

# Annual Report to Stowupland Annual Parish Meeting for the period May 2021 to April 2022

From Suffolk County Councillor Keith Welham

## **GLI Group becomes Official Opposition**

The County Council Elections in May 2021 returned 9 Green Party Councillors giving the Greens the second largest number of seats. An opposition group comprising Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent councillors was formed - the GLI Group with 15 members. Our role is to hold the Conservative administration to account and bring forward suggestions for improving the service provided by the Council. The Conservatives have a strong majority with 55 seats out of 75, but we have been able to bring forward questions and motions throughout the year and challenge them to do the best for Suffolk.

## **Budget Meeting: GLI Amendments Declined**

In February, County Councillors debated and voted on the Council's budget for 2022-23. Council Tax will rise by 2.99% - an increase of £41.76 for a band D property from £1397.16 in the current year to £1438.92 in 2022/23.

Our Group were concerned that the budget relied too heavily on transformation savings, and that the Conservatives did not take the maximum social care precept to fund adult care allowed by Government. We highlighted the need to invest more in adult social care, as well as in innovative projects to reduce the energy bills of those most vulnerable, considering the current energy and cost of living crisis. Both ideas were rejected by the Conservatives, but our Group will continue to champion more investment into social care and green technology.

## **No Scrutiny of Carbon Budget**

Conservatives brought forward the first Carbon Budget for Suffolk, but it wasn't part of the main budget and wasn't given formal scrutiny. The Carbon Budget is aimed at helping us understand the level of emissions the Council are responsible for and help to achieve the Council's ambition of being carbon neutral by 2030. It is important the Carbon Budget is scrutinised, as there are many issues with data collection and performance measures that weren't addressed. Our Group raised concerns about this and has been assured that this will form part of the general budget process for next year.

## **Levelling Up: A Devolution Deal for Suffolk?**

The Government published its White Paper on Levelling-Up, within which it has agreed that Suffolk will be one of nine initial 'County Deals' up for negotiation. A new deal will potentially give local leaders more powers to make decisions for their communities for the first time. Our Group welcomes the idea of bringing more power to the communities of Suffolk. However, we are concerned about a potential Mayoral position created in Suffolk and the effect this may have on marginalising the role of district councils in Suffolk.

## **Report into SEND Provision: Review & Recommendations**

Suffolk County Council commissioned an independent review of Special Educational Needs and Disability provision. The report found severe failings in the delivery of Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plans for

children, serious issues in communicating with parents and guardians, as well as an inefficient work environment within the service.

The scrutiny committee have met since the report to listen to lead officers within the service and parents, debate necessary changes, and submit recommendations for improvement. These included extended training, additional managerial posts, and new accountability structures to help deal with the issues outlined in the report.

### **Bus Back Better: Initiative from the Department for Transport**

The Bus Back Better scheme was launched in 2021, aimed at updating, expanding, and improving our bus services in Great Britain. The Cabinet at Suffolk County Council approved a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which was submitted to Government. In response, Government gave Suffolk zero funding, as the bid was not sufficiently innovative and did not include a pathway to zero carbon bus service provision. The BSIP proposals that were approved by Cabinet can be viewed here:

[https://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk/DocSetPage.aspx?MeetingTitle=\(12-10-2021\),%20The%20Cabinet](https://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk/DocSetPage.aspx?MeetingTitle=(12-10-2021),%20The%20Cabinet)

### **Biodiversity Enhancement**

Suffolk County Council will be doing more for the county's natural environment, as it confirmed plans to enhance the biodiversity of at least 30% of its land by 2030. Our Group had a major influence in providing recommendations to SCC which are now a part of the Council's ambitions to enhance biodiversity. Examples include planting more hedgerows, improving highway trees, and developing natural flood management solutions. For more information, visit: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/show/councils-commitment-to-further-enhancing-suffolks-natural-environment>

### **Sizewell C: Where are we now?**

Our Group has asked searching questions regarding this project, arguing the environmental and socio-economic impacts on local communities are far too great. The Government announced their strategy to retain investors, by shifting the costs of Sizewell C onto consumers, in the form of a taxpayer subsidy known as a 'Regulated Asset Base' funding strategy. Our Group rejected this strategy, and strongly recommended that the Government reconsiders before it puts the burden of cost onto our local communities, and instead looks into investing in cleaner, cheaper forms of renewable energy which could produce energy sooner. However, Suffolk County Council have announced their general support for Sizewell C but have taken up 'important concerns' with the Secretary of State.

### **New Investment in Drainage and Footway Infrastructure**

The Cabinet approved £10m to replace broken pipes and provide new drainage schemes, as well as a £10m increase in the budget for the maintenance of footways.

### **Lorry Route Map Review in Suffolk: Interactive Map to be Published**

Suffolk County Council undertook a review of recommended lorry routes across the county; the first major review of the network since 2011. Suffolk County Council invited parish and town councils for their views, and to provide up to three routes where they believe HGV traffic has the highest impact on their communities. The review will be completed in Spring 2022 when the County Council plan to publish a new interactive lorry route map. For further information, please contact [lorry.routes@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:lorry.routes@suffolk.gov.uk),

### **Local Electricity Bill: Suffolk GLI Motion Passed by Council**

A motion submitted by our Group, which asked Suffolk County Council to support the Local Electricity Bill, which is waiting to be debated in Parliament for its Second Reading, was passed unanimously by the

Council. The Bill seeks to localise energy supply, making local electricity cheaper, more reliable, and community based. Details of the motion and Local Electricity Bill can be found here:

<https://powerforpeople.org.uk/local-electricity-bill-briefing-for-councillors>.

### **Highways Issues**

There have been a number of highways issues, too numerous to mention all of them individually. Some of them are still unresolved, such as completion of the removal of sandbags in Thorney Green and final reinstatement of the road near The Pippins.

### **Locality Awards**

Each County Councillor receives an allocation of £8,000 per year to help support local organisations, and a Highways Locality Budget of £24,000 to be spent during the four-year term of the Council - £56,000 in total.

I am making a contribution towards the cost of removing the sandbags; I have allocated the majority of the remaining highways locality budget towards the cost of improving the Crown Street Roundabout in Stowmarket.

Local organisations benefitting from locality funding are:

Stowmarket Community Sports and Social Club – Water heating and showers

Stowupland Baby and Toddler Group – Storage shed

Stowupland Pre-school – Improvements to outside play area and storage shed

Stowupland Village Hall – architect's fees

Suffolk Axis – Equipment for craft and cookery projects

Cedars Park Gardening Projects

Every Garden Matters – exhibition at Museum of East Anglian Life

Student Life – Mental Health and Wellbeing Project in Stowmarket

Stowupland URC – contribution towards cost of air source heating

I have funding available for 2022/23 and would be happy to discuss how some of this can be used for the benefit of residents in Stowupland.

### **Contact Details**

**If you would like to find out what the GLI group are doing on behalf of residents, go to:**

**Twitter** - [Suffolk Green, Lib Dem & Independent Group \(@SuffolkGLI\) / Twitter](#)

**Instagram** - [https://www.instagram.com/suffolkgli\\_group/](https://www.instagram.com/suffolkgli_group/)

**Website** - [Suffolk Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent Group – The GLI Group at Suffolk County Council \(suffolkgli.wordpress.com\)](#)

**And finally:**

**A big thank you to the Parish Council and local residents for the support I receive. It has been a pleasure to represent you for the last year and I will continue to do my best for all residents of my division in the future.**

**Keith Welham**

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