

County Councillor's report – November

£7.8m redevelopment of Foxhall Recycling Centre to begin

It was announced on October 4th that work on a major expansion of the Foxhall Recycling Centre near Ipswich is set to begin.

RG Carter Ltd has been appointed by Suffolk County Council as contractor for the £7.8 million project, with work scheduled to start on October 17.

The new design will increase capacity for cars on site, reduce queuing and improve access from Foxhall Road, and provide greater capacity to meet future growth.

The site will have a raised level construction, giving better access to the containers for users without the need for stairs.

Containers can also be emptied without the need to close the site.

The funding includes £794,414 from East Suffolk Council through the Community Infrastructure Levy collected from new housing developments in the East Suffolk area.

Work is scheduled to complete in early 2024 and the site will remain open to the public during construction.

RG Carter will work alongside [Concertus Design and Property Consultants](#) on the scheme.

The project will be conducted in phases to keep the centre operational throughout the build, but at certain times this may result in fewer booking slots being available to the public.

The Re-use shop will change location in the new layout and will need to be closed for a period early next year to allow this to take place.

The project will also see the installation of a feeder lane from Foxhall Road, making access into the site safer.

Of the 11 recycling centres around the county Foxhall accounts for 19% of recycling and waste, collecting more than 12,500 tonnes a year.

Suffolk Roadsafe Partnership rolls out ANPR devices to target speeding motorists

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding.

I was very pleased that Suffolk County Council has been able to roll out a mobile number plate recognition system to target speeding motorists.

This issue is one that is of huge concern to councils and communities locally and nationally, and which here in Suffolk the Police and I are determined to target.

This innovative project is part of the Suffolk Roadsafe Partnership between Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Constabulary thanks to a £400,000 grant from the council's 2020 fund.

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) will be rotated around sites where there is a problem with speeding or rat-running on roads with a 20mph or 30mph speed limit.

There are ten of these devices and they work like conventional SIDs by displaying the speeds of drivers to them as they approach, encouraging them to slow down.

However, the difference is that if a driver continues to ignore the speed limit the ANPR camera will take a picture of them and record the date, time, speed, vehicle registration and a photo of the vehicle.

In certain cases, persistent offenders will be reported to Suffolk Constabulary and, while no one will be prosecuted as a direct result of the devices, they may be visited by a police officer who will speak to them about their driving

So, if no prosecution arises, you might ask what is the point of them? Well, in the majority of cases people seeing the SIDs flash that their speed is over the limit will slow down, so the cameras have done their job.

Unfortunately, there are some people who will ignore the limits, and these are the people whose details will be shared with the police.

The information shared with the police will also help them decide on where speed enforcement vans should be deployed going forward.

So, the case for SIDs is that as part of the bigger picture they will make a valuable contribution to tackling speeding and therefore are money well spent and a welcome addition to the county's roads.

It is no exaggeration to say that speeding is one of the biggest areas of complaint that we as councillors receive, and it is understandable why.

As well as being dangerous to both the person speeding and innocent road-users, be they motorists, cyclist or pedestrian, it is a blight on the community and peoples' quality of life.

Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Constabulary and the Police & Crime Commissioner have worked together with local people for many years to tackle concerns about speeding.

We have developed an approach which offers both enforcement and education to suit the needs and concerns of local communities, details of which can be found at the Suffolk Roadsafe Partnership website.

If you have concerns about speeding, I encourage you to contact your parish or town council or, if there is no such council available to you, to contact your local county councillor.

The £400,000 for the ANPR SIDS project was from the Suffolk 2020 Fund, a £3 million fund set up for investment in emerging policy priorities.

This fund was made possible because of the decision of this council to use part of the Government's one-year financial settlement to invest in some of the beneficial community projects that ordinarily may not have received as much focus or opportunity, given the other huge, costly frontline services that the county council is responsible for.

Next round of new SEND places agreed by Cabinet

On October 11th the Council's Cabinet agreed a new wave of funding to continue its programme to provide places for children and young people with SEND.

The £3million agreement marks the start of Phase 3 of the Capital Programme to create three additional specialist units providing 42 additional places for students with special educational needs and disabilities. This follows Phase 1 of the programme which created 825 new places across Suffolk and Phase 2, which was signed off in June 2022, and will create up to 73 new places.

So far, £45million has been allocated by Suffolk County Council to deliver the new places for Phase 1 and Phase 2 - £15million of which has been provided by the Department for Education.

In addition, Cabinet also agreed to support the Department for Education's High Needs Provision Capital Funding (HNPCF) for 2023/24 of £7million to be spent on the development of units attached to mainstream schools to support students with social, emotional and mental health problems and speech, language and communication needs. This will create up to 168 new spaces and is an addition to previous funding agreed from the Department for Education in 2022/23 for up to 78 new places.

The third item signed off today was Cabinet's support for the application for funding for two free schools from the Department for Education. One of these will be in east Suffolk and support children with severe learning difficulties and the second will be built in Sudbury for those with autistic spectrum disorder and complex social, emotional and mental health problems. If the bids are successful, both schools will teach children and young people from across Suffolk.

In total, Suffolk will deliver up to 1,317 new places for children and young people with SEND by 2025/26.

Suffolk Museum Award winners announced

The awards evening was hosted by Georgy Jamieson of BBC Radio Suffolk.

Six of Suffolk's outstanding museums and their teams have been announced as winners in this year's Suffolk Museum of the Year Awards, at a ceremony at The Hold in Ipswich on Monday 10 October.

The winners were:

- Large Museum of the Year: Food Museum
- Small Museum of the Year: Felixstowe Museum
- Family Friendly Award: The Red House
- Innovation Award: Bawdsey Radar
- Working with Young People Award: Halesworth and District Museum
- Volunteer of the Year: Steve Bell of Norfolk and Suffolk Aviation Museum
- Object of the Year (as voted for by the public in an online vote in September): Halesworth and District Museum for their Blythburgh coin.

In addition, the following museums and volunteers were recognised as highly commended:

- National Horseracing Museum in the Large Museum of the Year category
- Dunwich Museum in the Family Friendly category
- The volunteer team at Royal Naval Patrol Service Museum in the Volunteer/s of the Year category.

The awards are organised by the Association for Suffolk Museums to celebrate and champion the county's incredible museums and the hard work and dedication of their staff and volunteers.

The Challenges facing council budgets

A Column by Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for Finance and Environment

I fully appreciate that an article about "council budgets" is unlikely to be the most exciting thing you read today! However, I hope that you'll stick with me for a few minutes, to understand how Suffolk County Council's budget setting process works and the difficulties we face this year.

More importantly, I want to set out how you can share your thoughts on how we spend what is ultimately your money. Your views really will be considered, as we shape decisions for next year.

This year, we have around £625m to spend on everything that we do. That's from financing the fire and rescue service, to maintaining our roads and providing school transport. We have the freedom to choose where some of that money is spent, but we are legally required to spend certain amounts, such as on schools.

Of that pot the largest amount, around £6 in every £10, comes from council tax. The remainder is made up from the council's share of business rates, and the money we receive each year from the Government (known as our 'settlement').

The current budget was a real challenge to manage, not least due to uncertainties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet we were still able to maintain all our services and invest in some areas. Unfortunately, this year, we face much more of a challenge.

Councils across the country are subject to many of the financial pressures that we all face at home, such as rising energy costs. The high rates of inflation mean that the council's day-to-day costs are going up, the goods and services that we need to buy today are markedly more expensive than this time last year.

On top of this, there is the national wage increase and we continue to experience more demand for our services, particularly care services for adults and children.

Many councils are facing a situation where they will encounter a considerable budget gap – which is the shortfall between what needs to be spent, and money that's available. At the time of writing, our estimated budget gap could be as much as £56m.

If we do not have the money that we need, then if we want or need to increase spending on one service, we must reduce the spend somewhere else. That's the balance we must find, and it is never easy.

In short, councils need more money in their budgets just to be able to maintain levels of the service that they provide. There are two main ways that we can achieve this; receiving more money from the Government in our settlement and by increasing council tax. Of course, over and above this we always try to 'transform' and modernise our services, so we can do more with less and maximise the income the council can generate.

Regarding the settlement, we continually lobby Government to increase our settlement to meet the demands that we face, to be able to provide you with the services that you expect. In recent times, this money has been decided on a year-by-year basis and I am hopeful that this December we will be given a two-year settlement. This will allow us to plan with a much greater degree of certainty.

Last year we did increase our share of council tax, which worked out at 80p per week for a Band D property. We had the option to raise it by more but decided against it – recognising the pressures households were facing as we emerged from the pandemic.

We also look at making savings within the council itself. Through careful planning, we have saved hundreds of millions of pounds in recent years. This has made the organisation leaner – we have far fewer staff than we did ten years ago and spend less than most of the County Councils on staffing, whilst protecting many services from large-scale reductions.

It has also enabled us to make key investments, such as committing £12.8m to make our buildings and land more carbon friendly and reduce our impact on the environment. This has already achieved impressive results with one of our main buildings seeing a year-on-year reduction in gas consumption by 84%, meaning financial and carbon savings.

With all this in mind, I would welcome your thoughts on our budget for next year.

We launched a public survey two weeks ago, to ask you which services are important to you. There are just three questions to answer, and it should only take a few minutes to complete.

We have already had over 1,100 responses – thank you if you have already shared your thoughts.

I'm looking at the data on a regular basis, and your responses will be included in the report considered by the council when we agree the budget in February 2023. Alongside asking which services you'd prioritise; we ask that always controversial question – given everything you've heard do you think council tax should increase? I'd be grateful if you could share your thoughts at www.suffolk.gov.uk/budget