

East Suffolk Council – Annual Report to Town and Parish Councils

I am incredibly honoured to have been elected as Leader of East Suffolk Council and enormously proud to be its first female Leader.

Following Council elections in May 2023, the Green, Liberal Democratic and Independent Members formed the GLI group to become the new Administration.

After many years of Conservative Administration at Suffolk Coastal, Waveney and East Suffolk Councils, our residents voted in huge numbers for something different and our aim from day one has been to operate on the basis of clear priorities which reflect our shared values.

Our Direction 2028

Our vision is clear and has been set out in our strategic plan, 'Our Direction 2028'. Its four main priorities, Environmental Impact, Sustainable Housing, Tackling Inequalities and Thriving Economy reflect the political ambitions of the new GLI Administration, and set the path the Council will embark on, collaboratively, for the four years until 2028.

We want to work with and empower communities and individuals to conserve what we love about our district, improve services where we need to and adapt to our changing environment - ensuring the district is in the best place possible in 2028. We also want to work closely with businesses and people visiting our beautiful District.

In delivering this plan, we recognise the importance of the solid foundations that are critically important to any successful local authority. We will continue to provide excellent quality services for our residents and will always listen - engaging with you whenever possible.

For more, head to www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/ourdirection2028.

Our spending plans for 2024-25

East Suffolk Council will spend nearly £100million in 2024/25 delivering critical services for its communities, and projects to improve the district, as part of our ambitious four-year-plan.

We confirmed a balanced budget in February committed to a net spend of £46 million for services such as planning and coastal management, environmental services, leisure, waste collection and parking.

In addition, a further £50 million will be invested in assets, services, housing and infrastructure in 2024/25 as part of the General Fund and Housing Capital Programmes.

We know that many people are facing difficulties including with the cost of living and also mental and physical health, and our services can make a real difference. We are focusing on

the inequalities that people face in East Suffolk, with a range of services dedicated to providing support for those most in need. We are raising funding for Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) organisations, providing more money for Citizens Advice East Suffolk, and to Community Hubs which offer practical advice and support for a range of vulnerable residents.

Improved housing is also a key priority and, along with the Housing Revenue Account, our budget commits to supporting safe, suitable and sustainable homes, delivering affordable and sustainable housing as opportunities arise. Right house, right place, right infrastructure, right price – homes that people can afford to live in

We have also put together a £3m ‘investing in our future’ fund, from existing money. This is funding that will be available to each of the ‘four pillars’ of our plans in ‘Our Direction 2028’, so that the Portfolio Holder and those in that task group, can put together actions to bring forward projects, under their portfolio that address our priorities in ‘Our Direction 2028’.

Naturally, we are committed to delivering positive climate, nature and environmental impacts – which will also benefit and enhance our long-term financial stability. This includes a commitment to fund a range of different initiatives such as our Cycling and Walking Strategy and ongoing financial support for the delivery of the Council’s commitment to net zero by 2030. We have set up an active Cycling, Walking and Wheeling working group and the first project will link Benhall with Saxmundham. We are also looking at trialling some “modal filters,” which restrict motorised vehicles but allow through other road users, at a few places around the district.

This budget also looks to ensure that our economic development and regeneration activity enables residents of East Suffolk to benefit from and contribute to a thriving economy but with a sustainable approach at its heart.

East Suffolk Services

East Suffolk Services Limited began officially trading at the beginning of July 2023, delivering a range of operational services for local communities on behalf of East Suffolk Council. As part of our commitment to seeking the best possible value for money for residents, businesses and stakeholders, the council agreed to create a ‘Local Authority Trading Company’ (LATCo) in the autumn of 2021, enabling it to play a more direct and influential role in the delivery of important services.

East Suffolk Services aims to provide a more flexible service and respond quickly to local issues (as in the case of clearing up after Storm Babet). The council wants to deliver improvement that benefits council taxpayers. However, the decision to create East Suffolk Services was taken in part to help us deliver environmental changes, such as new fuels, more efficient vehicles and different approaches to waste management.

Storms Babet and Ciarán

On Friday 20 October, East Suffolk was badly affected by Storm Babet which resulted in serious flooding in parts of the district, and led to the declaration of a major incident in Suffolk.

East Suffolk Council, its Officers and Councillors (who were also physically out in our communities), and East Suffolk Services worked tirelessly, alongside towns and parish councils to support communities as they sought to recover from the incident - with Framlingham and Wickham Market particularly impacted.

In the immediate aftermath and for the days that followed, teams were on hand offering housing advice, as well as clearing and cleansing work. East Suffolk Services provided vehicles and staff to assist with the clearance of houses and businesses in Framlingham. I would like to thank everybody who assisted those that suffered flooding.

In response to this, and from existing funding, we have established a ring-fenced amount of money to proactively help people with disaster resilience. This way, we do not have to wait for something to happen, and for central government to decide how to deal with it (and usually via the country council). This takes too long and is not helpful to those on the receiving end of the issue who need help immediately. If we can help put protection in, in advance, then we proactively want to help.

Flood Protection

On a very wet day in October, I joined Peter Aldous MP for Waveney and community representatives, businesses, invited guests and local students to mark the completion of the tidal walls as part of the Lowestoft Flood Protection scheme.

The 1.5km of flood defences have been built in key locations impacted by 2013 East Coast Tidal Surge. Flood walls, demountable defences and flood gates have been built along Hamilton Road, Waveney Road and Station Square. Glass-topped flood walls have been built around the Royal Norfolk and Suffolk Yacht Club and the South Pier to maintain views across the marina.

However, following the emergence of a budget gap totalling more than £100 million, and with no immediate prospect of additional funding being secured, the decision (nobody wanted to make) was taken to halt work on the project to construct a tidal flood barrier for the town.

£15 million has been spent on the project to date, and this sum is accounted for with funds that have already been pledged. However, the project was scheduled to spend an additional £20 million from January to July 2024 and this amount cannot be covered by pledged funds, creating a £20 million risk for the Council.

Although discussions have been ongoing for more than a year, it was clear that a decision by the Government and EA would not be made before this additional spending must be committed to. Therefore, despite making them aware of the urgency, East Suffolk Council was left with no alternative but to halt work on the tidal barrier element of the scheme.

The business case for the barrier could not be clearer. Prior to the commencement of the Lowestoft Flood Protection scheme, Lowestoft was the only UK coastal town with no formal tidal flood defences, leaving the town at great risk of climate change impacts.

Alongside Lowestoft MP Peter Aldous - who has also worked tirelessly in support of the tidal barrier - we will continue to remind the Government of the necessity and benefits of this scheme. However, their inability to meet the clear, critical funding requirements at this time is incredibly disappointing.

Construction of Sizewell C

The construction of Sizewell C new nuclear power station is underway, and we will watch closely to ensure that Sizewell C adheres to the commitments and obligations to make certain that, where possible, the adverse impacts are appropriately mitigated.

This includes a commitment by Sizewell C, secured by and for East Suffolk Council, to provide £30 million in investment for Housing, Economic Development and Tourism schemes, as well as a £23 million community fund and £12 million towards the natural environment in partnership with Suffolk County Council.

In addition, East Suffolk Council will have two nominated Trustees on a Charitable Trust created by the promoters of the new nuclear plant, to be known as The East Suffolk Trust.

This will promote, for the benefit of the public, the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment, including the protection and enhancement of Natural Beauty and the advancement of the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment in and around East Suffolk for the next 70 + years.

Whilst the Council remains of the view that truly renewable energy, such as offshore and onshore wind and solar provides a better long-term answer to the energy security and carbon reduction future of the UK the development of Sizewell C has been consented by the government and it is now under construction.

Long stay car park charges reduced

In other news, and following feedback received from residents, the cost of an annual long stay car parking ticket has been decreased. There are 52 long stay car parks in East Suffolk, and for these, drivers can choose to purchase a daily, monthly or annual ticket.

As part of a review of the Council's fees and charges, the cost of an annual ticket has now been reduced from £650 to £350 per year. The new price will come into effect from 1 April 2024.

The Council sets fees and charges for a wide range of services including car park charges, planning application and building control fees, licence fees, land search fees, beach hut rents and cemetery charges. Some fees are fixed by Government, and some are discretionary.

Seashore village complete

We were also delighted that work was completed on a new seaside development of beach huts and landscaped public greenspace in Felixstowe. The new Seashore Village attraction features 27 traditional-style timber beach huts provided by East Suffolk Council.

Completion of the Seashore Village brings to fruition a wider regeneration project on land between Sea Road and The Promenade – with a neighbouring activity park, featuring climbing walls, sports equipment and games, which opened in the summer.

£900,000 investment for historic Town Hall

Meanwhile a project by Lowestoft Town Council to restore and revitalise Lowestoft's historic Town Hall has received a further funding boost thanks to a £900,000 investment by East Suffolk Council.

The funding will go towards a project to transform the vacant High Street building into a multi-functional community space, containing a Heritage Gallery, café, community event space and town council offices.

Cabinet members agreed a request from building owner and project leader, Lowestoft Town Council, for a financial contribution towards the redevelopment, which forms part of the Lowestoft Town Investment Plan and the Towns Fund programme.

East Suffolk Council has already provided support in developing the project plan and bidding for additional external funding, which included an allocation of £2million in Towns Fund investment as part of the overall £24.9m Lowestoft's Town Deal awarded by the Department for Levelling Up, Homes & Communities in 2022.

Meanwhile, plans to regenerate Royal Plain, Royal Green, and South Quay Wharf in Lowestoft to further improve the area as a destination for local communities and visitors are also proceeding.

East Suffolk Council is also proud to be one of the major funders of the First Light Festival in Lowestoft. Organised by First Light CIC and held on Lowestoft's award-winning South Beach each June, First Light Festival is a free multi arts festival, celebrating the first midsummer sunrise in Britain's most easterly town.

Supported by East Suffolk Council, the festival attracts tens of thousands of people from across the UK and offers an exciting programme of arts activities including music, dance, theatre and performance, for all ages (if you would like to volunteer to steward at this event, please do contact the organisers).

Safe Suffolk Renters

I am pleased that Suffolk's five district and borough councils are working together on

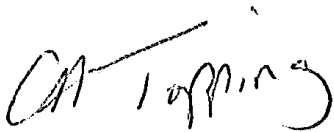
delivering a ground-breaking project aimed at improving the experience and environment for landlords and tenants in the private rented sector.

Called 'Safe Suffolk Renters', this multi-faceted initiative is designed to create a better understanding of the pressures and problems in the sector, and to improve standards, particularly in the worst private rented homes in the area. To achieve this, the project team will consult widely with tenants, landlords and stakeholders in the county.

The project is already speaking with key stakeholders and staged a landmark conference for private sector landlords at the University of Suffolk in Ipswich. Engaging for a Better Future brought together landlords, representatives of member associations and industry professionals.

We have also already funded some exemplar projects in East Suffolk such as Green Light Trust, who are building a 'Green Building' and ran out of funding to finish it off to the best carbon credentials and given space for the Deben Climate Centre to establish a climate action project in Woodbridge. Other projects are being supported and if you have such a project, please let your District Councillor know.

Cllr Caroline Topping

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Topping', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Leader
East Suffolk Council**