

Annual Report for Lavenham PC by County Councillor Robert Lindsay 15.5.25

Locality and Highways discretionary budget spending

I have used up my locality budget for the past year and highways budget which was a lump sum for my four year term over the past four financial years. However because County Council elections have been cancelled, I am still in office and have been allotted an annual budget for both for the next 12 months.

Spending of relevance to Lavenham in the past year from those two budgets included £1000 on fencing for Lavenham pre-schools forest school. I have also just agreed to cover the full £650 cost of painting a 30mph roundel on Bridge Street Road after residents complained about speeding traffic there.

Motions during the year

Of note was my Green, LibDem and Independent group's motion in October to ask for a cross party panel of councillors to look at lowering the bar with respect to intervening for pavement repair (currently they will not repair if the pavement is less than 2cm above the level). The administration voted this down but promised that they would review the criteria they used. We have fed in our request but we have yet to hear whether they will change things.

In December 2024 We also got unanimous approval for a motion calling on the government to adopt policies of prioritising "roofs before rural" when it comes to the roll out of panels. There is no real reason why solar panels cannot be made compulsory in new builds and planning barriers to solar on existing rooftops cannot be eased.

20mph scheme – it's this one or nothing.

This is something the Parish Council asked me to apply for five years ago. I spent some time and energy over subsequent years pushing Highways for action and for a better scheme than the one they first came up with. It was a case of haggling both by me and by some members of the Parish Council.

The scheme that eventually won approval – following a statutory consultation - was not perfect but it was better than what they had first proposed and in my view better than having a 30mph speed limit which is plainly too fast for much of the village.

I am firm believer in not letting perfect be the enemy of good. However, the PC have now decided not to take a decision on this scheme themselves and instead ballot the village. If the village vote against this scheme, I will not be sponsoring or promoting any other 20mph scheme for Lavenham, because it is clear that no amended scheme will be accepted by Highways.

Bus improvements

I was pleased that early in the year in the first round of funding for bus routes, the bus from Sudbury via Lavenham and Cockfield to Bury St Edmunds received funding for extra capacity. Although not of direct relevance to Lavenham I was also pleased to

see that the County Council are looking again – after much lobbying by me - at funding for a daily scheduled bus between Hadleigh and Stowmarket, after rejecting applications that Hitcham, Bildeston and Finborough parish councils made the year before.

Local Government centralisation – Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk and scrapping local districts and county council

It is becoming clear that the Mayoral tier of government will add a new layer of costs, likely eliminating any hoped for savings from merging district and county councils. The election for the Mayor of Norfolk and Suffolk will happen in May 2026.

The current schedule is for elections for a “shadow” unitary councillors to be elected in May 2027 and the new unitary council(s) will commence May 2028, at which time county and district councils will dissolve.

But there are doubts whether the Govt can meet this timetable.

Districts are asking for two and preferably three unitaries in Suffolk, the County Council wants one. Larger does not necessarily mean cheaper, since many services – such as bin emptying – are already delivered by district councils collaborating in partnership and other services eg public toilet maintenance - are often more cheaply serviced using local contractors and more efficiently provided by those staff and councillors with more local knowledge.

Suffolk Libraries brought in house

On Tuesday 18th March 2025 the County’s cabinet approved a recommendation to take the Suffolk Library Service in house after they failed to agree a renewal of the contract with the charity that has been running them since 2012. There were no other bidders.

Our group attempted to “call in” the decision – giving it another chance to be scrutinised at the scrutiny committee but our call in and that of the Labour group was rejected.

Council Budget 2025-26

In February 2025, the council budget for the 2025-26 year included approved the maximum rise in council tax of 4.99%, including the 2% social care precept for adult care.

The budget does not include borrowing from the council’s reserves, which was a concern last year. Instead, it relies on delivering £28.4m of savings across many council services. The Schools Grant, SEND and adult social care are providing much cost pressure.

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.