

Annual Parish Report – 2022/23

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Ukraine: One Year Anniversary

A year has passed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It was on the 24th March that Councillors cross-party shared a single motion in support of Ukraine. Our Group fully supported the motion, condemning the actions of Putin, as well as committed to support and welcome refugees to become a part of Suffolk communities, and recognise the positive response from Suffolk residents.

The 'Homes for Ukraine' programme continues to provide hosts for refugees, but is in need of more households to come forward and offer temporary accommodation. If you think you can still help, please visit: www.suffolk.gov.uk/Ukraine.

Full Council: Motions

In 2022, our Group submit 6 motions – one for each Full Council meeting. Motions are a way to highlight issues and attempt to change council policy.

In July, we asked this Council to declare a cost-of-living emergency in the county of Suffolk. Rising inflationary pressures, food shortages, and wage pressure has meant so many more households have fallen below the poverty line. With Winter looming, we believed more emphasis was needed on providing emergency support to the most vulnerable households.

In December, we ask the Council to commit further to Community Transport, as well as investigate further into why Suffolk County Council did not get government funding for our Bus Back Better bid. Rural bus services have been frequently cut, and the council's unsuccessful bid meant millions for investment in restoring the bus network was not able to be invested.

A successful motion we passed through the Council was to promote cleaner rivers in Suffolk. We believe every community should have access to safe waters. The motion committed the Council to investigate further into what further work can be done to protect biodiversity and address polluting run-off in rivers, as well as working with farmers to encourage better practice.

Carbon Budget – SCC is Not on Track

At the beginning of 2023, the Scrutiny Committee met to discuss the Carbon Budget. This is a document that aims to calculate the amount of carbon SCC emits through its services. More importantly, it shows the Council's progress towards achieving Net Zero by 2030 – a declaration made by SCC in 2019.

This year's carbon budget shows that SCC is not on track to reach Net Zero by 2030. Current forecasts show that SCC will still be producing 10,000 tonnes of CO₂ in 2030 – that's still half of what we are emitting now. In addition, the Council's calculations are not accurate enough to develop the full assessment of carbon impact our services have on the environment.

As SCC has had 31 new Cllrs since the original declaration, our Group successfully asked Cllrs to redeclare their commitment to Net Zero by 2030.

2023/24 Budget Meeting: GLI Amendments Declined

At the beginning of February 2023, the Council's budget for 2023/24 was voted in. The budget increased tax by 2.99% - broken down into a 2% rise in the Social Care Precept and a .99% increase in general tax.

Council services have faced a challenging year of demand and additional cost pressures. In addition, the Council is not on track in several service areas, Therefore, we proposed an additional 0.89% increase (19p weekly increase) to ensure vital services were protected from cutting support to residents, and that more direct action is taken to reduce carbon emissions, as well as recruit enough staff to deliver the services our residents require.

Our Group proposed to facilitate a review into Suffolk's speed limits, in the hope to provide residents with a clearer path to more appropriate travel in their communities.

We proposed using £1m to actively recruit, retain and reward frontline staff in adult social care, as well as providing more for Suffolk Libraries to help maintain services through the cost-of-living crisis. In addition, we wanted to invest £1m in providing wider capacity of community transport to be used to help achieve Net Zero through EV vehicle usage.

Report into SEND Provision: Review & Recommendations

Back in 2021, Suffolk County Council commissioned an independent review into its Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision. The report found failings in the delivery of Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plans for children, serious issues in communicating with parent/guardians, as well as an inefficient work environment within the service revealing high absenteeism. Recommendations were given, in which SCC have worked to implement them.

In January 2023, our Group were briefed on the subject and have been informed that all recommendations outlined in the review are now fully completed. Their priorities moving forward continue to be the timeliness of EHC plans, the number of school exclusions, availability of provision, and the ongoing rise in demand for SEND services.

Suffolk Devolution:

In 2022, the Government published its White Paper on Levelling-Up, within which it has agreed that Suffolk will be one of nine initial 'County Deals' up for negotiation to devolve powers. In December 2022, government met with SCC to sign an initial county deal. A public consultation will now follow, asking residents if this is what communities want.

Our Group have questioned whether this is the 'big win' that the administration portraying this as. £16m a year to deliver 'long-term' transformation is less than what governments have cut from the council's annual budget over the decades. Other agreements include:

- £5.8m for housing on brownfield sites
- Devolved Adult Education budget (amount undisclosed)

- Transport settlement starting in 24/25 (amount undisclosed)
- £3m to improve energy efficiency in houses

In addition, the deal will look to install a directly elected leader, and the legislation setting up a Mayoral authority – when the administration had said that this wouldn't be the case. Politically, there is a real risk of a stalemate in politics. Not enough information has been given to show how to prevent a gridlock if a Mayor from a minority party is elected.

Overall, we will always welcome devolving more power to local authorities. However, this deal is a long way from the finished article.

Pylons Project

Last year national grid launched a consultation into a proposal to connect Norwich to Tilbury using a pylon option, these pylons would be 1/3 larger than our current set with Nation Grid claiming this was the least expensive option.

This issue naturally has caused concerns as these new pylons are not able to be placed close to existing pylons due to technical issues, this would leave to a situation with us being "in between" a corridor of structures across the landscape. There have been many local meetings with many asking why an offshore windfarm's energy is being landed on Norwich when Norwich does not need this power? With many pointing out that Sizewell C is having its power taken to Kent with an undersea cable, surely the same could be put in place here, to save all the visual impact as well as the impact of undergrounding in protected landscapes.

The outcome of the pressure from local councils and MPs etc is that there is a further review of the financial claims etc before this project is finally put to government for a decision.

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