

County Councillor's Report to Lavenham Parish Council meeting on Thursday 3rd February 2022

20mph Scheme Lavenham

The report recommending a 20mph scheme has now been submitted to cabinet member for transport strategy Richard Smith and officer Graeme Mateer for consideration.

County deal – real local investment or yet another local government reshuffle?

Suffolk has been one of nine counties selected to negotiate a devolution deal with Government as part of Michael Gove's levelling up white paper. To apply for it was a decision by the little known Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Board – which is a body comprising the leader of the county council Matthew Hicks and the leaders of all the Suffolk districts and borough. Cllr Hicks has said that the deal could include greater control over buses and trains, to deliver "London style public transport or skills programmes". Regulation of the bus network, if that's what it means, would be an advantage but having new powers is no use if there is no money to use them. There is a risk it could become another drawn out and ill-advised attempt to merge local authorities. Cllr Hicks also points to the fact that the Government wants to see a "high profile, directly elected leader" for each devolved authority.

Bus Back Better

The Government has written to highways authorities, including Suffolk to advise it that it is cutting the pot available for investing in buses from £3bn to £1.4bn. It is not clear whether this will affect the £77m bid for bus improvements from Suffolk county council.

Suffolk budget proposals – 4% council precept rise, below the 5% cap

Suffolk County Council is proposing a 4% rise in council tax for next year. This is made up of the maximum 2% they are allowed on general budget and 2% rise for social care precept (below the 3% cap they are allowed). They had a similar rise last year. They are having to dip into reserves to meet a forecast budget deficit for the year. Savings they were hoping to make by implementing new ways of working particularly with Special Educational Needs and adult social care – have not happened as soon as they would like. At the Budget Scrutiny Meeting my political group proposed that the social care precept be raised to 3% to help Suffolk's social care crisis. This recommendation rejected by the Conservatives.

Carbon Budget and scrutiny

The council has produced a carbon budget to help show whether it is on track for zero carbon by 2030. My group is concerned that this budget, unlike the financial budget, has not been submitted to scrutiny committee before coming to cabinet and full council. It takes no account of emissions that will be caused by the road projects – such as the Lowestoft Gull Wing Bridge - that it is funding.

Biodiversity recommendations approved

These were approved by cabinet on 1st February. There is a long list of recommendations including phasing out the council use of glyphosate by 2023 at the latest. The overall goal is to restore enhanced biodiversity to 30% of the council's land by 2030, including 30% of council farms. The recommendations were the result of a motion proposed by a Green on the council a couple of years ago. Sadly the yet to be determined money for this will be in 2023-24 budget, not next year's.

**R LINDSAY
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