

## **December '24 and January '25 report to Bungay and Wainford villages from**

### **County Councillor Judy Cloke**

I had intended to write a brief report at the end of December, but time ran away from me as it often does.

Having been on holiday at the beginning of January, I then missed much of the remainder of the month because of Bronchitis.

However, I hope everyone had a peaceful Christmas and a good start to the New Year. Despite the miserable weather it is uplifting to see the spring flowers starting to push their way through.

Just a quick update on the projects with which I have been involved over the two months – a traffic survey was in place at Flixton over two weeks in January, also one in Cromwell Road, Ringsfield. At my instigation, the Highways team has recommended some improvements at the cross roads in Ringsfield and I am awaiting further discussions over who is to organise them and whether any funding is required from next year's Local Highways budget. I am pleased to report the raised surface bus stops have been installed in Barsham. I have complained a couple of times to the Highways team about the quality of the work undertaken by Virgin contractors when installing fibre in Bungay. This is being monitored and once raised with Morrison there is a timescale for deficiencies to be rectified. At this stage, rather disappointingly, no action is to be taken.

I am afraid I will definitely be your Councillor for the next 12 months, because of Suffolk being chosen by the Government to be part of the Devolution programme. SCC has been expressing an interest in this process since at least 2016.

I have included below a press release about Devolution, although technically the decision happened outside the scope of this report. Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader has appointed Cllr Richard Rout to lead negotiations with the Government on this very important issue for all of us. Richard is a good friend and able negotiator as well as being a very experienced Councillor, with the interests of Suffolk and its residents and businesses at the heart of all he does. He has been most vocal in opposing the pylons' project and the potential for solar farms being installed on grade A & B agricultural land.

### **Suffolk on the fast-track towards complete council restructuring and devolution**

- Ministers wants Suffolk at the front of the queue
- Suffolk's county, borough and district councils to be abolished
- Work starts on reorganisation plan for new unitary council or councils
- Government proposes postponing county elections to facilitate rapid change
- Mayor set to be elected in May 2026

Suffolk's 50-year-old two-tier council structure is set to change with the government proposing to abolish county, borough and district councils and replace them with a new unitary council arrangement and a directly elected mayor.

Under the proposals, all six of Suffolk's district, borough and county councils would be disbanded and just one authority would provide all councils services in an area. The government argues that unitary councils can deliver better outcomes for residents and save money that can be reinvested into public services.

### **Budget news**

Suffolk County Council has unveiled its proposed budget for 2025/26, with a strong focus on supporting vulnerable residents across the county.

Under the proposals, the council's net budget would rise by 6.7%, from £752.9 million in 2024/25 to £803.7 million in 2025/26. Key allocations include:

- £18.1 million extra for children's services, ensuring continued support for young people and families in need
- £35.2 million extra for adult care, aimed at addressing the growing demand for social care services.

To help fund these essential services, the council is proposing a 4.99% rise in Council Tax. This would consist of a 2.99% increase in general Council Tax and an additional 2% specifically for adult care services.

This means the costs for a household would be:

- **Band B property:** £24.67 per week, a £1.17 increase from 2024-25 (Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
- **Band D property:** £31.72 per week, a £1.51 increase from 2024-25.

The council will also receive £12.1 million of the additional £880 million allocated by the government for adult and children's social care. It also expects to receive £2.2 million of the £263 million earmarked for a new Children's Services Prevention Grant.

To balance the books, the council has also identified £10.9 million in additional savings, building on the £17.5 million approved last year. This brings the total savings to £28.4 million for the 2025/26 financial year.

### **Pylons**

A large area of landscape on the Norfolk/Suffolk border with particular uniqueness, rivalling those of other nationally protected landscapes, is set to be decimated by pylons as part of National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury project.

In a letter to both Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council, and other local leaders, National Grid has outlined that it has decided to install overhead lines through the Waveney Valley, rather than running cables underground, as they had set out in their previous consultation.

This is a significant blow to local communities and the natural environment, especially following last year's [Valued Landscape Assessment](#), a report jointly commissioned by Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council.

The report concluded that “the length of the Waveney Valley expresses many special qualities, and in the context of Suffolk and Norfolk, it is considered to be a valued landscape. Conserving and enhancing the special qualities articulated in this report is a key aspiration of existing planning policy.”

### **Suffolk's SEND provision**

A report has been published that provides the most detailed assessment of need for SEND services in Suffolk and will be used as a blueprint for immediate change.

The forensic 177-page document delves into current arrangements, future anticipated need and looks at gaps and challenges in SEND provision. This assessment highlights the increasing demand for SEND services, the challenges faced by families and professionals, and the importance of improving service provision to ensure equitable outcomes for all.

As a result of this analysis, a series of recommendations have been made to further shape improvements to SEND services. Known as the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Needs Assessment, the report will be discussed at the Health and Wellbeing Board on Thursday 16 January.

Some of the key findings and recommendations in the report include:

- A significant rise in demand for SEND services, with projections suggesting further increases in the coming years
- The importance of early intervention, timely diagnoses, and accessible services to address complex and multiple needs
- Strategic priorities emphasising communication, transition support, and whole system improvements to meet evolving demands.

The report also captures the voices of children and young people, parents, and practitioners to ensure lived experiences inform future strategies. The Suffolk Parent Carer Forum was involved in collating the report.

### **Departures: Exploring Emigration from Suffolk**

Suffolk Archives is proud to present *Departures: Exploring Emigration from Suffolk*, a new exhibition opening on 14 February 2025 and running through 31 May 2025. This free-to-enter exhibition will delve into the long history of emigration from Suffolk,

showcasing the personal stories of emigrants who have journeyed from the county to destinations across the globe.

The exhibition will explore the diverse reasons behind emigration from Suffolk, from early colonists heading to America to those drawn by the Gold Rushes in Australia and California. It will also examine the impact of emigration on both emigrants and the communities they left behind, as well as the lasting legacies of empire, colonisation, and their effects on indigenous communities.

### **Suffolk County Council Staff cycle more than 900 miles for St Elizabeth Hospice**

Suffolk County Council staff have been raising money for St Elizabeth Hospice, as part of their upcoming Wild in Art trail, set to launch in Ipswich this summer.

Suffolk Fostering and Adoption Service has sponsored a Hare through St Elizabeth Hospice's Hopscotch Learning & Community programme for the "Hop to it! Suffolk 2025" trail. Organisations on the programme each pledge to raise a minimum of £650 for the charity.

Staff from Suffolk County Council pledged to cycle 20-minutes each, towards a collective goal of 900 miles. They beat this target, cycling more than 1170 miles and raising over £1100 for St Elizabeth Hospice so far.

In the UK a child comes into care every 20 minutes. In Suffolk there are approximately 900 children in care.

As ever , do please get in touch if there is anything I can help with . I don't have all the answers, but I usually know someone who can help.

Judy Cloke 12/2/2025