

Report to Bungay and Wainford Parishes January & February 2024

from County Councillor Judy Cloke

Flixton :

I met with Cllr Warne and an officer from ESC regarding ongoing issues in St Felix Rise. Cllr Warne and I have tried to have these addressed for a long time. We discussed the best way to reinforce the grass which has been destroyed in places by residents driving over it and how to finance the project. There will be no resolution until costs are known. Further housing issues were raised by residents at the recent village meeting and I have passed these concerns on to the ESC housing team as we do not yet have a dedicated Housing Officer for this Ward / Division. We managed to get an untaxed car removed.

I was also pleased to attend a Flixton Quarry Liaison Group meeting . These have happened all too rarely and there is hope they will be more frequent going forward. We discussed the plans for the new quarry.

St Cross

The flooding issues are ongoing but I understand Highways officers have visited the sites highlighted in my visit with Cllrs in November. I also understand the gulleys in Mendham Lane are to be cleared and jetted and Highways officers were to meet with representatives from Anglia Water on 28 Feb. I am sure Cllr French Mullen will provide an update.

Barsham:

Our Highways team has spoken to the East Suffolk road sweeping team and have asked for all the debris near Barsham Rigg to be cleared from the road . I'm afraid it is an inevitable result of the recent heavy rain – mud is washed down onto the roads

Sotterley:

I have had a lengthy email exchange with a resident of Smith's Rd Sotterley about the poor condition of the road and undertaken a site visit, I am pleased to report the road should be repaired soon.

Bungay:

I am pleased to report I have received the results of two traffic surveys which I sponsored on Flixton Road and Bridge Street . This is the second survey of Bridge Street which I have commissioned in the last 3 years and the stats are not hugely different – they do not support excessive speeding, the mean speed being 19mph. I have asked the Town Clerk whether the mobile camera unit can be deployed to Flixton Road because the stats for this stretch of road do indicate people are breaking the speed limit along here.

I was honoured to be asked to chair the Lucy Robertson Walker Make a Difference Awards. Lucy was a good friend to many in Bungay and made a difference herself in the town – Cllr Martinez is the most worthy winner.

Suffolk generally :

SEND

There has been plenty in the Press regarding the SEND provision in Suffolk and the resignation of three cabinet members. It has been a difficult time for everyone involved and whilst improvements were being made, plainly this was not fast enough. I very much hope the situation will improve. I have copied below a statement made by Cllr Matthew Hicks (leader) in the EADT:

Experienced cabinet member Cllr Andrew Reid will take the role of cabinet member for SEND and education. The role previously included oversight of skills, but to enable more political focus and accountability on urgent improvements on SEND services, this has now been moved to Cllr Richard Smith to sit alongside his existing responsibilities for economic development, transport strategy and waste. Cllr Debbie Richards will support Cllr Reid as deputy cabinet member for SEND. Working with the DfE, we are also establishing a new SEND Improvement Board, with an independent chair. This is a requirement following the Ofsted/CQC inspection.

Continuing the changes to children and young people (CYP) leadership, serving cabinet member Cllr Bobby Bennett has been appointed as cabinet member for CYP services. Two deputy cabinet members have been promoted to cabinet roles – Cllr Philip Faircloth-Mutton is now cabinet member for equality and communities and Cllr Craig Rivett is cabinet member for public health and public protection.

Alongside these changes, further new faces come in as deputy cabinet members. Cllr Nadia Cenci becomes deputy cabinet member for property and county farms, Cllr David Roach becomes deputy cabinet member for fostering and adoption and Cllr Heike Sowa joins as deputy cabinet member for transformation.

Separately, there has also been change at a senior officer level within SEND services, with two senior leaders having left the organisation late last year and interim leadership in place. A new executive director of children and young people is in the process of being recruited. The application window closed last week. This will be a key executive role and we are specifically looking for someone who understands SEND, knows what success looks like and who can deliver the much-needed cultural change that is needed and that Suffolk children and their families deserve.

I am sorry and deeply disappointed that the speed of change has been too slow and am determined to deliver improvements through leadership change, investments and culture change. Most importantly, I want the experience of children and families to be far better, emotionally sensitive and timely.

Getting this right for the children and young people in Suffolk is my top priority – a commitment shared by councillors and senior leadership team. This is not an empty pledge. We remain steadfast and resolved to go further and faster with our reforms.

Driving forward SEND reform will be paramount. Our job will be to build on the good work that is already underway, including investing more than £55 million to create more than 1,250 additional places in specialist and mainstream schools and the creation of specialist SEND support teams and training for all Suffolk schools to support them to meet the additional needs of children in mainstream schools. If approved by

councillors next week, we are also proposing the additional investment of £4.4m in 2024/25 and £3.4m in 2025/26 to expand our statutory SEND teams and secure sufficient educational psychology resource to improve the quality and timeliness of Education Health and Care assessments and reviews. This investment comes at a time when Suffolk County Council is facing its most challenging budget.

60 new members of staff will be recruited to drive forward important reform to the way SEND services are delivered in Suffolk.

POTHoles & HIGHWAYS

Suffolk Highways has welcomed the new pothole-repairing machine to help fix the growing number of potholes experienced nationally during the winter season, with a trial set to initially target defects in rural Suffolk.

The Dragon Patcher is a machine that releases compressed air which cleans the surface of the road, before heating the surface to a temperature that enables repair material to bond effectively with the road surface, allowing the pothole to be repaired with an aggregate and hot bitumen material.

Compared with the traditional approach of repairing potholes, the Dragon Patcher can work five times faster. This trial is in addition to the potholes being repaired around the clock as part of our routine repair programme, during the past two months Suffolk Highways has repaired 2,851 potholes across Suffolk.

Fuelled by the biodiesel, HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil), the patcher reduces raw material use and creates zero waste and has shown to provide significant carbon savings when compared to traditional patching techniques.

As a result of the extreme weather, Suffolk Highways has seen an 82% increase in requests for action on the highway - 18,000 additional customer reports so far during the 2023/24 financial year.

The number of drainage and flooding issues have increased by a staggering 364% in the last five months when compared to the same period in 2022/23. Suffolk Highways has also responded to 2,117 emergency incidents in the same period, which represents a 64% increase on last year.

The increased wet weather coupled with occasional freezing temperatures this time of year results in a sharp rise in pothole breakouts. Despite these challenges, highways has completed 34% more repairs to potholes in 2023/24 when compared with the previous year.

LOFT INSULATION GRANTS

Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders have launched a Suffolk Loft Insulation offer, teaming up with builders' merchant Travis Perkins to offer Suffolk residents a significant reduction on loft insulation.

There are four product options available, and residents will receive a 50% discount off their purchase (up to £200), with free delivery.

According to The Energy Saving Trust, it is estimated that an uninsulated home loses a quarter of its heat through its roof. An effective way to reduce this heat loss, and heating bills, is to insulate your loft, attic or flat roof. Correctly installed insulation should pay for itself many times over in its 40-year lifetime.

TRANSPORT SURVEY

Residents are invited to share their views on how they travel to help inform Suffolk's Local Transport Plan.

The plan sets out a long-term vision for transport in Suffolk and covers key themes such as decarbonisation of transport, strengthening the local economy, promoting health, wellbeing and social inclusion, and creating better-connected places that encourage a range of transport choices.

Suffolk County Council is asking for feedback on the key themes proposed for the fourth version of the plan, which will cover the period until 2040 and respond to long-term transport opportunities and challenges facing Suffolk and the UK as a whole.

A link to the survey can be found at <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/ltp4>. The consultation will run for eight weeks until 8 April 2024.

BUDGET

A £752.8m package was approved at the Full Council meeting on Thursday 15 February 2024, with the priority to protect vulnerable adults and children across the county.

Despite the recently announced uplift in government funding and asking residents for the maximum Council Tax contribution, it is still not sufficient to cover the rising costs imposed by inflation, or the increasing levels of demand for services - in particular children's care, special educational needs, and disabilities (SEND) and home to school transport.

However, as a direct result of the government's recent intervention to provide further funding, the following proposals were approved:

- £500,000 of project funding will be made available to all arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk from April 2025 – it is intended that this funding will be available every year going forward
- £528,000 of core funding to nine arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk will end in March 2025
- £45,000 will be reinstated to support the County Music Service from April 2024
- £9 million of reserves will be used to balance the 2024-25 budget

WEED CONTROL

In February 2022, the council agreed to stop using glyphosate in its routine weed treatment programmes, to find more natural alternatives to help protect the local environment.

However, the alternative products proved unable to meet requirements, which was further exacerbated by exceptional growing conditions. Multiple applications were sometimes needed which could introduce other negative environmental impacts.

It has proved a challenge to reduce high performing treatments, whilst significantly mitigating the environmental impact. Other local authorities locally have experienced a similar situation.

Regular weed treatment on our highway network will continue using a variety of methods, with plans for glyphosate being considered only when appropriate – the ambition still remains to reduce the use of glyphosate as far as possible.

Teams will continue to monitor and research the different approaches being used to remove weeds on our roads and pavements. Where needed, glyphosate would be used responsibly as it is one of the most cost-effective and long-lasting solutions.

Judy Cloke 4/3/2004