

Report for Lavenham PC by Robert Lindsay, Suffolk County Councillor, 7.3.24

Skirting back verge on Melford Road

At the time of writing, Highways are still investigating the cheapest way of doing this rather than paying multiple thousands of pounds to Milestone. I will update verbally if I have more.

Council Budget for 2024-25

The controversial council budget with many heavy cuts was approved at full Council on 15 February. 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 only and subject to a bidding process for grants after that. 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's (Green, LibDem and Independent) proposed amendment to save funding for arts and museums and young people not in education or training was voted down as was the Labour amendment which also proposed to reverse some of the planned cuts.

Reinstating glyphosate spraying and biodiversity

The Cabinet has reviewed its biodiversity policy and decided to reinstate weed killing with glyphosate. They started using acetic acid as a substitute last year but found that it requires five or six sprayings a year to kill larger weeds effectively and they could not afford to do this. Its new policy states that it will only use glyphosate as sparingly as possible where it has to for things such as maintenance of pavements. They will also do a small trial of hand weeding to work out how much it costs and how effective it can be.

The Council has a target of managing 30% of land it owns for nature - in line with stated government policy, however, it is only applying this to its own estate, not to schools.

SEND failure – “Priority Action Plan”

Following Suffolk's special educational needs services failing its Ofsted inspection, the County must now produce a Priority Action Plan with its NHS partners which must be submitted by 7th March. It will be spending £4.4 million extra in the next financial year to enable this action plan to be delivered. New staff will be hired to, amongst other things, enable care plans to be produced more promptly as well as extra training.

Suffolk Devolution expected 2025

The government is offering the County Council a bit 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. The first election would take place in May 2025 alongside County Council elections.

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>