 5 Norwich wards claimant count unemployment 2020 to 2024

Claimant count unemployment: male/female

In the Norwich city council area, around two in every five (43 per cent) out-of-work claimants are women. In September, female unemployment rates remained the same as in the previous month across Norfolk (2.9 per cent) and regionally (3.3 per cent); rates increased slightly at the national level (3.9 per cent) and in Norwich (3.8 per cent),

Over the month, male unemployment rates remained the same in Norwich but increased in, regionally and nationally. The male unemployment rate stands at 4.9 per cent of working age males in Norwich, but rates are lower nationally (4.7 per cent), in Norfolk (3.3 per cent) and regionally (3.7 per cent).

Since records began in 1992, Norwich's male and female unemployment rates have continued to be higher than rates in Norfolk, the region, they tend to mirror those at the national level. The relatively high levels of unemployment can be traced back to the loss of production line manufacturing jobs and the dominance of the service sector in the city.

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Housing benefit

Table 3 Norwich City Council housing benefit claimants – 12 months

	Number of claimants	Monthly change
September 2023	13,636	+ 11
October 2023	13,558	- 78
November 2023	13,519	- 39
December 2023	13,513	- 6
January 2024	13,480	- 33
February 2024	13,516	+ 36
March 2024	13,430	- 86
April 2024	13,465	+ 35
May 2024	13,488	+ 23
June 2024	13,521	+ 33
July 2024	13,480	- 41
August 2024	13,417	- 63
September 2024	13,358	- 59

Housing benefit is an income related benefit designed to help people on low incomes pay for rented accommodation whether in, or out, of work. Housing benefit numbers include people who are claiming council tax benefit only. Many housing benefit claimants are pensioners, people with disabilities, carers or people who are in low waged work. It should be noted that low resident earnings in Norwich are a contributory factor to the number of people claiming housing benefit.

Table 3 shows that the number of housing benefit claimants in the Norwich local authority area fell by 59 claims during September compared to the previous month. Over the past twelve months housing benefit claims in Norwich have fallen by 1.5 per cent. Comparable national data is not available because of a time lag in data collection.

Average house prices

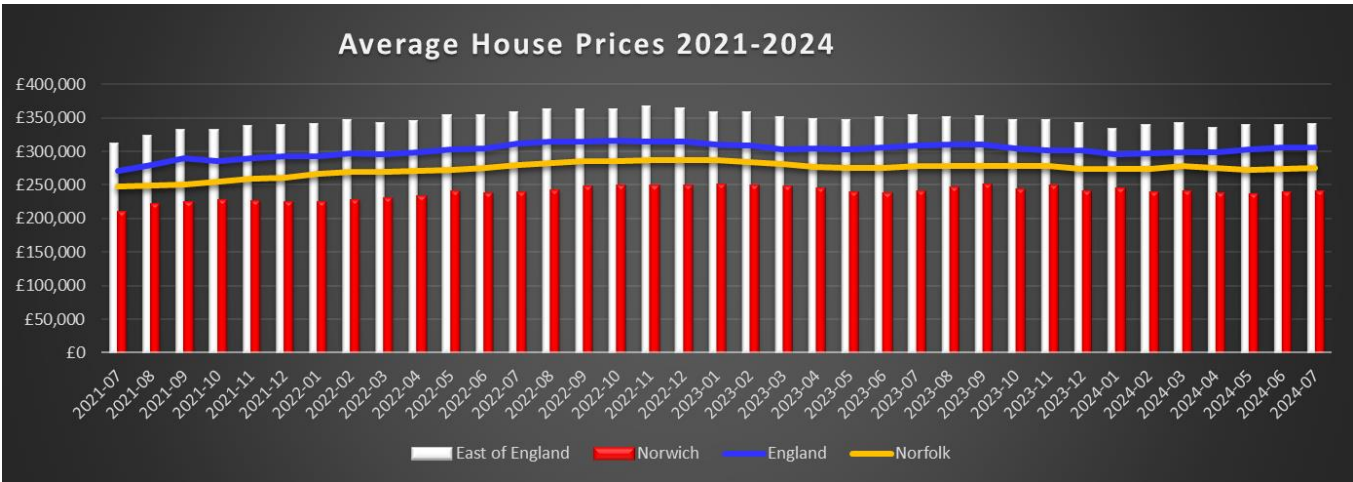


Figure 6 HM Land Registry average house prices 2021- 2024

The House Price Index (HPI) produced by HM Land Registry is the most accurate and independent house price index available for the UK.

According to HM Land Registry’s HPI (Crown copyright) over the past twelve months, average house prices grew by 1.0 per cent in Norwich, by 0.3 per cent in the East of England and 1.6 per cent nationally. The average house price in Norfolk fell by 0.8 per cent over the year. Figure 6 summarises average house price movements since July 2021.

During the month of July, average house prices grew by 0.6 per cent in England, by 0.4 per cent in Norwich and by 0.7 per cent in Norfolk; prices fell by 0.7 per cent in the East of England.

The average house price in Norwich currently stands at £237,073 against £275,965 for Norfolk, £335,448 for the East of England and £298,299 for England.

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City centre vitality

Footfall data is provided by the Norwich BID (Business Improvement District).

	Monthly Footfall Counts					
	Year to date %		Year on year %		Month on month %	
	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023
Norwich	-2.8%	3.7%	0.8%	-6.2%	0.4%	-0.6%
East	-3.0%	5.5%	-4.4%	2.8%	-8.7%	-4.4%
High Street Index - BDSU (BDSU - Comparison)	-0.3%	6.8%	-0.2%	0.8%	-3.5%	-3.8%
UK	-1.0%	4.6%	-1.4%	1.5%	-4.6%	-3.7%

Benchmark calculations (Year on Year and Month on Month) have been calculated using like for like data sets (only those counters available in both comparison periods) to ensure statistical accuracy

Figure 7 Monthly footfall counts

The total number of visitors for the year to date is 12,077,694 which is 2.8% down on the previous year.

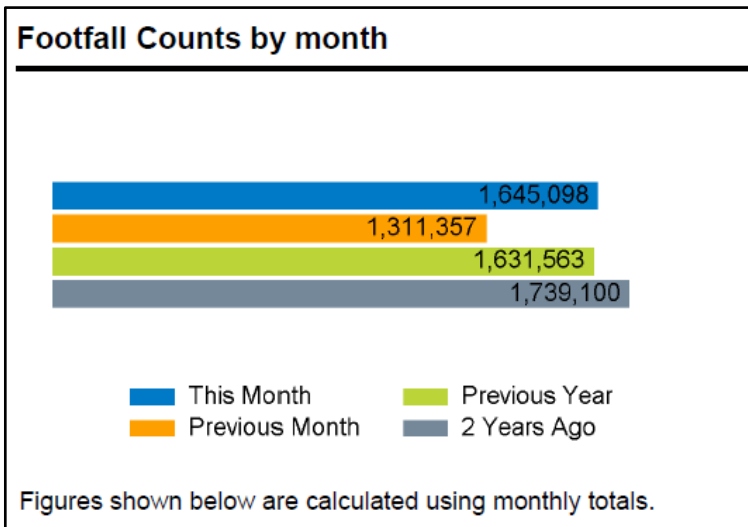


Figure 8 Comparison of monthly footfall

Figure 8 shows the total number of visitors to Norwich in the month beginning 26 August 2024 was 1,645,098.

Figure 9 overleaf shows that the busiest day in the month beginning 26 August 2024 was Saturday 28 September with 66,863 visitors. The peak hour of the month was 13:00 on Saturday 28 September 2024 with footfall of 8,981.

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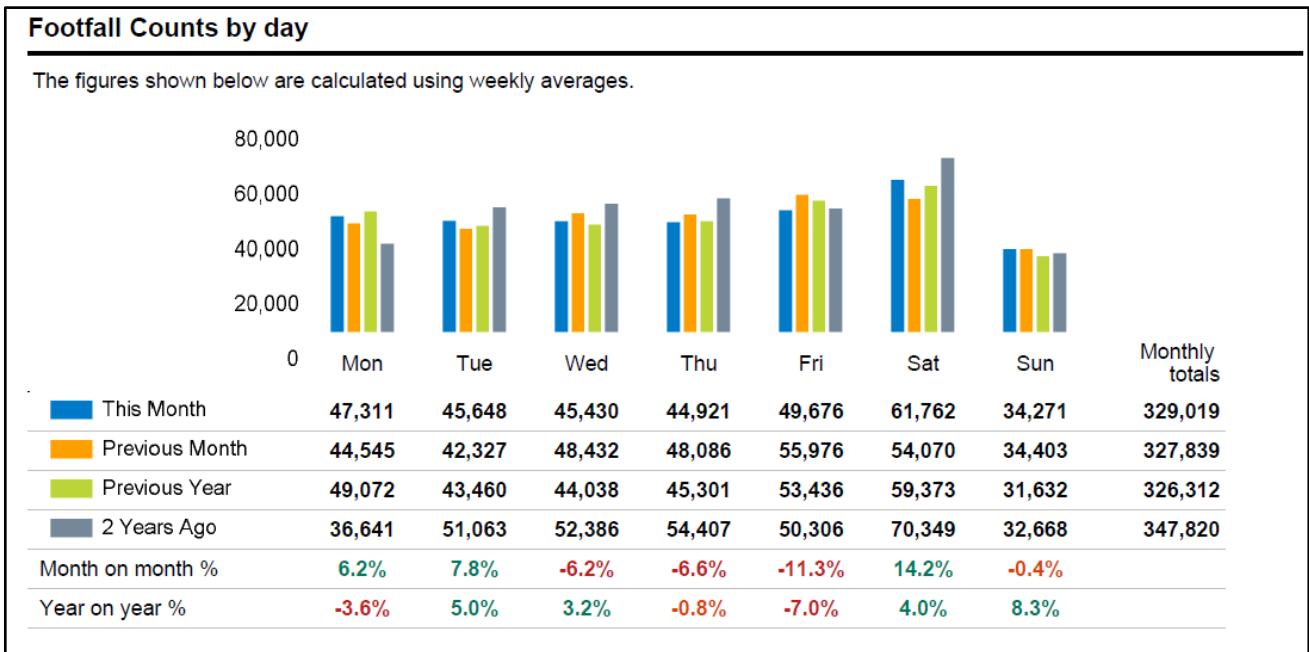


Figure 9 Footfall counts by day

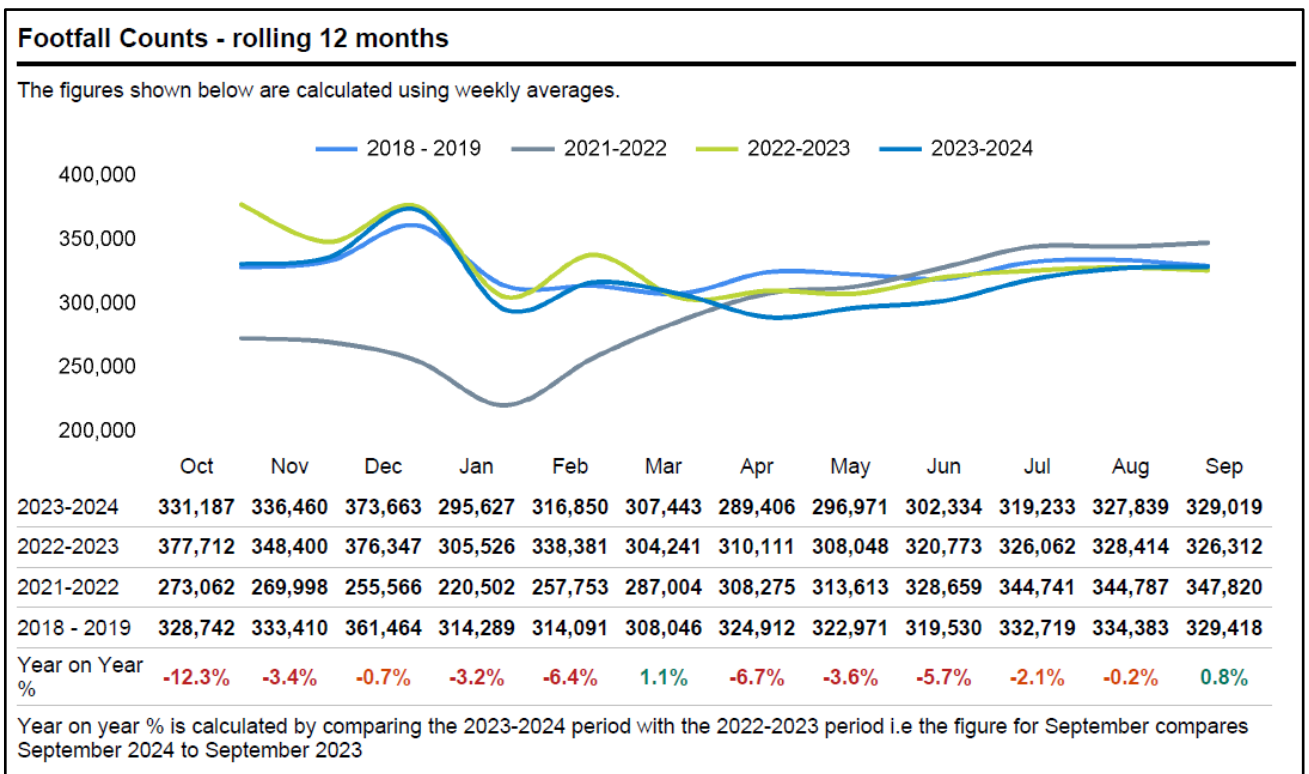


Figure 10 Rolling 12 months footfall counts

Figure 10 summarises rolling 12 month footfall counts since 2018. Each of this year's monthly footfall counts are lower than for the previous 12 months.

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Appendix

Contact details:

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Sources:

Figure 1: S&P Global/CIPS UK Services Business Activity Index

Figure 2: S&P Global/CIPS UK Manufacturing PMI

Figure 3: S&P Global/CIPS UK Construction PMI

Figure 4: Claimant count – NOMIS, Crown copyright

Figure 5: Ward unemployment – NOMIS, Crown copyright

Figure 6: House Price Index - HM Land Registry, Crown copyright

Figure 7: Monthly footfall counts, Norwich BID

Figure 8: Comparison of monthly footfall, Norwich BID

Figure 9: Footfall counts by day, Norwich BID

Figure 10: Rolling 12 month footfall counts, Norwich BID

Table 1: Claimant count – NOMIS, Crown copyright

Table 2: Claimant count – NOMIS, Crown copyright

Table 3: Housing benefit claimants - Norwich City Council

News stories from a variety of sources including EDP/Evening News; Business in East Anglia; Office of National Statistics; Reuters; BBC; Markit/CIPS PMI; Markit Monthly Economic Overview; University of East Anglia; Norwich University of the Arts; City College Norwich.



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