

Report for Bildeston PC by Robert Lindsay, Suffolk County Councillor 13.5.24

Road resurfacing £14.5m extra

Immediately after the local elections a year ago, the Conservatives at Suffolk council announced £10m extra for resurfacing and surface treatment – which they will borrow. They also got £4.5m from central government for “100 sites”. A 35m stretch of Bildeston High Street - between Squirrels Mill and Wattisham Road, is on that list to be done.

Newberry Farmhouse

I recently had at a Teams call with senior officers at Highways and was able to bring in the owners of this property. In discussion it emerged that the most acceptable solution for now would be to see if white lines on the road can be amended to encourage HGV drivers to pay more attention. It would involve removing the dotted central white line and painting them on the sides of the roadway to give the impression of narrowing. Highways need to check with their speed and safety team that this is safe to do. Bollards, as we know, have not been deemed suitable because of utilities under the ground there.

Motion on Local Government Funding

Following massive budget cuts by the county in February, my political group – Green, LibDem and independent – is proposing a motion to full council next week that will note that the government’s autumn spending statement last year failed to address the needs of local authorities and their residents. It asks the council to urge the next government to put in place proper long term funding for local government and, as a matter of urgency close the £4billion funding gap (over next two years) for councils in England. One in five English local authorities are in danger of issuing a Section 114 notice this year or next, (effective bankruptcy) and half of English councils are not confident that they have the money to fulfil their legal duties next year.

While Suffolk itself is not thought to be in imminent danger of a Section 114, it’s budget in February proposed taking heavily from reserves to meet the funding gap. Officers warned in the paperwork that some of the cuts meant services could well suffer – particularly for people not in education or employment.

Libraries Consultation

On Tuesday 25 March, Cabinet reviewed the results of the recent consultation about the Suffolk library service. Recent pop-up libraries in village halls did not score highly in the consultation and it is unlikely these will form part of the service in future. It is also likely that mobile libraries will run from smaller vehicles in future. The successful bidder for the new libraries contract is likely to be announced in November, with the new contract starting from June 2025.

Water Management in Suffolk

A report to Scrutiny Committee detailed how East Anglia is considered a Serious Water Stressed Area by the Environment Agency. By 2050, the demand for water here is forecast to outstrip supply. Demand will be 2538MI/d (mega litres per day) but the amount available will be only 1700MI/d. Housing developments are guaranteed a water supply but commercial ones are not.

The report included plans to preserve water or generate new supplies, including reducing water company leaks, two new reservoirs in South Lincolnshire and the

Cambridgeshire fens, plus a small new reservoir in North Suffolk, and an increase in water transferred around the region.

My group's view is that there is not enough emphasis on water companies cutting their own leaks, nor on encouraging water saving measures for the public. It was noted that Essex and Suffolk Water had already declared a moratorium for new industrial/commercial connections to the supply in the Hartismere area of mid Suffolk.

New electric vehicle on-street charger funding

Suffolk County Council has won a £7.3m Government bid for electric vehicle chargers. Suffolk residents without off-street parking will supposedly benefit from £5.9 million to support EV charging, and a further £1.4 million will be used to develop the county's existing EV charging network in community locations.

Suffolk residents are invited to 'nominate' their street for consideration for on-street charging points with this online form. I do not know the criteria they are using to prioritise sites. But I would not want to see charging points installed on already narrow pavements. In villages, car parks are the best place for them.

[:https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/requestchargepoint/](https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/requestchargepoint/)

More homes eligible for Energy Improvement grants

The county has raised the income threshold to qualify for a home energy improvement grant (insulation, heat pumps, solar panels) from £31k to £36k.

But homes must have an EPC rating of D or below and must not be heated by mains gas. The threshold does not apply for certain post codes in a few more urban, deprived areas.

Average funding of £18,000 is available for homeowners, and £12,000 for landlords and their tenants.

Special Educational Needs action plan update

The county's SEND service in November failed its inspection. As a result it has drawn up a priority action plan which means spending £4.4 million on extra staff over the next couple of years to try to turn things around. Two new senior appointments have been made.

Sarah-Jane Smedmor will be the new permanent Director for Children's Services, starting July. An independent chair for the new SEND Improvement Board, which will implement the action plan, has also been appointed. She is Kathryn Boulton, who will start in June.