

Lavenham Parish report from Robert Lindsay County Councillor 5.8.26

Road closures – Water Street

In response to a query from your Clerk, I have checked and Highways told me they will not be doing their surface dressing works on the B1071 at Great Waldingfield and the B115 at Little Waldingfield at Lavenham until Cadent Gas have finished their emergency repairs at Water Street, Lavenham.

Fire Hydrant Spring Street

I forgot to mention this in my last report, but I believe your Clerk kindly conveyed the info anyway. Suffolk's Fire Chief tells me that at the fire in Spring Street, the crew reported the hydrant had been capped by Anglian Water. They are usually capped because of a fault.

After the fire service officially reported the fault, AW checked it and it is now available for use, as are all other hydrants in the village.

Reform ponders selling off Suffolk assets to successor Councils

Michael Hadwen, Suffolk's Reform leader has been recorded by an undercover reporter telling Reform Councillors at a private meeting that he is looking at selling off the County's three wholly owned, semi-commercial companies to private interests to prevent the successor three unitary councils from inheriting them.

Hadwen was recorded by the Local Government Chronicle saying: *"We have some wholly owned companies that I'm looking to release into the market, basically to give off everything we can, because other than what we need to give the unitaries, I don't want to give them anything extra, because they're going to collapse financially immediately."*

There is no evidence for his repeated assertion that unitaries will collapse. However, selling off income earning assets, increasing the County's annual spend and spending precious reserves on his judicial review is likely to help that come about.

Melting Roads, heatwave and climate change

Parts of over 20 Suffolk roads melted during the heatwave we saw at the end of June and in early July. Highways had to use gritters with granite chips instead of salt to try to repair them. The A143 was closed for a week. At this stage we do not know what the extra cost implications are of these needed repairs.

Reform cancels climate emergency

At the full County Council meeting in July, between heatwaves, Reform Councillors proposed a motion to cancel the climate emergency declared in 2019. That declaration, seconded by me seven years ago, led to an action plan by which the Council saved £3.9million a year.

The motion is similar to ones Reform, who obtain two thirds of their funding from wealthy fossil fuel interests, have passed in Norfolk, Essex and several other authorities they control.

At Suffolk, a slightly amended motion was eventually passed with the support of Reform and Conservative votes, though the other parties voted against. At a protest we staged outside Endeavour House against the motion, the firefighters union representative said that they were woefully under-resourced to fight the fires that were breaking out all over the county due to the drought and heat.

Dunwich wildfire latest

At the time of writing (Weds afternoon) the fire is considered “stable” after a week but not out since it is likely to be burning underground via oil-rich plant roots and could re-emerge if not continually damped down. This spells disaster for Suffolk’s largest area of natural heathland habitat since it is estimated that it will be 25 years before the habitat manages to regrow fully. Many of us will may be dead by then.

Buses

189 out of 490 parishes in Suffolk do not have a commuter bus. Yet there is now funding for bus services available from Government. So at the July Council meeting I proposed a motion to draw up a costed plan for a minimum level of bus service to every parish in Suffolk. This was voted down by Reform.

Meanwhile the County has won £564,000 funding from Government to fund a feasibility study into Suffolk (or Suffolk and Norfolk) running their own bus service using franchising. Franchising works (in London and Greater Manchester) by the Council setting fares, timetables and routes and simply paying bus companies to provide the buses and drivers. It would allow the Council to use profits from the major routes to subsidise the more rural ones.

Bus Fare caps and free for kids offer in August

For those places that do have a bus, Burnham’s Government has announced a £2 cap on the fare from January (currently it’s a £3 cap) but it is voluntary for the bus companies and not all Suffolk companies had taken up the £3 cap. I understand TMS, or Transport Made Simple, which runs the 40 bus between Bury, Sudbury and Colchester via Lavenham, has. In August the Government is offering to fund free fares to children between 5 and 15. TMS has taken this up. Sadly Burnham is funding the £2 cap by taking money from vital overseas aid for climate change.

£19m more agreed for creating more local SEND places

The Cabinet on Tuesday 14 July agreed proposals to spend £18.9m of High Needs Provision Capital Funding received from the government on increasing the number of specialist education placements in the County for children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) – 248 new places will be created in both mainstream and specialist schools.

Budget Outturn for 2025-26 Financial Year

Cabinet on 14 July also reviewed the Council's financial outturn for the financial year ending 31 March 2026. The Council overspent last year by £15m overall, a figure which the Council will need to take from its reserves to balance the books. The main areas of overspend for the Council are in Care Purchasing for Adult Social Care, and Children in Care placements.

Public Consultation on Cuts to Healthy Child Service

The County has begun a public consultation on proposed cuts to its Healthy Child Service, which is provided by the Council's Public Health team. They want to cease providing support to parents under the age of 21 after they have a baby, and axe the Community Staff Nurse role from Health Visiting teams. The consultation runs until 18 September, with a decision likely to be made at Cabinet after that.

You can read through the proposals and respond to the consultation here:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/consultations-petitions-and-elections/consultations/healthy-child-services-consultations>