

Minutes of the **Annual Town meeting** held at the Woodbridge Town Football Club on **Wednesday 8th May 2025 at 7pm**

Councillors:

Present: Cllr. Robin Sanders (Mayor of Woodbridge), Mr G E Diaper (Town Clerk) and forty-four parish electors.

Apologies: Cllrs. Geoff Holdcroft, Doreen Pegg, Nigel Phipps, Thomas Rogerson, Catherine Walsh and Martin Wilks.

In Attendance: MP for Suffolk Coastal – Jenny Riddell–Carpenter
Suffolk County Councillor for Woodbridge – Ruth Leach
District Councillors of Woodbridge – Ruth Leach and Stephen Molyneux.

1. Welcome

The Mayor of Woodbridge, Cllr. Robin Sanders welcomed those in attendance to the Woodbridge Annual Town meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllrs. Geoff Holdcroft, Doreen Pegg, Nigel Phipps, Thomas Rogerson, Catherine Walsh and Martin Wilks.

3. Consideration and approval of Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Wednesday 8th May 2024.

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Wednesday 8th May 2024 were signed as a true record.

The Mayor advised those present that he was going to re-order the agenda to allow the MP for Suffolk Coastal to speak to her report as she was due to attend a VE Day event in Felixstowe later this evening.

5. To receive a report from the Member of Parliament for Suffolk Coastal, Jenny Riddell–Carpenter MP.

The MP spoke to her report (appended) which followed her election some ten months previously – her office in Felixstowe was now open and to date, she had received over 40,000 emails.

Her main areas of concern and focus are:

- Adult social care
- Education and special education
- Local environment

The MP was questioned about the potential removal of swift bricks from planning policy, for which she would provide a direct reply via email, and about the recent signing of a trade agreement between the UK and US with a particular concern about imported, lower grade beef. The MP responded that she is a advocate of local farmers, UK food resilience and the continued importance of animal welfare.

4. To receive a report from the Town Mayor on the Civic Year 2024/25.

The Town Mayor spoke to his report (appended), and focussed on the following important topics from the past year:

- Launch of the Sutton Hoo longship
- Updates on the proposed sale of 15 Tide Mill Way and Theatre Street toilets.
- Improvements to Kingston Field
- The condition of the Town Council estate
- Travellers on Kingston Field
- Continued issue with topsoil erosion on Broomheath
- Fen Meadow boardwalk installation
- Hares for the Hospice fundraising trail
- Shire Hall NLHF bid

6. To receive a report from the County Councillor for Woodbridge, Cllr. Ruth Leach.

County Councillor Leach spoke to her report on the 2024/25 Civic Year (appended).

The Town Mayor allowed questions from Members of the public to County Councillor Leach in regard of the Active Travel Woodbridge project at this time.

A resident enquired as to whether the Town Council utilised traffic data when preparing its response to the Active Travel Woodbridge consultation – the Town Mayor provided a response detailing the process followed by the Council.

7. To receive a report from the East Suffolk District Councillors for Woodbridge, Cllr. Ruth Leach and Cllr. Stephen Molyneux.

District Councillors Leach and Molyneux spoke to their reports on the 2024/25 Civic Year (appended).

860. Public question time.

Representatives from the following local organisations and charities addressed the meeting:

- Fairtrade Woodbridge
- Transition Woodbridge
- Woodbridge Shufflers
- Woodbridge and Melton Society
- Choose Woodbridge
- Woodbridge Town Football Club
- Rotary Club of Woodbridge
- Deben Rotary

861. Closure

The meeting was closed at 9.13pm.

Councillor Robin Sanders
Mayor of Woodbridge



REPORT TO WOODBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter MP, Member of Parliament for Suffolk Coastal

Annual Town Meeting – 8 May 2025

1. Introduction

It continues to be an immense privilege to serve as the Member of Parliament for Suffolk Coastal. Over the past ten months, I've had the opportunity to meet hundreds of constituents across Suffolk Coastal at surgeries, coffee mornings and on the doorstep. These conversations have helped guide my work both locally and in Westminster, and I am grateful to every individual and organisation who has taken the time to share their views and concerns.

As part of my ongoing work, I have made it a priority to be as visible and accessible as possible across our large and diverse constituency. From hosting workshops, community coffee mornings, regular surgeries and more, I am committed to staying rooted in the day-to-day lives of our towns and villages.

I'm grateful to Woodbridge Town Council for the opportunity to provide this written update ahead of the Annual Town Meeting, and to outline the work I've been doing on behalf of the town and the wider constituency

2. Parliamentary Work and National Issues

In Westminster, much of my attention over recent months has been directed toward those policy areas where national decisions have a clear and immediate impact on our local communities.

I led a Westminster Hall debate on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in February. The debate followed a detailed survey I launched across the constituency, gathering evidence from nearly 100 families. The findings were stark: more than half of respondents said their children had missed out on school because their needs could not be met, and 13% had been out of education for over a year. I have challenged the Department for Education to respond urgently, and the relevant Minister for SEND will be visiting Suffolk Coastal shortly to meet affected families and professionals on the ground.

Energy infrastructure has also been a major area of focus. I have spoken out in Parliament and submitted formal responses to consultations on Sea Link, LionLink, and Nautilus. These projects, taken together, represent a significant transformation in our region but their planning has been fragmented. I have called for a coordinated offshore grid approach and urged developers to work with rather than around local communities. I have made clear that respect for our landscape, and for the people who live here, must be at the heart of any national infrastructure rollout.



Through my role on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, I have scrutinised the performance of water companies, challenged poor standards, and supported reforms to improve accountability. I've pressed Anglian Water on their role in protecting rivers like the Deben, and highlighted the vital work done by local citizen science groups who regularly test and monitor water quality.

I've spent a lot of time listening to farmers across Suffolk Coastal, hearing directly about the challenges they're facing. One of the key concerns raised with me is the imbalance in the supply chain, with farmers too often being squeezed by large retailers. In Parliament, I was part of a group of MPs who wrote to the UK's major supermarkets to demand fairer treatment for farmers and an end to misleading "farmwashing" practices. While these retailers reported billions in profits last year, many of our local farms are struggling to remain viable. I've been clear that supermarkets must play their part in building a fairer, more sustainable food system, and I'll continue to use my voice in Westminster to stand up for those who put food on our tables.

Parliamentary work has also included efforts on healthcare, rural transport, farming, and digital infrastructure, all areas that directly affect residents in Woodbridge. I have spoken on the floor of the House about the need for more investment in rural NHS services and community GPs, about fairer treatment for farmers in the supply chain, and about supporting BT's work at Adastral Park to develop new digital opportunities, especially for young people in Suffolk.

3. Woodbridge: Local Priorities and Engagement

I have had a lot of positive engagement from constituents in Woodbridge since being elected as MP, and this is really important in ensuring that I work on issues that are priorities to local people. Throughout the year, I have heard directly from residents on a range of local issues, including traffic congestion, crime and antisocial behaviour, access to healthcare, and environmental protections.

Earlier this year, I met with the River Deben Association to discuss the ongoing need to protect and enhance the water quality of one of Suffolk's most iconic natural features. The River Deben is not only a vital environmental asset, it supports local wildlife, tourism, and recreation, and forms a central part of the town's identity. My work on water regulation in Parliament has been informed by local concerns here, and I will continue to push for transparency, investment, and stronger enforcement powers to hold these companies to account.

Concerns about road safety and traffic congestion remain a regular feature of



correspondence and casework. I have raised these issues directly with Suffolk County Council and in Parliament, an example being safety and traffic on the A12 and the broader need for better roadworks coordination. In Woodbridge, I know from correspondence with constituents that areas such as Melton Hill and key school routes require attention, and I will continue to press for meaningful improvements.

Crime and antisocial behaviour, while low by national standards, have become a growing source of anxiety for some residents. I remain in close contact with Suffolk Police and have urged greater visibility of neighbourhood teams. I've also been clear that Woodbridge, as a busy town centre, must not be overlooked when it comes to community safety planning.

One of the most promising opportunities ahead lies in digital innovation. At Adastral Park, just a short distance from Woodbridge, BT is developing an innovation hub focused on AI, cybersecurity, and next-generation connectivity. During a recent visit from the Housing and Local Government Minister, I made the case for further investment in skills, training and infrastructure to support these industries, ensuring that towns like Woodbridge can access the benefits.

4. Local Casework and Support

Over the past year, my team and I have handled a wide range of casework on behalf of Woodbridge residents. These have included SEND support for children, challenges in accessing NHS and dental care, housing allocation issues, and a wide range of localised issues. My role as MP includes ensuring that people can navigate public services and get the help they need.

In December, I partnered with the Woodbridge Salvation Army and the Citizens Advice Bureau to host a pension credit awareness event. These kinds of local initiatives are essential in helping people access the support they are entitled to, and I was pleased to see the positive response from residents. I have also visited local food banks, schools, and voluntary organisations to listen, learn, and amplify their voices in Parliament.

5. Future Priorities

Looking ahead, my focus will remain on the core issues that matter most to Woodbridge and similar towns across Suffolk Coastal.

This includes continuing to fight for a fairer and more effective SEND system, protecting and enhancing the River Deben and our wider natural environment, supporting efforts to grow our digital economy, and pushing for real change in how national infrastructure



Jenny Riddell-Carpenter
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projects are coordinated and delivered. I will also maintain pressure on Suffolk County Council and government departments to invest in road safety, improve public transport, and protect access to essential services like libraries, GP surgeries and schools.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide this report. I am proud to represent Woodbridge and Suffolk Coastal in Parliament, and I look forward to continuing our work together in the months ahead.

Report for 2024-2025 Mayoral Year

As Mayor and Chair I am pleased to report that the Town Council has been advancing a number of significant changes and projects during the year as well as providing recommendations and local input for work that the District and County Council are responsible for.

Buildings

The Town Council own 8 buildings in the town, two of which are Grade 1 listed and they are under regular review and assessment including discussions with tenants and occupiers.

Shire Hall

The Shire Hall has been a primary focus this year.

At the beginning of the year the Council agreed to proceed with seeking funding for renovation of the Shire Hall in line with residents wishes from the previous year's consultation on options for the Shire Hall. We sought bids from consultants versed in seeking funds from the National Lottery fund and one consultant stood out from the others. That consultant, Tricolor, was appointed in the summer and after a range of consultations with key stakeholders and with the council members we submitted a bid for National Lottery funding in April to do urgent repairs to the lower floor windows and to help fund a detailed feasibility study on the overall renovation. The results of the bid should be known soon. Notwithstanding that the Council has continued to set aside significant funds for the major work that we need to renovate the Shire Hall, our aim is to put in a further bid to the National Lottery for the overall renovation. Finally, to celebrate the Shire Hall's 450th anniversary we are planning an Elizabethan themed event on the Market Hill this September.

15 Tide Mill Way

This building, which requires significant improvement work, and was previously occupied by Woodbridge Arts Club Ltd, was registered as a Community Asset Building by East Suffolk Council in 2024. The Town Council who, in any event had always intended this to be a building with community uses, decided to put the building up for sale and there is keen interest by a number of parties in its purchase. Purchasers are being requested to submit by 2nd June their proposals which will detail their intended community use of the building. The proposed community use will form a key element in selecting the purchaser for the building and putting specific covenants on the sale to ensure such use.

Kingston Pavilion

As owners we have upgraded the Pavilion over the last 12 -18 months with new accessible entrance doors and improvements to the toilets but the tenant was not

succeeding in making it a profitable enterprise. We negotiated an early release from the tenancy and advertised the building for an 18-month tenancy whilst we review the use of Kingston Field which I outline further below. There has been considerable interest and interviews of shortlisted applicants and appointment of a new tenant is expected to be in place in mid-May. Watch this space.

Longshed

At the start of the year the occupier of much of this facility raised concerns in the press and at council meetings about the future of the Longshed in relation to the shipbuild remaining in the building and in the town. Discussions have led to better relations between the town council, the leaseholder and the occupier and the latter has now found and is negotiating for long term premises at Robertsons Boatyard. The project will thus remain in Woodbridge after the boat is launched from Whisstocks slipway, and a new area of the Woodbridge waterfront will be opened up to the public by this move. Discussions are also ongoing with regard to the management of the launch of the ship, currently projected to be in the spring of 2026, as the restricted space at Whisstocks/Tide Mill Way and the likely large influx of people wishing to be present for the launch presents considerable logistical issues.

Town Council land

The principal areas of land we own are Elmhurst Park, Kingston Field, Fen Meadow and the open space at Broomheath, all have been subject to investment approved this year with more in prospect.

Securing our land

This year we had an unauthorised incursion onto Kingston Field by an itinerant traveller family late one afternoon. The swift action by our Estates Officer prevented a much larger contingent entering the field the next morning. Subsequent to that event we reviewed how we can secure our land from further incursions and action has been taken. At Kingston Field we decided against lengthy barriers and have planted a 'soft' defence of trees and bushes which will gradually form a natural strong defence line to incursions.

Maintenance

The quality of the maintenance of our land by our grounds contractor had been deteriorating and we took strong action in the summer to force an improvement resulting in the parks and green areas now being returned to an acceptable level of care. This will continue and we will review, this forthcoming year, how we progress such work at the end of the contract.

Play Areas

We have instigated improvements during the year to the Kingston Field and Elmhurst Park play areas by installing new matting around play equipment to make these safe areas for the town's children to play. We have reviewed the Fen Meadow play area and proposals for a new play area are being advanced and the details can be seen in minutes of our recent meetings.

Kingston Field

We have appointed a specialist consultant to review the use of Kingston Field and consult with users and potential users to determine how we can make best use of the playing field and the Pavilion thereon to serve the town and its numerous sports clubs.

In the meantime, we have improved the pétanque court by importing material to replenish the surface to a good playing surface. The court is being increasingly used.

Fen Meadow

After discussions on how to improve ease of access via the footpaths we have contracted to put in place a boardwalk over the lowest part of the path between Seckford Street and Cumberland Street which become waterlogged and muddy in winter. This boardwalk has now been completed.

Broomheath

This open space is a fragile environment due to the fine sandy soil conditions and has, in the past, needed protective fencing to recover areas after fires, the fencing allowing vegetation to recover free from incursions. Last winter the overuse of the main slope by the abundant rabbit population, dogs and humans led to a serious loss of vegetation and subsequent erosion by water. A further area has been fenced and initial recovery of vegetation can be seen but we anticipate fencing will need to remain for some time to stabilise the area. In the near future we will be adding seating and table facilities for picnics on the site.

Allotments

Despite strenuous efforts to find additional land for allotments both inside and outside the Council boundaries we have been unsuccessful. Fortunately, this year the waiting list has reduced in number and time to be offered an allotment has reduced; the Council will continue to try to find additional land. After discussion with current allotment holders a new allotment agreement has been developed.

Grants

Last year the Council received a high number of applications for grant support and the requested sums far exceeded the budgeted allocation for grants. The process was for applications to all be submitted early in the year and this became onerous and difficult to administer in a single grant award meeting. The Council has reviewed the grants policy and application process and for the forthcoming year we will have three rounds of application for grants.

Planning

The Council is a statutory consultee on all planning applications in the town and also on large developments outside the town which may impact upon the town. Fortnightly meetings are held to give our responses and over the last year we have commented upon over 120 applications or reapplications.

WTC also monitors the development of the Sizewell C project and will be watchful of the impact that project will have on the A12 and the road and rail links through the town. WTC has made representations on the potential impact of the intended nighttime freight trains which have just commenced to run and will monitor the impact over the forthcoming year as these trains make their regular nightly runs.

Consultations and Proposals

Consultations

The Town Council has been engaged in responding to a number of consultations by district, county and national government over the last year.

One of the most significant of these in relation to Woodbridge is the Suffolk County Council Active Travel consultations for South Woodbridge and latterly the Town Centre.

We have held meetings to discuss the updated proposals for the former and our response to the latter at which members of the public have given their comments. We will continue to liaise with residents and SCC on these proposals.

The Town Council is also monitoring and commenting upon the accelerated devolution proposals for Suffolk as these are likely to impact on the Council, the community, the services we provide and the cost to ratepayers.

The devolution proposals include radical reorganisation of the higher tiers of councils establishing a mayoral authority for Suffolk and Norfolk by May 2026, dissolving the county and district councils by spring 2027 and replacing them with a single tier authority. Initial proposals to government by the current higher tier authorities vary widely and the Town Council will seek to have consultation with these authorities over the next 6-9 months to establish the potential impact on the Town Council and the services we will provide in coming years.

Cllr. Robin Sanders
Mayor of Woodbridge

Annual Report for Woodbridge Town Council meeting 8/5/2025

Compiled by Cllr Ruth Leach

I am pleased to submit this report in my role as Suffolk County Councillor for Woodbridge.

The report has two parts, the first pertains to the Annual Town Meeting and the 2nd part is as a reference to matters mentioned in part 1.

I have been the Suffolk County Councillor for Woodbridge for the last 18 months and then was subsequently elected to the position of East Suffolk District councillor for Woodbridge in February this year. This followed the sad passing of my fellow Lib Dem colleague and friend; Cllr Kay Yule, in December 2024. Kay's memorial service is to be held on the 16th of May at 12pm at St Mary's Church, all are welcome to join in and pay respects to her memory.

Finally, for the last 2 years I have represented the Seckford Ward as a Woodbridge Town Councillor and have had the honour of serving as Deputy Mayor over this last year.

I have found that, although keeping me very busy, being a 'triple hatter' has given me the opportunity to combine many of the solutions that each role offers, which I believe is to the benefit of Woodbridge residents. Previously where there was overlap and duplication and seemingly impenetrable barriers to getting things done, which now have largely been removed. I am enjoying the synergy with my ESC colleague, Cllr Stephen Molyneux, and value working with my fellow Woodbridge town councillors, clerks, staff and mayor, Cllr Robin Sanders.

Suffolk County Council (SCC) has 75 councillors, and the current political distribution is as follows: Conservative (52), Green (9), Independent (2), Labour (5), Liberal Democrat (5), West Suffolk Independents (1), and one vacancy. The administration is Conservative.

At SCC I am opposition spokesperson for women and am on the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Board as well as the Councillor Development Group. I have volunteered as the Lib Dem representative on the Local Govt reorganisation and Devolution Working Group.

East Suffolk Council (ESC) has 55 councillors, with a Green/Lib Dem/Independent (GLI) alliance in administration. I am still busy completing all the learning modules and so far, have been appointed to sit on the Audit and Governance committee and am a member of the Melton, Woodbridge and Deben Peninsula Community Partnership Board.

Woodbridge Town Council (WTC) has 16 councillors, distributed across a range of political parties. I am on the planning and finance committees and am the deputy chair of the Highways committee.

I serve Woodbridge as a Liberal Democrat.

For the sake of brevity my report is in table form listed under the focus areas of both of my election campaigns; viz;

- creating a resilient community
- protecting the environment and
- improving the local landscape

My activities are distributed roughly over 10 % policy and 90 % hands on casework.

Casework Update

Context	Objective	Which Council role	Actions	Outcome
Creating a resilient Community				
Strengthening our sense of identity and community	Encourage an inclusive and welcoming community where all are respected, regardless of cultural differences and supporting and valuing the diversity amongst us.	SCC/ESC/WTC	Participated in 'Everyone is welcome' action event. Support Woodbridge Library events. Using my budgets; fund, attend and support local community events such as, the Christmas Lights switch on, the Christmas Gingerbread Village, the Woodbridge Regatta, Woodbridge Town Football Club, and cultural events such as the Woodbridge Festival of Art and Music, The Woodbridge Opera and the Ambient Music Festival, and	Delivered Ongoing Ongoing

			others which are new to Woodbridge.	
Addressing isolation and loneliness	Identify and address issues that cause isolation, to give residents a sense of belonging and purpose, and a place to go each week where they feel welcomed and valued.	SCC/ESC/WTC	<p>Create a grief support group that is accessible to all</p> <p>Celebrate International Women's Day</p> <p>Support the Men's Shed/support and encourage groups with different activities such as the Mission to Music choir, Grove Court Garden Group and a Woodbridge Men's brunch club.</p>	<p>Delivered 'Deben Grief Support Group'</p> <p>Delivered the 'Exceptional Suffolk Women' Trail and fashion show</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
Preventing trips and falls in the over 65s	<p>Identify uneven pavement surfaces and defects that are causing people to trip and getting them repaired quickly.</p> <p>Improve balance and core strength in over the 65 demographics</p>	SCC/ESC	<p>Lobby relentlessly for repairs to the Thoroughfare despite the absence of funding, the Thoroughfare was on the 'Wish List' four times before funding became available. Repairs are in progress</p> <p>Propose motion to SCC to lower threshold for intervention in repairing surfaces</p> <p>Initiate and support a self-sustaining strength and balance programme with</p>	<p>Delivered</p> <p>Delivered</p> <p>Delivered</p>

			exercise group 'SPOT Wellbeing' starting in June	
Anti-Social Behaviour reduction	Identify 'hotspots' and offer alternatives, listen to the voices of our Youth Council, liaise with Suffolk Constabulary	SCC/ESC/WTC	Developed the 'Enable, Support and Protect (ESP)' programme with Youth Council for young workers in the hospitality industry. Work with Choose Woodbridge and Suffolk Constabulary to support businesses in tackling crime on their premises and on handling confrontation. Provide children's play facilities to use up their energy positively	'Enable' Meeting 15/5 And 'Support and Protect' ongoing Meeting for businesses in the library on the 15 th May Skatepark repaired and to be extended – under discussion. To propose a cycle track at Fen Meadow where the old track used to be
Update the Emergency Plan	Secure a resilient community response in the face of emergency such as flood, smoke or rail disaster	ESC/WTC	Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU) and WTC to create plan, thank you to Cllr Adelson for chairing	In final stages, will be shortly calling for community volunteers to do rest centre training
Improve Communication to residents	Deliver messages directly to residents via social media, newsletter and face to face	SCC/WTC	Walking surgeries, Woodbridge Town Crier now monthly, WTC quarterly newsletter, social media, Wi-Fi and City Fibre rollout	Ongoing
Improve facilities for: 0 – 5yrs age group	Create a place for new parents to meet up and access support and resources and build friendships	SCC	Offer child friendly play area for caregivers and 0 - 5yr olds to meet up and socialise, to offer ante natal education,	Under development

			pregnancy exercise classes, parenting courses, ante natal exercises, breast feeding advice, baby massage and 0 -5 yr. old enrichment classes.	
Over 65s	Support safer walking and wheeling and activities so that there is something for everyone to enjoy such as riverside walks, art classes and cycling.	SCC	Support and promote local interest groups and events in the town Active Travel Woodbridge Scheme	Ongoing support of groups and events. Ongoing work with the ATW team to tailor the project to work for Woodbridge
Families	Give families a pleasant place to spend time together, support carers and young carers	SCC/ESC/WTC	Improve play areas and outdoor leisure facilities that are also inclusive to people who benefit from a neurodivergence tailored approach and that are accessible for people with mobility challenges. Support Jetty Lane project, activities in the Long Shed and local clubs such as the Light Hearted Philosophy Cafe	Ongoing Ongoing
Scouts	Support 1st Woodbridge troop in moving back into Woodbridge, support them to reduce waiting	SC/ ESC/WTC	Investigate/ monitor and create opportunity to return them to Woodbridge. The group is over 100 yrs. in existence,	Ongoing, monthly liaison

	lists of approx. 100		one of the oldest in the country and will benefit from being housed in Wb again	
Sea Scouts	Support 5 th Woodbridge Sea Scouts in new building, support them to reduce waiting lists of approx. 300	ESC	Monitor and identify larger premises that will accommodate their growing numbers	Ongoing, monthly liaison
Army Cadets/Air Cadets/Guides	Improve facilities – MOD and Guiding	MOD		ongoing
Youth Council	Give our young people a voice in the town and support them to make decisions as Youth Council	WTC	Weekly Youth Council meetings. Thank you to Cllr Sutton for recruiting, developing the concept and chairing this exceptional group	ongoing
Provide more allotments to reduce the 2-yr waiting list	Increase the number of allotments available	ESC	Investigating land options as there is nothing within the Town Council's portfolio of property that is suitable. To consider a piece of land that has been identified.	ongoing

Promote tourism and support our market town economy	Maximise what is available and make new businesses welcome	ESC	Encourage new business ideas Support 'Choose Woodbridge' Create 'Mill to Mill' walk Publicise opening of Woodbridge section of the King Charles III England Coast Path Create more parking spaces and more Blue Badge spaces as part of the Parking areas refurb	Ongoing
Make Woodbridge a disability-friendly town within the existing limitations	Work with the Disability Forum to improve accessibility and disability-friendly amenities	WTC/ESC	Find a site for the 'Changing Places' toilet Increase the number of Blue Badge parking places Declutter the Thoroughfare – A boards and unlicensed street furniture	Under ESC at present Active Travel Woodbridge and ESC Ongoing
Protecting the Environment				
Continue to monitor water quality in the transitional Deben at Woodbridge	Continue to demand accountability from Anglian Water, the Environment Agency, Ofwat and Defra. Support bathing water classification at Waldringfield because this	ESC	Continue with River fly monitoring with the River Deben Association, testing of the transitional Deben over the bathing season using Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) funding, submitting a	Ongoing

	<p>impacts the wastewater recycling plant at Woodbridge. Monitor progress towards Ecological classification (EA) and submit a Designated Recreational Water (DRW) application from Woodbridge in May.</p>		<p>designated recreational water application for Woodbridge, participation with SAS at National level and lobbying for legislation change with the Ilkley clean river campaign, contributing to the Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust's 'Recovering the Deben' programme and the Deben Estuary Partnership.</p>	
Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)	Supporting and working with SCC in the LNRS	SCC	<p>This programme is under public consultation but going forward the Deben Estuary is home to many of the key flora and fauna and I will be working closely with SCC to deliver this strategy locally</p>	Under development/identifying resources to match with key species surveys using Volunteer paddle boarders and kayakers
Biodiversity support	Make sure that our gardens and green spaces support a Biodiversity corridor across Woodbridge which in turn supports insects and birds, bats and other local wildlife, especially hedgehogs.	SCC/ESC/WTC	<p>Working with and supporting the efforts of SWT and Transition Woodbridge to create hedgehog corridors, insect sanctuaries, support the 'ESC 'Nature at Work' programme, encourage bat boxes, swift boxes and tiny ponds where safe.</p>	Ongoing

Play areas	To improve our children's play areas	ESC/WTC	To create play areas in all 4 wards, Kingston Playing Fields serves Woodbridge well, have secured improvements for the area next to Kyson School and once that is completed will look at a small cycle track there and propose a BMX track on the pre-existing cinder cycle track at Fen Meadow.	Ongoing and proposal under development
Green spaces	Protect green spaces for the enjoyment of residents as well as acting as a sponge to prevent flooding as water drains across Woodbridge from the A12 to the river Work with SCC 'Reclaim the Rain' project when it is renewed	SCC/ESC/WTC	Identify the SCC and ESC owned green spaces and protect them.	ongoing
Improving the Local Landscape				
Highways	Potholes and drains	SCC	Encourage public to report potholes and blocked drains using the SCC Highways Reporting Tool, follow up on	Ongoing routine annual cyclical cleaning annually and 6 monthly for problem areas.

			<p>reports and hold SCC accountable if delays, champion individual blocked drains although some may become defunct.</p> <p>Resolution on the A12 puddles at Farlingaye, flooding at Deben Rd and the perpetual deep puddle at the Station Rd Car Park (soakaway replaced)</p> <p>Most U roads resurfaced as part of extra Govt funding pot.</p>	<p>Delivered</p> <p>Delivered</p>
Footpaths	Clear existing footpaths and try and find the owners of unadopted footpaths such as Collett's Walk and Pilot's Way	SCC/ESC	Where the funding isn't available use Highways Budget to engage East Suffolk Services to carry out the clearance on behalf of SCC	Part delivered and in the process of identifying unadopted footpath owners for Collett's Way and Pilot's Way
Public Rights of Way	Resurface PROW alongside the Woodbridge Boatyard and to keep PROW along the riverside clear. Unfortunately, the path along the river wall is owned by the EA and there is no funding to resurface it. I	SCC	Funding secured, designs have been drawn up for an asphalt surface and awaiting permission from Network Rail as to whether it can proceed and when that is possible because of proximity to the railway line. Then agreement will be	Ongoing but I hope it can be carried out within the next few months when there are scheduled rail closures and in the meantime the surface will have a 'ramp-like' incline for the Woodbridge regatta.

	would also like to improve the steps down to the benches overlooking the Deben		sought from Woodbridge Boatyard and works will be scheduled. To apply for a grant to improve the riverside walk	Under development
Pavements	Resurface damaged pavements and repair surface defects such as disrupted flagstones, unstable surfaces and patches that are deteriorating	SCC	Funding was secured in a SCC Gov't extra funding pot, and this was allocated to the worst pavements which have been resurfaced. Dukes Park and Peterhouse Crescent are next on the 'Wish list'	Delivered Ongoing
Parking	A complete parking assessment needs to be carried out to secure parking for residents, visitors and people working here and to implement a residents parking scheme	ESC	Parking assessment has been agreed but awaiting date of commencement	This is a top priority because of the lack of residential parking on some streets and the peak occupancy of car parks during peak times
Parking restrictions	Traffic Regulation Order sought to implement road markings at 9 different sites in response to complaints of fly parking and obstruction of traffic and utility vehicles	SCC	Total cost of TRO approx. £12 000 has had two statutory consultations and is now with design team. Once designed will be approved and then go to SCC Legal dept. for the order to be drawn up, once this is done it	Expected Oct/Nov

			will go into the list of scheduled works, painting lines is not usually a long wait apparently	
Cycle storage	To respond to requests for improved, safer cycle storage facilities that are consistent with the conservation area in the Wb town centre	SCC	Convened a cycling advisory group, report has been compiled and is awaiting approval from the group before it is passed on to ESC parking dept and SCC Active Travel Woodbridge team for approval. Thank you to members of the advisory group for your hard work.	Ongoing Will be implemented during the changes to car parks (ESC), when the ATW changes are implemented (SCC) and when WTC can implement them.
Cycle routes	Respond to the lack of connection between Woodbridge and rural cycle routes and the poorly maintained state of the cycle routes	SCC	Active Travel Woodbridge Scheme to raise the profile of connecting routes by securing the funding for extra ordinary clearance and to reinstate the cycle path by clearing back the foliage and skirting the surfaces	Awaiting the start date, funding secured, design completed, it may have to wait for the bird's nesting season to pass. To include the cycle routes on the B1438 from the A12, and up the A12 to New St at Foxburrow farm
Lighting	Deal with various lighting issues, lights can be shaded and dimmed if needed	SCC/WTC	Purchased and installed light for Elmhurst Walk, same on order for Collet's Way and Ship Meadow Walk	Ongoing and responding to issues as raised
Transport	Following public engagement need identified for improved bus connection	SCC	Submitted draft bid for Park and Ride service between Martlesham and	Final bus bid to be submitted in conjunction with Sutton Heath and Melton Parish Councils

	with neighbouring villages and for a possible park and ride facility to manage the lack of parking in Woodbridge, especially as visitor numbers increase, especially when the Sutton Hoo Ships Company replica longboat is launched and to cope with influx from Sizewell C and Brightwell Lakes		Sutton Heath to accommodate rising tourism and Gurkha families Bus shelter outside Deben Leisure Centre designed and paid for (SCC, ESC and WTC) and in queue for minor works	Pending
Respond to complaints of speeding	Complaints of speeding especially around schools and around Shire Hall, New st and Castle Street.	SCC	As part of ATW interventions will be implemented, such as the 20 mph speed restrictions, crossings and speed pillows which will decrease speed. Recent traffic speed monitoring campaign outer Woodbridge area	Obtain mean speed report - done, 20 mph speed limit, Speed Indicator Devices (SID), APNR cameras, part of consideration under ATW scheme and due to start being implemented second half of this year. neighbourhood monitoring speed watch to be considered
Consider writing a Neighbourhood Plan	Neighbourhood plan is required to give community the opportunity to shape new development in area	ESC/WTC	To consider whether to go ahead with what will involve years of work when there is little space for new development in Woodbridge however, we will benefit from more Community	Initial meeting set up.

			Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money when the Old Council Buildings are developed by Rose Developers.	
Attend Planning meetings	To support planning applications from Woodbridge to go to pre planning for advice and to support the application in going forward where appropriate.	ESC/WTC	Attend referral meetings and champion, where appropriate, Wb planning applications	Fortnightly WTC planning committee. Weekly referral committee ESC

Other casework includes engaging with the charity to prevent the closure of Suffolk Rape Crisis service, supporting SEND complaints, reporting Anti-Social Behaviour, noise complaints, road closures that don't make sense, asbestos contamination, cuckooing allegations, drug dealing, bullying, and dealing with problems related the roll out of City Fibre as well as signposting for various planning issues and complaints.

In addition to this I am a governor at Kyson Primary School (gov lead on Art and Design/staff wellbeing) and on the Patient Participation Group (PPG) at Framfield House Surgery.

Policy update:

At the SCC full council meeting I wrote and proposed a motion to adjust the criteria that create the threshold for intervention in surface defects and pothole repairs, seconded a further motion and supported a motion preventing Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) and at the devolution debate I used my speech to object strongly to the frustration of democracy in the form of the cancellation of SCC elections this May.

Special comment

There are three major projects taking place in and around Woodbridge over and above what I am already dealing with.

They are the A12 major road network improvements (**A12MRNI**) which went to public consultation and are awaiting their planning application outcome, the 6 major Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (**NSIPs**) such as Sizewell C, various offshore wind farms, solar power farms and new electricity lines and finally the local government reorganisation (**Devolution**) which will see a unitary authority/ies and a regional mayor covering both Suffolk and Norfolk.

While I welcome the expected streamlining that it is hoped devolution will achieve, I am concerned that there may be a knock-on process of double devolution, and our Town Council may end up running services that may require significant increases in time, space, skills and knowledge. We will need to continue to be a robust, responsive and nimble town council in the days ahead.

Whether we are a single/double or multiple unitary is a decision made at ministerial level towards the end of this year and there are many arguments for and against each case. In the sum of the discussions, I believe a double unitary council will deliver the savings needed as well as maintaining a level of local voice, but the devil is in the detail – would we be spilt North to South or East to West? Therein lies the debate. SCC proposes a single unitary model while the District and Borough councils propose multiple starting with two. (please find more resources on this in part 2 of this report)

I ask that a working party be set up within the WTC to deal with the NSIP consultations and a second one to deal with the council's response to devolution.

Suffolk Libraries

Following the tender process for the library contract, the proposal to take Suffolk Libraries back under the management of SCC was accepted by the SCC cabinet members based on their concerns regarding financial matters (to be succinct). As the opposition to the administration, we explored every possible avenue to resist this action, but the objection strategy was not upheld, and the decision went ahead, based on the cabinet's unanimous vote in favour.

From June the staff are to be Tupe'd over to SCC, and it is anticipated that there will be no change in frontline services. This has been a heart breaking journey for many and as the councillor my job is now to make the best of whatever the future holds for our library.

It is expected that frontline staff will not lose their jobs and that no libraries will be closed or hours reduced. I hope that the Friends of Woodbridge Library will continue to bring the community together and I will support those efforts. A heartfelt thank you to Helen Scrivener, the library staff and volunteers for keeping the library the beating heart within our community and for remaining so professional, friendly and welcoming to the public during these difficult times. I know that I am guaranteed a warm smile and friendly welcome when I walk through those doors and this is part of what holds our community together.

A further thank you to all at the charity 'Suffolk Libraries' for what you have developed the library into over the years.

Active Travel Woodbridge

The Active Travel Woodbridge (ATW) scheme continues to develop. In its present form it is a far cry from the inappropriate fit of the 'Mini Holland' proposals first introduced, and I would thank everyone who has worked so hard, and who continues to do so, on finding solutions to its very complex challenges.

To put it into perspective...with an allocated Highways Road maintenance budget (£17 million) in 2024 which is only one third of the budget that SCC needs to provide a proactive maintenance service (£50 million) it is vital to try and keep the ringfenced funding (£5 million) from Active Travel England for Woodbridge. It can only be used for Active Travel improvements as it comes from an executive branch of the gov't and not from the Dept of Transport so it can't be used to repair potholes etc.

This opportunity for local improvements to facilitate safer walking, wheeling and cycling in the area is not likely to come our way again and with NSIP development our town may soon be the preferred route to the upper A12 and Sizewell C campuses via the peninsula, and the Active Travel changes (such as removing 'rat runs' and the 20 mph zone) are what I believe will future proof and protect our market town hub and make us less likely to be used as the crossroads gatekeeping vehicular access to the future development projects across the Suffolk countryside. It is imperative that we tailor this project until it succeeds and I thank the thousands of residents who have engaged with me on this as well as the members of the community liaison group who have provided their input along the way. The evolved shape of the project bears testimony to what has been achieved so far.

Progress is being made ...with our increased over 65 years demographic I believe equal consideration should be given to walking safely on our footpaths and pavements as well as making sure those with mobility scooters and buggies can move around confidently while cyclists can commute safely and families can enjoy cycling in the countryside.

The project is being developed in two phases, the first being the South Corridor (National Cycle Route 1 included) which has been to public consultations, gone through the design stage and it is hoped to start delivering on the proposals starting with the Burkett Rd pedestrian crossing outside St Mary's School in the summer of 2025 and the 20-mph speed restriction in the second half of 2025.

Phase 2; the Town centre proposals remain complex and convoluted and while SCC is the final decision maker, I would thank everyone who has contributed towards shaping those decisions with your views and lived experiences. Where there is challenge, it has been a platform for adaptation, and I would thank the ATW team at SCC for listening to my many requests to do things differently and to Cllr Alexander Nicoll who is the SCC lead on Active Travel for his endless support and advice. We are almost there and as expected the closer one gets to completion the tougher the challenges. I believe we can tailor this to suit Woodbridge and I won't stop until that is achieved. The results of the Town Centre consultation are expected to be released within the next few weeks. From there the proposals that are to be taken forward will go to the design phase, for legal approval and then in the works queue for implementation so I expect a few more years until it is delivered fully.

Budget

I am responsible for the allocation of three budgets;

SCC Highways budget - £6000 for 2025, mostly committed to outsourcing footpath and cycle track clearance and the TRO

SCC Locality budget - £6000 for 2025

ESC Enabling budget - £7000 for 2025

Please find details on the relevant websites as to what these budgets have been allocated to, and what they can be used for, and I am happy to discuss any grant applications.

In closing...

The list seems rather long, and the job is huge.

But the things that I have achieved wouldn't have been possible without the unflagging support of my partner Neil, my family and my friends and the many officers and excellent SCC, ESC and Woodbridge councillor colleagues with whom I collaborate. I would also like to thank the residents of Woodbridge for raising their issues so eloquently and for encouraging my efforts to make changes and the Town Clerks and WTC staff for their significant advice and support, without which I couldn't do this job.

Please keep engaging with me and let's keep up the good work during 2025.

My email address is Ruth.Leach@Suffolk.gov.uk

Continued...

Part 2 – resources and appendix to part 1

Further information on Local Government Reorganisation (Devolution):

This will be carried out nationally, Suffolk is on the fast-track programme which is why the County elections were cancelled. The biggest debate now is as to whether we will be a single unitary authority, double with an East/West split or North/South split or comprised of three smaller unitary bodies.

- This is the ‘White Paper’ telling councils why and what must be done:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper>
- This is the guidance that the gov’t offered to help councils shape their plans and interim proposals:

Guidance from the Secretary of State for proposals for unitary local government.

Criteria for unitary local government

1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.

- a) Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.
- b) Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.
- c) Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement.
- d) Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.

2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.

- a) As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more.
- b) There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal.
- c) Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils’ finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.
- d) Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.
- e) For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable.

f) In general, as with previous restructures, there is no proposal for council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation. For areas where there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation.

3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.

- a) Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.
- b) Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money.
- c) Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.

- a) It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.
- b) Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.
- c) Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed.

5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.

- a) Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.
- b) Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.
- c) Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.

6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

- a) Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.
- b) Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

Developing proposals for unitary local government

The following matters should be taken into account in formulating a proposal:

Boundary Changes

- a) Existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for your proposals, but where there is a strong justification more complex boundary changes will be considered.
- b) There will need to be a strong public services and financial sustainability related justification for any proposals that involve boundary changes, or that affect wider public services, such as fire and rescue authorities, due to the likely additional costs and complexities of implementation.

Engagement and consultation on reorganisation

- a) We expect local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area to which this invitation is issued, rather than developing competing proposals.
- b) For those areas where Commissioners have been appointed by the Secretary of State as part of the Best Value Intervention, their input will be important in the development of robust unitary proposals.
- c) We also expect local leaders to engage their Members of Parliament, and to ensure there is wide engagement with local partners and stakeholders, residents, workforce and their representatives, and businesses on a proposal.
- d) The engagement that is undertaken should both inform the development of robust proposals and should also build a shared understanding of the improvements you expect to deliver through reorganisation.
- e) The views of other public sector providers will be crucial to understanding the best way to structure local government in your area. This will include the relevant Mayor (if you already have one), Integrated Care Board, Police (Fire) and Crime Commissioner, Fire and Rescue Authority, local Higher Education and Further Education providers, National Park Authorities, and the voluntary and third sector.
- f) Once a proposal has been submitted it will be for the government to decide on taking a proposal forward and to consult as required by statute. This will be a completely separate process to any consultation undertaken on mayoral devolution in an area, which will be undertaken in some areas early this year, in parallel with this invitation.

- The interim plans from the councils have been submitted and this is what they proposed (cut and paste the link)

<file:///Users/ruthleach/Downloads/Suffolk%20LGR%20interim%20plan%20-%20District%20and%20Borough%20Council%20Submission%20-%20March%202025.pdf>

<file:///Users/ruthleach/Downloads/SCC%20Cabinet%20Agenda%20Item%209%20-%20Appendix%20B%20-%20Interim%20Plan.pdf>

- Feedback from the Government was received last week – it is a lengthy document and I am happy to share it on request.

The next step is for the stakeholders to submit their final proposals in September, and we expect a decision early next year with the Mayoral elections in May 2026 and the Unitary councillor elections in May 2027.

Continued...

Summaries of Parish reports for SCC and ESC

Summary SCC annual parish report 2025

Motions

My group passed three successful motions at council over the year:

1. In May 2024, we proposed that the council lobby the government for proper, long-term funding for local councils and support policies to address the long-term funding of adult social care. We tabled this motion as the Local Government Association had recently estimated that councils in England will have a funding gap totalling £4bn over the next two years. Suffolk County Council is predicting a 'budget gap' of £33.1m for 2026-27 so this is a very real concern for Suffolk and will affect Suffolk's local services.
2. In July 2024, my group tabled a motion that the council would do everything it could to avoid delays with local infrastructure funded by developer contributions. We were aware that a lot of local projects that are due to be paid for by developers are very overdue, in some cases for years – for example, new pedestrian crossings for roads where there is new housing. Sometimes these works are due to be undertaken by the developer and the delay is caused by them, but our motion acknowledged that the design and programming of works by Suffolk County Council was also often delayed.
3. In December 2024, my group successfully proposed a policy for the council of 'Roofs before Rural' regarding solar panels. The motion noted that the new Labour government was proposing to triple the amount of solar power in the UK by 2030 and set out the council's position that rooftop solar was preferable to 'solar farms' which are becoming an increasing sight across the county. The council agreed to write to the government to seek assurances Suffolk's best quality agricultural land would be protected.

My group also proposed the following motions which were voted down by the Conservative administration at council:

1. In October 2024, my group tabled a motion to revise the Highways Maintenance Operating Procedure so that repairs to footways and pavements would be prioritized in areas with heavy footfall, or where a recent fall had been reported. This motion was rejected by the Conservatives.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganization

Since the publication of the government's White Paper in December, Suffolk councils have been scrambling to develop their proposals for reorganizing local government. Under the new system, Norfolk and Suffolk will have a joint mayor (with elections held in May 2026) leading a mayoral authority, with two tier government (county councils and district/borough councils) replaced by unitary councils – single councils that undertake all local services like education, adult care, waste collection, housing and highways. Suffolk County Council's administration have been clear that they would prefer a single unitary council for Suffolk, and they ratified this decision by voting for it in the council chamber on 13 March and at Cabinet on 18 March.

Opposition councillors, like my group and the Labour group, are less convinced that

one massive council would bring decision-making closer to the communities, which is what devolution is supposed to enable. Councils have to submit interim plans to the government by 21 March, then detailed proposals in September, with a decision from government by the end of the year on what will happen. It is likely that councillors for the new council/s would be elected by Suffolk residents in May 2027, a year after the mayoral elections.

Suffolk's Library Service

At Cabinet in March 2025, the council administration voted to bring Suffolk's libraries back in-house at the end of the current contract for the library on 31 May. Suffolk Libraries, who have held the contract since the service was divested in 2012, were the only bidder for the contract, but negotiations broke down and the council felt it had no alternative but to bring the libraries back under council control. The proposal to do this was passionately opposed not just by Suffolk Libraries, but also Suffolk residents and the many volunteers and Friends groups who work for and raise money for libraries in their communities.

Norwich to Tilbury Pylons

At Cabinet in May 2024, the council voted to object to the proposed Norwich to Tilbury 400kV grid reinforcement and call for a pause until alternative options had been explored. The proposals which were reviewed included 183k of pylons, with four sections of underground cabling through and near the Dedham Vale National Landscape (the new name for an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Waveney valley. The council were keen that more underground cabling take place in the Waveney valley than proposed, and it was agreed more generally that energy projects in the county needed to be coordinated better to reduce the impact on residents and the local environment, particularly as so many of them are due to be under construction at the same time. Other councils in the area have also objected to the plans. Since then, the National Grid has confirmed it will not be proposing any further underground cabling in the plans, holding several consultations with local residents which have been largely negatively received.

State of Suffolk's Roads

In July 2024, a report was brought to Scrutiny Committee which looked into the condition of Suffolk's roads, the amount spent by the council to repair them and how repair works were prioritised. The findings were that amount of funding available for repairing highways was around £17m per year, but £50m per year would be needed for an optimal programme of resurfacing. Works are prioritised by the council's Highway Maintenance Operational Plan, which sets out the parameters for repair work and the order of priority repairs. Unsurprisingly, main roads and roads which have a lot of traffic are prioritised over quieter roads which do not. Having said this, the council is currently undertaking a scheme of resurfacing residential roads which have fallen into disrepair, having announced an additional £10m of funding for this project in May 2023.

Council Budget 2025-26

In February 2025, the council voted to adopt its proposed budget for the 2025-26 financial year. This included approving a maximum rise in council tax this year of 4.99%, including the 2% social care precept for adult care. The budget this year does not include borrowing from the council's reserves, which was a concern last year. Instead, the budget relies on delivering £28.4m of savings across many council

services. Cost pressures for the council include care purchasing for adult social care, Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and placements for children in care. There is still a lot of concern about the level of debt the council is carrying from the Designated Schools Grant (DSG), a debt which is due to increase this year by £62.175m. Councils are allowed by the government to hold this 'negative reserve' until March 2026. The government is yet to come up with a solution for this issue after that date; many councils are holding enormous levels of this debt which they would not be able to pay off if they had to. In addition, the councils have to borrow money to cover the interest on the debt which affects their finances every year: over 2025-26, the debt will cause a £6.8m cost pressure for the council. The rising DSG debt is mostly for council services for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The council is also forecasting that in the next few years, it will have budget 'gaps' that will only grow: £33.1m for 2026-27, and £96.2m in 2028-29. The council has lobbied the government for better funding – my group proposed a successful motion on this in May 2024. The council hopes that Local Government Reorganization (see above) will make enough savings to improve the medium and long term picture for local services.

Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services

In June 2024, the council was subject to an Ofsted inspection of its social care services for children and young people, known as an ILACS inspection (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services). These inspections are undertaken approximately every three years to judge how the council are performing in their function to support children who are vulnerable and in need of protection. Previously, in 2019, the council had been rated as 'Outstanding', but in 2024 it had dropped two grades and was assessed as 'Requires Improvement'. This meant that the council had to prepare an action plan for improvement, which was submitted to Ofsted and the Department for Education. The council has recruited extra staff to and has organized peer reviews with other local authority to learn how to improve practice. It has also established a new Strengthening Services for Children and Families Board chaired by the council's Chief Executive, Nicola Beach. The council particularly needs to improve services for care leavers and ensure that young people leaving care are aware of the support they can access until they turn 25.

Improving Services for Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)

Following the poor Ofsted/CQC inspection report published in January last year, the council has been trying to improve SEND services. In May last year they produced and submitted a SEND Strategy, and in June they produced a Priority Action Plan for improvement, including extra funding of £4.4m to recruit more staff, including Educational Psychologists. In July the council approved an additional £9.1m over three years to increase capacity to clear the council's backlog of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and Annual Reviews. This was funded from council reserves.

In January 2025, the council's Public Health team presented a SEND Needs Assessment for the county at the Health and Wellbeing Board, which forecast that SEND demand in Suffolk has risen sharply in recent years and was likely to continue to rise. It also found that delays in EHCP assessment, ADHD and autism assessment and support, and access to mental health services for young people

were unsatisfactory and in some cases getting worse, like speech and language therapy.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Inspection

In February 2025, the government published a report following its recent inspection of Suffolk's Fire and Rescue Service. Inspections for fire services are relatively new, with the first ones undertaken by the Home Office in 2018. The inspection report was not complimentary; it found that the service was good at preventing fires, protecting the public and that it met requirements for responding to major incidents, but also that it needs improvement in several areas, including improving culture and morale, and behaviour of senior leaders, who it advised should act as role models and show they are committed to the values of the service through their behaviour, improving communication with fire service employees and making sure they felt confident about raising concerns. This report was followed shortly afterwards by allegations in the press by the Fire Brigades Union that Suffolk County Council had made mistakes processing firefighter pay and pensions for years and has not addressed them properly or listened to employee concerns about the errors. The council subsequently announced additional investment of an extra £1.6 million over two years to improve the service.

Warm Homes in Suffolk

This year saw the end of the Warm Homes Grant fund, in which £5m of government money intended to improve insulation and make houses more energy-efficient was returned to the government unspent by the council. The reason given for this was that the criteria for the scheme, which was set by the government, was too stringent and meant that many Suffolk families who needed help were unable to access the funding. There are still schemes available to help with making homes more energy-efficient though – The Suffolk Loft Insulation Offer is funded by the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group (which includes Suffolk County Council) and this scheme will only close once the allocated funding has all been spent. Suffolk County Council is also running a new scheme to offer residents interest-free loans to upgrade the energy efficiency of their homes, that includes insulation but also solar panels, glazing and heat pumps. Loans are from £2k to £15K to be repaid over a maximum of seven years at 0% interest, but in order to be eligible, properties must have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) band below C. Increasing insulation and making homes more energy-efficient will not only save people money on their heating bills, it is also helping the environment as less fuel will be consumed to keep homes warm. Please signpost people to these schemes using the links below:

- For the Suffolk Loft Insulation Offers, residents should visit <https://highloft.co.uk/pages/suffolk-council-200-loft-insulation-contribution> and fill in the form to receive a discount code
- For the interest free loan scheme, homeowners can check to see if their property has an existing Energy Certificate with an EPC band and record of their property size at gov.uk/find-energy-certificate. They can apply for the vouchers by visiting suffolkenergyassessment.co.uk. This scheme started in November and vouchers are being distributed on a first-come, first-served basis.

Update on Flooding

Following the Storm Babet flooding in October 2023, the council announced it was investing an extra £1m in investigating the causes of flooding and taking action to prevent further floods. As the lead local flood authority, the council undertakes investigations into flooding in the county regularly, but the level of flooding in autumn 2023 meant that far more investigations would need to be made than in other years. A year later, in November 2024, the council announced it would be allocating a further £1.5m from its reserves to deal with recommendations made in the 10 investigation reports published so far. A further 38 investigation reports have been commissioned by the council relating to Storm Babet flooding. The council also announced it would be writing to the government to request £20m to protect Suffolk from flooding, given that extreme weather will become more likely due to the effects of climate change.

In October 2024, Cabinet agreed a £2m contribution from the council towards protecting the A12 from flooding at Benacre, south of Lowestoft. Erosion of the coast meant that road would likely be flooded at that location at nearly every high tide within a couple of years. The total cost of the works, which includes two new pumping stations, clay embankments and a new saltmarsh, will be many millions, with the Environment Agency committing over £30m and Sizewell C agreeing to fund the rest. Since then, it has been revealed that the cost may be higher than expected, and the council has agreed to allocate and put aside an additional £2.7m contribution in case it is needed later in the construction period.

Summary East Suffolk Council activity 2024/25:

East Suffolk Council has agreed a historic, new approach to recycling collection, and with it, a commitment to greatly improve environmental outcomes for the district.

This will see all households supplied with an additional wheelie bin or other container to separate paper and card from plastics, metal, cartons (including Tetra Pak) and glass bottles or jars. A weekly food waste collection service was also agreed.

This extra collection service allows the Council to adopt a three-weekly residual waste collection service, rather than the current fortnightly arrangement, without a reduction in the overall combined capacity of household bins.

Working together in response to Government legislation, Suffolk's district and borough authorities - Babergh, East Suffolk, Ipswich, Mid Suffolk and West Suffolk Councils - are all reviewing their waste and recycling services to meet new nationwide 'Simpler Recycling' requirements by 31 March 2026.

In September, East Suffolk hosted the final stage of the Lloyds Bank Tour of Britain for Men. The final stage started in Lowestoft, and residents lined the streets to watch the race as it passed through Beccles, Framlingham, Aldeburgh and many more towns before moving on to Felixstowe for the finish.

Felixstowe also showed wonderful support in the lead up to the final stage with their Love Felixstowe festival, which proved to be a huge success with local residents.

Last summer, East Suffolk Council set up a series of roadshows, in a variety of locations across East Suffolk, aimed at connecting with the local community.

At each location, councillors and senior officers were on hand to listen to any concerns or questions from residents. Residents were also asked to fill out a survey about their local area. The roadshows proved to be a success, with good levels of attendance and plenty of people stopping to speak with us.

The information gathered from the roadshows and survey will help us create better outcomes for our residents and communities and shape the future of East Suffolk.

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A balance budget will be achieved for 2025/26 by using reserves, currently estimated at £5.3m. Meanwhile, a council tax premium on second homes, to be introduced from April, could generate around £9m in East Suffolk.

End of report

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kearl', written over a horizontal line.

Suffolk County Councillor for Woodbridge Ward

7/5/2025

East Suffolk Council has agreed a historic, new approach to recycling collection, and with it, a commitment to greatly improve environmental outcomes for the district.

This will see all households supplied with an additional wheelie bin or other container to separate paper and card from plastics, metal, cartons (including Tetra Pak) and glass bottles or jars. A weekly food waste collection service was also agreed.

This extra collection service allows the Council to adopt a three-weekly residual waste collection service, rather than the current fortnightly arrangement, without a reduction in the overall combined capacity of household bins.

Working together in response to Government legislation, Suffolk's district and borough authorities - Babergh, East Suffolk, Ipswich, Mid Suffolk and West Suffolk Councils - are all reviewing their waste and recycling services to meet new nationwide 'Simpler Recycling' requirements by 31 March 2026.

In September, East Suffolk hosted the final stage of the Lloyds Bank Tour of Britain for Men. The final stage started in Lowestoft, and residents lined the streets to watch the race as it passed through Beccles, Framlingham, Aldeburgh and many more towns before moving on to Felixstowe for the finish.

Felixstowe also showed wonderful support in the lead up to the final stage with their Love Felixstowe festival, which proved to be a huge success with local residents.

Last summer, East Suffolk Council set up a series of roadshows, in a variety of locations across East Suffolk, aimed at connecting with the local community.

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Cllr Stephen Molyneux's Woodbridge Town Council AGM Report 2025.

It has been a tumultuous year.

2024 ended with the sad passing of fellow District Councillor Kay Yule. I had huge admiration for Kay and her forthright approach to her public duty. Her death was met with huge shock throughout the council.

The wooden boat down on the Ferry Quay beach has been renewed recently, as when she showed newly appointed head of planning, Ben Woolnough around Woodbridge, it was something she was keen to get sorted out.

Although sad to see Kay go, I'm enjoying working with newly elected Woodbridge ward member Cllr Ruth Leech and the many insights of all three levels of local government she brings to the table.

The next big thing to overshadow everything we're doing at District is of course Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation. As an administration we're now in the infuriating position whereby we're having to look at which projects we put down due to the fact our officer's time will now get sucked up by how we go about dismantling District services. It'll take several years to complete and millions of pounds to deliver and it will be likely be only after a decade that we'll see any savings or improvements to services.

I can't help but feel this is a case of throwing the baby out with the bath water and the usual tales of jurisdiction overlap between, parishes, district and county, could just be addressed rather than having to completely remodel from the ground up.

We need to be working on the urgent issues our district faces right now rather than getting caught in the quagmire of reorganisation that'll completely overshadow and drain and capacity for anything else.

One glaring problem is the quandary of diversity of councillors. Suffolk becoming a, or a collection of, Unitary Authorities will mean less councillors covering broader geographical areas. The workload will increase dramatically, likely ruling out individuals in full time employment. There've been discussions around looking at councillor positions as being full time jobs, however, who would take on a job where they could be voted out of their position every 4 years? Also, how much of this work will be devolved to town and parish councils and will there be more resources for them to carry out the extra responsibilities?

I also can't help but feel that this is a move by the new Labour Government to remove local dissent around major developments and infrastructure so as to speed up 'growth' and remove local opinion and descent from the equation.

In my role as Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning, this is the latest disruption in a long line of change happening in the national planning landscape. We were initially looking at the Levelling Up Bill, then the new draft edit of the NPPF, now the new Planning and Infrastructure Bill and then of course, new housing targets and LGR. When chatting to a planning officer recently I was told that the main thing obstructing planning is planning reform. Changes to planning aren't given a chance to bed in and start working.

Politicians looking for legacy are continuously dissecting the patient and not allowing them to heal.

Our planning team approach these slaloms with far more grace, patience and thoughtfulness than I'm able to muster and deploy their expertise in tackling these constant riddles set to them by successive governments.

The next huge body of work we're approaching in the mele of this uncertainty is the East Suffolk Local Plan. This sets out to combine the old Suffolk Coastal and Waveney local plans to update policies, five-year land supply and housing delivery targets etc. We as an administration have already earmarked policies we wish to be more ambitious on with regards to climate change and mitigation. My area of focus has been on the Sustainable Construction policy and has led to us as a council joining the Good Homes Alliance, supporting legal positions against the Government's 2023 Written Ministerial Statement (which limits Local Authorities' power to demand more from developers) and producing the East Suffolk Developer's Charter: [Developers-Charter.pdf](#). A specific voluntary energy efficiency standard is in the pipelines at county level as well and with LGR approaching, Districts have been aligning their local plans, so I'll be pushing for standards that go above and beyond across the board.

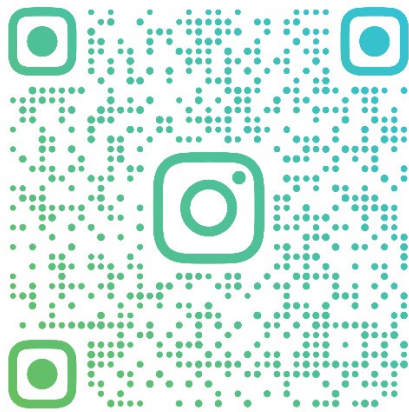
I've also been enjoying helping out on the housing side of things and working with David Bevan looking at various finance and building solutions that deliver modular, high performing, bio-based housing with a view to deliver more social housing. We need to show that super energy efficient housing doesn't have to cost the earth. If planned and delivered to first principles and eventually at scale, we can deliver housing that's healthy and affordable to run, insulated from the turbulence of global energy prices. Government want local authorities to deliver housing at a scale not seen since after WWII. This was a time that local authorities were delivering council housing. The difference is that the technology has come along in leaps and bounds since then. I believe that if government wan to truly tackle the housing crisis they need to get councils building again. Building with communities in mind, not the guaranteed 20% profit. The private sector haven't delivered the numbers or the types of housing needed for some time and the many undeveloped sites that have planning permission have contributed to this housing crisis. To look to them to deliver these new houses and high-quality places now is foolhardy.

We've a couple of projects in the pipelines right now and hope to be talking more about them in 2026 and seeing this innovative approach taken on past Devolution and LGR.

On a more local level, I've been enjoying my role as chair of the Melton, Woodbridge and Deben Peninsular Community Partnership and growing it become a flourishing network and to have now supported a range of amazing local projects. From democratising and levelling up music provision in state primary schools, to bat-based community science, to CIC's that support families tackle unsustainable living conditions.

I've also been enjoying managing my Enabling Communities budget that's renewed at the beginning of the financial year. I'm proud to have fully allocated both year's funds across 20 different community initiatives, ranging from music and arts events to table tennis groups, to greening the thoroughfare, to supporting great youth groups like the Sea Scouts.

I'll be covering some of the various other roles I've taken on as a District Councillor in an upcoming newsletter which will be distributed to every house in Woodbridge but in the meantime, you can see various updates via my Instagram account:



GREEN.STEVE.MOLYNEUX