

County Councillor Report for 2024/2025 for Stowupland Annual Parish Meeting May 2025

It has been an honour to represent the residents of Stowmarket North and Stowupland Division for the last year. My current term should have ended in May 2025, but Government cancelled those elections at the request of Suffolk County Council. The county, district and borough councils in Suffolk will cease to exist at a date to be announced (possibly May 2026 or, more likely 2027) and one or more unitary authorities will replace the current councils. Parish Councils will almost certainly be affected, but to what degree is unknown at present. In May 2026 there will be an election for a Mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk to head up a new mayoral authority being created to take over strategic powers to be devolved from central government.

I have listed below the most significant topics, which have taken up much of Councillors' time. For me, the needs of local residents are of key importance and much of my time has been spent on local issues, often dealing with individual's concerns. I welcome contact from residents, by telephone or email; and I'm always prepared to meet with anyone who feels that I can assist them.

Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs)	<p>NSIPs are major infrastructure projects of national importance, and the majority of Suffolk's NSIPs are associated with the generation or transmission of electricity. The decision to allow an NSIP to proceed is made by the relevant Secretary of State, not councils, although the county council is a statutory consultee for many projects. There are a high number of projects in Suffolk currently, with more in the pipeline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drax – a gas power plant on the former Eye Airfield. • East Anglia Three offshore windfarm is under construction. • Two new offshore windfarms, East Anglia One North and East Anglia Two, were approved by the Secretary of State in March 2022. • EDF began construction of Sizewell C nuclear power station in January 2024. • National Grid grid reinforcement works from Bramford to Twinstead. • National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury stretch of the 'Great Grid Upgrade' programme, a controversial pylon route through the middle of Suffolk. Currently with central government. • SeaLink proposals for an undersea cabling route between Suffolk and Kent is due to see significant onshore infrastructure at Friston, near Aldeburgh. • LionLink proposes undersea cabling to link the UK with the Netherlands, with landfall proposed either above or below the Blyth estuary. • Sunnica Solar Farm, a 2,500 acre proposed solar development for Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk was approved by the Government soon after the 2024 election. • A new 750 acre solar farm, White Elm, has been proposed for Mendlesham in Mid Suffolk, with non-statutory engagement and consultation due to begin in the next few months.
Flooding in Suffolk	<p>Storm Babet hit Suffolk in October 2023 and a number of communities and individual properties were damaged by floodwaters. Suffolk County Council have so far completed over 20 flood investigation reports. The report for Stowupland is not yet complete but grants have been made to householders and preventative works have been completed in some cases.</p>
Condition of School Buildings	<p>In 2023, nine schools in Suffolk reported they had Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in some of their buildings - out of around 230 nationally. Stowupland High School has been very badly affected with some buildings closed, necessitating a large number of temporary classrooms. The extent of demolition, rebuild and repair is not yet known. Meantime the temporary classrooms will be used.</p>
New Highways Contract	<p>From 1 October 2023, Suffolk County Council entered into a new highways contract with Milestone, ending the previous contract with Kier. The anticipated improvement in communication with councillors and Suffolk residents has not fully materialised and there are still concerns about programming of local highway works.</p>
Budget Meeting	<p>The Conservative administration proposed a 2025/26 budget requiring an increase in council tax of the maximum 4.99%, which breaks down into a 2% rise for the Social Care Precept and a 2.99% increase in general council tax. This equates to an increase for a band D property of £78.39 from £1,571.04 to £1,649.43. The total budget requirement is £629,516,892.</p>

	<p>The Capital Programme for 2025/29 totals £362M, of which £66M is expected to be spent in 2025/26.</p> <p>No further drawdown from reserves is anticipated in 2025/26 but there is a budget gap likely in the following year. Beyond that, there could be financial difficulties for unitary authorities unless better funding provision is made by central government.</p> <p>The budgeted spend for each service is as follows:</p> <table> <tr> <td>Adult Social Care</td><td>£371M</td></tr> <tr> <td>Children and Young People</td><td>£205M</td></tr> <tr> <td>Public Health and Communities</td><td>£44M</td></tr> <tr> <td>Fire and Public Safety</td><td>£33M</td></tr> <tr> <td>Growth, Highways, Infrastructure</td><td>£55M</td></tr> <tr> <td>Corporate Services</td><td>£42M</td></tr> <tr> <td>Central Services, Capital Financing</td><td>£54M</td></tr> </table> <p>The total estimated value of central government funding for 2025/26 is £174M; almost all of this is for Social Care and Public Health services.</p>	Adult Social Care	£371M	Children and Young People	£205M	Public Health and Communities	£44M	Fire and Public Safety	£33M	Growth, Highways, Infrastructure	£55M	Corporate Services	£42M	Central Services, Capital Financing	£54M
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Ofsted/CQC Inspection of Suffolk SEND Provision	<p>Suffolk County Council and its NHS partners who provide SEND services (the 'Local Area Partnership') were inspected by Ofsted and CQC in November 2023, with the inspection report being published on 30 January 2024. The inspection found 'widespread and/or systematic failings' in the county's SEND provision. A priority action plan was drawn detailing how the Partnership would rapidly address the systemic problems, including improving the quality and timeliness of Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) and annual reviews, improving communication with families and reducing school exclusions for young people with special educational needs.</p> <p>A new full time Director for Children's Services (DCS) took up her position in July 2024 and there has been some progress. Additional SEND places in special schools or in mainstream schools have been provided and more are planned for the next two years. There are still concerns over the delays to EHCPs and placement of students.</p>														
Suffolk Devolution Deal and Local Government Reorganisation	<p>This time last year we were anticipating a devolution deal with powers devolved to the leader of Suffolk County Council who would be directly elected by the people of Suffolk, so every four years residents would have two votes, one to elect their local county councillor and one to elect the leader of the county council. It was anticipated that the first election for the directly elected leader would have been in May 2025, to coincide with the county council election.</p> <p>That all changed when the incoming Labour Government decided upon devolution to a directly elected mayor for the whole of Suffolk and Norfolk and reorganisation of the two county councils and all district councils across Suffolk and Norfolk into unitary authorities. Election of the mayor is due to take place in May 2026. Details of the reorganisation and election timescale have not yet been announced by government.</p> <p>The county council elections which should have taken place on 1 May 2025 were cancelled and county councillors are serving an extra year. It is not yet known if county elections will take place in 2026. It seems unlikely that reorganisation of authority boundaries can be completed in time for Unitary Authority elections to take place before 2027.</p>														
Library Service	<p>This time last year the tender process for a new six-year contract to run the library service was under way. The successful bidder for the new libraries contract was expected to be announced in November, with the new contract starting from June 2025. However, only one tender was received and cabinet have taken the decision to take the service back in house; SCC will be running the service from 1 June 2025.</p>														
Motions to Council	<p>One of the ways that opposition groups can influence policy is by way of motions to meetings of the full council. The group are permitted one motion per meeting. Our motion to the December 2024 Council meeting, urging the new Secretary of State (Ed Milliband) to promote, through the planning process, solar panels on rooftops rather than in open fields which are able to produce crops. This motion received all party support and was carried.</p>														
Local Highways Issues	<p>I have lost count of the number of highways complaints I have made and the issues I have reported. Within Stowupland, I am continuing to push for drainage improvements on A1120 near Freeman School, near the URC, and between the high school access and the church layby.</p>														

	<p>A draft design for alterations to the junction with the high school access and construction of a footpath in front of The Crown has been agreed by the parish council but funding is not yet in place.</p> <p>There has been some progress on the Safer Route To School Scheme with completion of the section of the route from The Green to the high school car park. But we are still awaiting a submission by the school to SCC for diversion of public footpaths which cross the school site, including one across the main school car park.</p>
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Keith Welham

Keith.Welham@suffolk.gov.uk

07831 705 716 (mobile) 01449 673185 (home)