

PAUL CLOVER/MARGARET MAYBURY DISTRICT
COUNCILLOR'S REPORT FOR LAVENHAM PARISH
COUNCIL MEETING 8TH JANUARY 2026.

Car park charging increase

When BDC introduced car parking charges, they undertook not to increase them for two years. It would appear they are about to go back on their word as they are proposing to increase them by 20%. This is before being reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny in February.

After initial concern that BDC were looking at a £900k budget deficit for the coming year, it now transpires that there is a forecast of a £140k surplus. BDC are claiming that the car park charges have had little impact on retail commerce in our towns, yet they will not engage with shop keepers. Projecting their own six monthly figures on an annual basis, Hadleigh and Sudbury have suffered 800k less visits per annum to their car parks since the charges came in. Many of the social media posts pay testament to this downturn.

In the original forecasts for last year, the amount of income was over estimated by a £120k and this figure has been rolled over into the new year, meaning the possibility of full cost recovery is £135k short on a scheme that costs £1.5m to administer. Without this roll over it would be cost neutral. Last week Lord Rose, one of our countries leading retailers urged councils to do whatever they can to help High St retailers to keep them in business and our towns vibrant attractive places to visit. Councillors have a duty to preserve and promote the economy of our town centres and any further increases are therefore counterintuitive. Particularly as BDC accept that with the charges, usage will not increase therefore we are looking to stagnation whereby the more the shortfall on full recovery, the more the council will look to increase the level of charges caused less people will visit.

Of the retailers we have spoken to, over 70% have said their sales are down year on year. Also, year on year Feb-July, the issue of PCN's has fallen except for Lavenham where it has risen from 23 to 160. At the cabinet meeting, the motion to charge on Sundays was not carried forward and according to a BBC website, this is to be standardised across the district.

Community Development Funds deadline

Any community groups wishing to apply for development grant funding should note that the final date for applications is 18th January.

Funded training sessions for local organisations

Four fully funded training courses are available to help local organisations strengthen and build for the future. Presented by Community Action Suffolk, the courses will take place in January and February and will cover such subjects as

- Understanding trustee roles and responsibilities
- Essentials for launching a charity
- Volunteer leadership

Further details are to be found on the Community Action Suffolk website.

Warm homes local grants fund

Free energy saving improvements are available to poorly insulated homes where the resident is on low income, benefits or in certain postcode areas. Available to private homeowners or landlords with an EPC of D or below. SCC have a fund of £1.38m which has to be allocated by March 2026. Visit: www.warmhomessuffolk.org or call 03456 037 686

Anglian Water's thriving communities fund

This fund supports projects that improve the water environment and bring real social benefits to local communities. Applications for grants of between £10k and £100k can be applied for including projects to reduce flood risk. £5.8m is available with the aim of distributing £1.5m in the first year. Further information is to be found on the Anglian Water website.

Unity healthcare merger

Unity healthcare which serves Lavenham, Long Melford, Haverhill has now merged with Glemsford surgery. It is hoped that this will increase patient services and reduce wait times.

Bus service

This week I have spoken to Konnect bus services re the local services that they provide with a view to understanding residents needs. If anyone has any points they wish to raise, please contact me and I will take these forward.