

### **Conservative/Labour plan to centralise Local Government**

At the Extraordinary General Meeting of the County Council on 9<sup>th</sup> January Conservative and Labour councillors united to vote in favour of a requesting the Government to abolish all six District Councils and the County Council in Suffolk and join a fast track scheme to move to a new two tier system with a single elected mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk and huge new “unitary” authorities underneath them. They also requested that the County Council election scheduled for May 1<sup>st</sup> 2025 be scrapped.

On 5<sup>th</sup> February Angela Rayner, the Deputy Prime Minister, announced that Suffolk is one of a small number of areas that will be included in the fast track programme which will also see the election of a mayor covering Suffolk and Norfolk in May 2026. The elections due in May 2025 will be cancelled.

I and my group – Green, LibDem and Independent - voted against joining the fast track process. I see the whole move as a way for the Government to gain greater control of local government to promote their agenda of allowing swathes of for-profit housing and road building on green fields in rural areas. It’s hard to find any decision-making powers being devolved down from central government, which is what devolution is supposed to be about.

### **20mph speed limit at Bildeston reduced mean speeds**

Bildeston’s 20mph speed limits were installed about a year ago. In December I commissioned a week long survey of traffic speeds on Bildeston High Street to see if they had changed from the survey done in 2019 before the 20mph limit was installed.

At the place it was sampled, just south of the market place, close to the pedestrian crossing used by school children, average traffic speeds fell from 25mph to 19mph – a 24% drop - and southbound traffic from 19mph to 17mph, an 11% drop.

This indicates to me that where a road is narrow, built up and bendy, enforcement, in terms of police issuing penalties, is not so important. Two other speed surveys in the village - on Wattisham Road and Ipswich Road where the limit has been installed - showed similar drops in average speed.

### **County Budget**

The County Council is finalising its budget for 2025/6 year but it has already made it clear that council tax will be raised to the maximum cap it is allowed of 5%.

### **Library service – tender cancelled as no contractor found**

The County Council has cancelled its tender for a new contract for the library service, saying “the procurement process did not result in a successful outcome due to difficulties in aligning submissions with the service requirements and budgets.” This seems to mean that those bidding for the tender could not make the money on offer from the County stack up. The County are currently not saying what the plan is from here although it is thought they are still talking to current provider the Suffolk Libraries IPS.

### **Daily bus route between Hadleigh and Stowmarket**

My thanks to Cllr Tuck for attending the recent meeting about this. It appears that the County’s bus officer is looking again at whether such a route can be funded. I hope a way forward can be found. I pushed hard for this last year and have made clear to the Officer that such a route ought to be at timings that allow students to get to and from college or people to get to work. But there are many obstacles and SCC again seems to want yet more data on passenger demand that perhaps only very experienced and entrepreneurial bus operators are able to provide.