

**TOP-TEN REPORT FOR BUNGAY AND THE VILLAGES (DECEMBER 2024 & JANUARY 2025)**  
**East Suffolk Councillors Toby Hammond and Anthony Specia**

1. The Secretary of State has approved applications from Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils to cancel the local elections expected in May. No local elections will now take place until the election of a regional Mayor. The date and scope of that election have not yet been decided, but we understand that one likely possibility is that residents will be asked to vote at some time in 2026 for a single Mayor for all of Norfolk and Suffolk.
2. Local government reorganisation will also involve eliminating separate district and county councils in favour of unitary councils. East Suffolk Council will be abolished, no district elections will take place in 2027, and we will be the last East Suffolk Councillors for Bungay and surrounding villages. The scope of the new unitary authority for our area has not been decided, but on Government's current plans it will be larger than the current East Suffolk district.
3. At this stage it appears that local government reorganisation will not involve any changes to Town or Parish Councils/Meetings. However, Towns and Parishes in East Suffolk will be part of a new structure of larger unitary authorities under a regional Mayor. Powers currently held at East Suffolk district level will be pushed up to these unitary authorities, excepting any powers that may be pushed up further to the regional Mayor.
4. A small amount of our Enabling Communities Budget remains for this civic year. Grants are available for a broad range of small projects that benefit communities in our ward, and we'd be pleased to receive a final set of applications from community groups. We'll be able to endorse applications after 27th February, when two East Suffolk Council by-elections are concluded.
5. History was made at the January East Suffolk Council meeting, when Full Council adopted and unanimously passed a motion on youth safety and services brought forward by the new East Suffolk Youth Council. With great professionalism, Youth Councillors prioritised the issue, drafted the motion, debated and passed it at their own December meeting, and introduced it to Full Council. We look forward to further contributions from the Youth Councillors.
6. East Suffolk Council is currently consulting on new guides for Town and Parish Councils/Meetings establishing or reviewing Neighbourhood Plans. The guides concern housing and climate change, and the consultation runs until 12th March. Town and Parish Councils/Meetings are encouraged to respond online at <https://eastsuffolk.inconsult.uk/system/listConsultations?type=O>. We'd also encourage any councils/meetings in our ward that don't have Neighbourhood Plans to consider establishing them as a way to embed local interests in the planning process.
7. Planning permission for the controversial Gray's Lane solar farm proposal in Wissett, just outside of our ward, is being determined on 11th February. Whilst we have every sympathy with the concerns raised by residents, Toby and Anthony view solar farms as a vital part of a low-carbon future, and of meeting the UK's net-zero target. At the same time, we'd like to see a robust element of community ownership and involvement in future schemes.
8. Toby has been working on an ongoing mystery around the derelict building opposite The Factory Shop in Priory Lane, Bungay. The owner vanished many years ago, and the decaying building has been stuck in limbo ever since. We appeal for anyone with any information about the whereabouts of the owner to contact us.
9. A bright new vision is within reach for Ringsfield Hall to become a centre for outdoor learning for pupils unsuited for mainstream education. The local non-profit organisation pursuing this vision has substantial capital in place, but fundraising with benefactors and supporters continues. For more information, please contact us.
10. As Chair of Council, Anthony was pleased to represent East Suffolk at the Holocaust Memorial Service at Lowestoft Rail Station in January.