

Appendix C – County Cllr. Penny Otton’s Report to Full Council –

- Cost of Living help and advice: <https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/family.page?familychannel=6>
- Benefits advice and support: <https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/adult.page?adultchannel=0>
- Flood preparation advice: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/suffolk-fire-and-rescue-service/fire-and-rescue-safety-advice-in-the-community/preparing-for-flooding>
- Flood recovery advice and support: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/about/flood-recovery-information-for-suffolk>

- Council Budget - At Council on 15 February, Suffolk councillors met to discuss and vote on the administration’s budget proposals. The council is borrowing heavily from its reserves to meet the growing demand for social care for adults and children, and council tax is due to rise by £74 annually for Band D properties from April this year. There will also be cuts to Family Hubs (children’s centres) and Housing Related Support, which supports vulnerable people like care leavers to find accommodation. Funding for arts and museums will be maintained for 2024-25 but not from SCC core funding, and subject to a bidding process for grants from April 2025. The Bury St Edmunds local archives will be moved to The Hold in Ipswich, which like the arts funding cuts has been controversial locally.

My group were concerned about the lack of core funding from Suffolk County Council to arts and museums, we proposed an amendment and suggested that some of the council’s remaining Covid funding from the government be used to support young people not in education, employment or training, as this cohort had suffered a lot of upheaval in their final years of schooling and exams.

- Flooding: yet again Beyton/Thurston Road was severely hit by yet another storm and heavy rain. I attended a meeting in Gt Finborough where parishes got together, it was obvious that the main problem is the various authorities don’t work together to get things sorted out.
- Ixworth Road: I have asked Andrew Cook the director to deal with this.
- Highways: at the meeting with Drinkstone we got a commitment from National Highways to recompense SCC highways for the damage to local roads due to the A14 work.
- A14 Slip Road: I’m pleased SCC has agreed to replace the direction sign. To get a STOP would need to be approved by National Highways.
- West Suffolk Local Plan: at a briefing on this I asked that consideration MUST be made on the impact of Beyton and Thurston of new developments if they are agreed in the east of West Suffolk and you should be consulted. These could impact on the local roads.
- Thurston Library: like you I am delighted that the DFE has agreed that the library will continue to be part of the school so will now the library will be able to proceed with any future improvements. I have a catch up about the DFE plans on 29th February so will let you know anything new.
- New Deal for Suffolk: As part of the governments devolution plans, Suffolk will be consulting on this from March 18th for 10 weeks. This is NOT A referendum. Only the results will be fed into the current county council for approval. If it goes ahead there will be an election for a “mayor” type leader in 2025 alongside the elections for county councillors. That person however cannot be a county councillor. The new government has promised new money for various issues.
- Ofsted/CQC SEND Inspection Report - as you may have read in the local press, Ofsted and CQC published their joint report into SEND services in Suffolk at the beginning of the month. The report was scathing. My group was disappointed and concerned that the services are yet to get to grips with this and offered our assistance to the Local Area Partnership (Suffolk County Council and NHS teams) in preparing the Priority Action Plan they now need to submit to Ofsted

and CQC by 7th March. The poor report led to the resignation of the Cabinet members for SEND, Education and Children's Services and prompted a reshuffle of the political leadership at the council.

- Suffolk Devolution in Sight - Devolution is something there has been a lot of talk about in Suffolk in recent years, and it looks like it may be happening from 2025. The deal the government is offering Suffolk is the same as the one for Norfolk and would give the county more freedom on decisions and funding for transport, skills and adult education, regenerating brownfield sites and retrofitting homes to make them more energy efficient. If the deal is approved, the leader of Suffolk County Council would be directly elected by the people of Suffolk - every four years, residents will be given two votes, to elect their local county councillor AND the leader of the county council. The first election would take place in May 2025. The council will be consulting on the deal soon and residents will be able to give their opinions on the changes proposed. For more information, see <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/devolution>
- Changes to Local Archives: Following the recent controversial proposal in the county council's budget to move local records from Bury St Edmunds to The Hold in Ipswich, the council have announced that they will be inviting community representatives from both Lowestoft and Bury St Edmund's to form two new Working Parties to consider local access to historical material. This could allow relevant collections to remain in the local area, but any proposals would need to be funded locally rather than by Suffolk County Council. This is not a reversal of the council's decision, and the majority of the records are still planned to move to The Hold, with the North-East and West Suffolk branches of the archive service to close.

Appendix D - District Cllr's Report to Full Council – Cllrs. David Bradbury and Austin Davies

- MSDC Meeting - Mid Suffolk District Council meeting in February. The budget was approved. The MSDC part of the council tax will be increased by 2% which is lower than most councils in the country. The MSDC part of the council tax bill is about 8% with the rest to Suffolk County Council and the Police. The council also approved changes to the second home and empty home council tax charges. There are more than 680 empty properties in Mid Suffolk, which councillors are keen to see used to meet growing housing need. The councils already impose a council tax premium on the owners of properties that are empty and unfurnished for two years or longer, but under new legislation, the councils would be able to target empty properties after just one year from April 2024 – and impose a levy on second home owners from April 2025. At meetings this week, both councils agreed a new joint policy that will see the owners of properties left empty for a year or more paying double, with a premium of up to 100% from April 2024; properties empty for five years or more seeing their council tax bills treble with a premium of up to 200%; and owners of properties left empty for 10 years facing quadrupled bills, with a premium of up to 300%.
- Owners of 542 second homes in Mid Suffolk will see their council tax bill double from April 2025. The definition of a second home for council tax purposes would be a property which there is 'no one resident' but that is 'substantially furnished'. There will be exceptions, in line with Government policy, expected to include properties being actively marketed for sale or rent for a limited period, houses going through probate, caravan pitches or houseboat moorings (I can't think of many houseboats in the area)
- Mid Suffolk District Council has launched a new rural transport grants scheme to help provide passenger transport routes across the district, connecting local communities and reducing emissions, by providing viable alternatives to solo car journeys.

- As well as the Cosy homes scheme, MSDC have a loft insulation offer (here: Funding and Support for Homeowners and Renters – Green Suffolk) Funding is available to help residents make their homes warmer with extra loft insulation to help save money on their energy bills.
- MSDC have approved a grant to New Green Community Trust for new doors at Thurston’s New Green Centre - £10,000.00
- Network Rail – foot crossing at Thurston Station. Still no sign of the final report which was due by the end of November.2023 Our preferred option is the reinstatement of the tunnel under the tracks.
- Flooding - the worst flooding in the villages (that we’re aware of) was the road between Beyton & Thurston but If any properties have experienced flooding damage, grants are available from MSDC to assist. Apparently this is the wettest February on record, so some locations are suffering from flooding despite not being affected previously.
- Locality grants - Austin & David still have some locality budget which needs to be applied for before 22 March

Briefing Note for town and parish councils – from Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils -

[Mid Suffolk agrees budget ‘to back communities and drive change’](#)

‘A prudent budget, but one that can deliver real change’ – Mid Suffolk District Council agrees a lower council tax rise than most authorities as it sets out its plans for the year ahead.

[Go-ahead for ‘exciting new sports facilities in Stowmarket](#)

Plans for new facilities including a 3G football pitch, sports pavilion, multi-use games area, sports hall and mini athletic track, have been given the green light.

[New rural transport grants scheme launches](#)

Mid Suffolk District Council has launched a new rural transport grants scheme to help provide passenger transport routes across the district, connecting local communities and reducing emissions, by providing viable alternatives to solo car journeys.

[Tax premiums agreed for owners of second homes and empty properties](#)

Councillors at Mid Suffolk District Council have agreed higher tax premiums for owners of second homes and long-term empty properties as part of a raft of measures to bring more homes back into use.

[Council leaders warn of ‘catastrophic effect’ of Suffolk County Council budget plans](#)

Proposed changes to Housing Related Support ‘could impact on our most vulnerable residents’.

[All aboard! Mid Suffolk gives green light to involvement in new community rail partnership](#)

Rail passengers in Mid Suffolk could be on track to see improvements to their local stations, after councillors backed the introduction of a community rail partnership.

[More of Suffolk’s tree cover and orchards to be restored](#)

Suffolk County Council has secured £201,213 from the government’s Local Authority Treescapes Fund for 1,877 new trees in a bid on behalf of all Suffolk councils – including Mid Suffolk District Council. The funding will go toward planting and maintaining the trees – many of which will be ‘standards’, which are around six feet in height when planted.

Council's loft insulation offer for Suffolk homes

Funding is available to help residents make their homes warmer and save money on their energy bills.

Making Suffolk's older properties more energy efficient and cheaper to run

A free event to explore how to make Suffolk's older homes more energy efficient is at The Hold in Ipswich on March 6.