

Bildeston Annual and monthly Parish report by Robert Lindsay county cllr 11.5.26

County Election and the new Cosford

I am relieved to have been re-elected as your county councillor. The new Cosford division is much larger than before – 21 parishes councils (as opposed to 18 before) – and seven of them, including Boxford, Little Waldingfield and Alpheton are new to me.

The dust is still settling but this extra number of PC meetings to cover does mean that attendance at all PC meetings – difficult before - will not be possible. I will necessarily have to focus on the seven new ones to start with to get to know them. Luckily Bildeston parish councillors know me well enough to be able to approach me about issues without the need for a formal meeting. This super large division, if the government has their way, will only last two years until the new West Suffolk unitary council come into place in May 2028.

The new county council

The elections cut the Conservative councillor numbers down from 55 to just 9 with Reform winning 41 out of 70 seats, enough to form an administration on their own. Greens increased seats from nine to 13 – making us the official opposition - while LibDem and Labour seat numbers were roughly halved.

Reform	41
Green	13
Conservative	9
LD	2
Labour	2
Independent	2

At this stage it is not clear what Reform's policies are on county council matters. There are press reports that the chairman of Ipswich Reform Party has banned its new councillors in Ipswich from talking to the press.

We have our first full council meeting next Thursday. Green members will be discussing ahead of that meeting what kind of group to form. I and my fellow Green councillors will do our best to hold the Reform administration to account for the remaining two years that the county is in existence.

Reform have indicated they do not support the government's decision to scrap the county council and create three unitary councils in May 2028. They may launch a judicial review of the decision. Non co-operation with the Government on creating the three unitaries would not be to the benefit of Suffolk residents if the three unitary council plan does go ahead.

Two more elections in next two year - 2027, 2028

If the Government does stick to its plan, subject to any potential judicial review, in a year's time, in May 2027, there will be elections of "shadow" unitary councillors – in our area for the new unitary of West Suffolk. Those elected will not actually be representing residents until the unitaries are legally created with full staff in May 2028.

Alongside this, the Government is creating the office of a Norfolk and Suffolk Mayor, elected by all the voters in the two counties. The Government has delayed its plans for that election by two years to May 2028.

New 51 bus service

Looking back at the year, I'm delighted to say that the new 51 bus service has been running (since April 14) between Hadleigh and Stowmarket six times daily, five days a week. The new service is the result of an application for bus funding I supported Bildeston and two other parish councils to make two years ago and something I strongly urged. The 15 seater bus appears already to have a core of regular passengers and the £3 fare to Stowmarket (£6 there and back) is cheaper than parking at the train station all day.

Since then £27m has become available to Suffolk for new bus routes over the next three years and parish councils are being asked to bid again for services they might want. I will be trying to ensure the new administration allocates this money where buses are most needed.

Five month closure Bildeston High Street

The replacement of the water main on Bildeston High Street will mean its closure of different stretches over the five months between start in mid June to end in mid November. The surgery will still be accessible by car throughout, from one direction or another at any one time. And all businesses will be open to pedestrian access.

The county has not yet responded to my suggestion that they use the works to resurface the High Street. I can pick that up now the elections are over. I have repeatedly asked the bus company and Highways what they will do about the 51 bus route given the closure and they have so far told me that they are in discussions and awaiting a decision.

I have met Highways network assurance with local parish council chairs to see what can be done to mitigate the use of rat runs – particularly through the villages of Wattisham and Kettlebaston and Monks Eleigh – it is likely to involve the use of warning signage.

Test case for new simplified 20mph policy

On Monday 27 April I was informed that Cockfield parish council have been granted approval for reduction of speed limits from 30mph to 20mph on the three roads that surround Cockfield Great Green. So far as I know, this is one of the first test cases of the council's new, simpler policy on 20mph being put into action. It required just three speed surveys on the three roads and each one came in with an average speed below 28mph – the sole criterion now in place. However, funding will still need to be found. The new administration's policy on funding is not yet known.

Suffolk Roads Rated Red by UK Government

As you may have seen in the press, the government recently released RAG (Red, Amber, Green) ratings each county based on how effectively they use the government's highways maintenance funding and the condition of their roads. Suffolk's road maintenance expenditure was rated as Red, the worst category, implying it did not spend as much as it could have done on maintaining the roads. Suffolk County Council's administration, however, has pointed out that the condition

of the roads is rated amber and claimed that the Red rating on expenditure is an error because DfT should have included £10m of funding that the county brought forward from a later financial year than the one assessed. Despite the new administration, I don't expect a great solution to potholes at any stage in the near future.