

## **Lavenham Parish Council report by Robert Lindsay County Cllr 5.2.26**

### **Bollard at Pump Court**

I have been approached by a resident about a delivery vehicle breaking off the bollard here.

Highways assure me that they have ordered their contractor to replace this, but I do not have a time when this will be done. This time of year is their busiest time with the poor weather. Restricting access to deliveries would be complicated and unlikely to be well enforced, and may not be effective since apparently the damage has been caused by a delivery vehicle and an ambulance.

### **Sewage Sludge - Wattisham whiff**

Following reports of smell from a sewage sludge processing site in my division near Wattisham that was making residents and nearby workers retch, County Council enforcement have investigated and issued a stop notice on the site which did not have planning permission.

There is a national problem in that sewage sludge that is spread on agricultural fields is known to be contaminated with industrial waste at sewage works and to contain forever chemicals – Pfas and microplastics - and current regulations have not taken account of these new toxins.

### **Buses and visitors**

I know of the issues of on-street parking in the village. My view is that a permit system for residents is desirable but there is not funding or apparent willingness for that. There is funding now for better bus services and the more buses that take visitors to Lavenham to shop etc, the fewer visitor cars you will have to put up with – parked or otherwise.

So just to bring to your attention again the £27m of bus funding available for parishes to bid for over next three years. A better link than the one I included in my last report is this

<https://www.suffolkonboard.com/bus-service-improvement-plan-where-should-the-money-be-spent/>

You can scroll to bottom of that web page to find the online application form. Because funding is spread over three years, there is no deadline as such.

### **New Hadleigh to Stowmarket six day a week bus service to start April 13**

From bus funding form a previous round the 51 KonnectBus service between Hadleigh and Stowmarket daily should start 13<sup>th</sup> April. This is six services, six days a week and – if the timetable can be made to align with other services - should make a big difference and lessen car dependency for the people in the villages like Bildeston, Hitcham, Finborough and around.

## **County council elections for May 2026 scrapped**

The Government told County Councils before Christmas that it would delay county elections if the councils told them they had “resource issues”.

At County Council on Monday 12 January, a debate was held about “the resource implications” of an election in May on the delivery of Local Government Reorganization in Suffolk.

The Conservative administration unanimously voted down an amendment proposed by my group to ask for a clear vote “that the council was in favour of the elections going ahead”.

A Cabinet meeting was held following the council debate, where the Conservatives voted unanimously to write to the government outlining capacity concerns that might be felt if elections were to go ahead.

On 22 January, the government announced that the elections in Suffolk, and in 28 other councils around the country, would not take place in May this year.

The Government has indicated that the county elections will now not be held at all, since there are shadow unitary elections in May 2027 and the county and district will be dissolved and unitary councils will start in May 2028.

## **Council budget pennies away from breaching minimum reserve levels**

At Cabinet on Tuesday 27 January, the budget for the coming financial year was presented. The council is planning to raise council tax by the maximum 5% this year, reflecting the fact it is struggling to meet its rising costs.

The recommended minimum level of reserves is 5% of the council’s total £850m annual spend. In order to keep reserves just within that level (£42.5m), the council’s pension fund committee has agreed to give the council a one-year-only £10m reduction in pension contributions for the coming financial year.

Even then, and combined with planned cost cuts of £46.5m, the council will be taking £5.9m from reserves to cover the remaining budget gap.

Budget gaps are forecast to rise above £20m in the following two years, requiring more cost cutting measures.

One of the biggest cost pressures is SEND. The Government, aware that it is not providing enough money, has been making councils borrow to fund this with the promise that it will take on responsibility for SEND funding by April 2028. But a promised white paper has yet to materialise. The council is in the meantime having to pay interest on the debt. This will be £5m in the year about to end, rising to £8.9m in the 2026/27 year and then a forecast £11m plus in the year thereafter.

There are also concerns about the amount of money the Local Government Reorganisation will cost the council. This is currently estimated as £48m overall, but will be divided between all Suffolk councils.

## **Net Zero Carbon Report**

Also at cabinet was the annual report on the council's efforts to reach net zero carbon by 2030. The council has cut its energy bills by £4.8m a year thanks to this initiative which reduced gas and electricity consumption from 2019. Measures included improving heating controls in the council's offices and a car park solar array. It reckons it will have cut emissions (from purely its own footprint – not those of customers or staff commuting) by 63% by 2027/2028, and is not producing a forecast thereafter because the council will cease to exist.

## **Suffolk Roads Rated Red by UK Government**

The government has rated Suffolk's road maintenance as Red, the worst category. This has struck a chord with residents in the county, who have been clear that they agree and want the quality of Suffolk's roads to improve. Suffolk County Council's administration, however, has denied that the rating is accurate, saying that overall the condition of Suffolk's roads are rated Amber, with the overall Red rating being arrived at because the Department for Transport did not include in its assessment £10m of highways funding that it brought forward from the 2025-26 financial year and invested early in a resurfacing programme in 2024-25. The council has met with the Department for Transport to press for the Suffolk rating to be raised to Amber.

## **New 20mph Policy**

At Cabinet on Friday 9 January, a new 20mph speed limit policy was approved which the administration said would make it easier for communities to apply for a 20mph speed limit. The decision will be based on average speeds being below certain thresholds and a demonstration of support from residents.