

Parish Report – March 2021

Councillor

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Suffolk County Council Budget

The Suffolk County Council Budget was voted through Full Council on February 11th. This year's budget is based on a 12-month financial settlement from government, rather than the 3 or 4 year agreement which is usually offered. Key points include:

- A council tax rise of 3.99% (1.99% basic council tax and 2% Social Care Precept), representing an increase of £53.55 for a Band D property, from £1,343.61 in 2020-21 to £1,397.16 in 2021-22.
- A council tax shortfall of £7.9m less than expected, to be met by using reserves.
- Planned spending is £597.9m, 7.4% more than 2021-21.
- £15.3m of spending to address ongoing COVID-19 costs.
- No proposed reductions in council services or personnel.

LDGI Group Budget Amendment and Group Leader's Speech

The LDGI Group submitted a Budget Amendment to Full Council on February 11th alongside the administration's Budget. The amendment would have authorised the use of the full 3% social care precept to avoid impacting SCC's reserves and generate an extra £3.452m for social care at a cost of only £13.41 per year to a Band D household. The extra income would have provided funding for a wider service offer for Suffolk residents, including a new officer for the flooding team to unlock more government funding, and the re-enablement of concessionary bus passes on community transport. The amendment was unfortunately not passed.

Cllr Elfrede Brambley-Crawshaw, Leader of the Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group and proposer of the motion, gave the following speech:

"After 13 years of cuts to local government, which has starved this council of government grant funding, this council is no fit state for the financial and environmental challenge it faces. Raising council tax is the least progressive form of taxation, but we are left with no choice. This Government cut taxes for the rich and then cut funding to local councils to pay for it. As leader of the largest opposition group I can firmly say we, the Greens, Lib Dems, and Independents, had no part of this plan to tax the poor harder and give tax breaks to the rich. Everyone in this chamber today is being forced into a position by the government where we have no option but to vote for raising council tax."

"Our amendment would have taken the full amount of precept allowed for social care, meaning that money is not being taken from general council funding. If we don't take the extra 1% then we lose almost three and a half million for social care this year and every year into the future. That money will have to be made up by reducing services elsewhere."

Suffolk & Norfolk County Council submit joint bid for £6m flood funding

Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils have submitted a joint bid to the £200 fund for Flood and Coastal Resilience, requesting £6m to invest in flood protection schemes across both counties. The proposed projects would also capture water for reuse. If the bid is successful town and parish councils will be encouraged to get involved through measures like permeable paving, water butts and 'rain gardens' that can cope with occasional flooding. These projects would be in place by 2027 if the bid is approved.

Consultation on proposed A12 improvements from A14 Seven Hills to A1152 Woods Lane

Suffolk County Council is currently consulting on proposed improvements to the A12 between A14 junction at 'Seven Hills' and A1152 at Woods Lane, with the aim of increasing highway capacity in the area and preventing future congestion. Government predictions suggest that traffic will increase by 25% in this area by 2040.

The improvements will include traffic lights on every roundabout but Seckford, and have an estimated cost of £60m. The lights would monitor congestion and use 'intelligent flow' to adapt to changing levels of traffic.

Cllr Caroline Page, speaking on behalf of the LDGI Group, gave the following quote:

"I am anxious about the number of roundabouts with traffic lights. This is the trunk road all the way to Lowestoft, are they going to make life more simple or easier for anyone doing this journey? It's going to cause people to stop and start. There are lots of areas on the A12 that are narrow and in need of improvement, so I would really question why it is so highly invested in the stretch here. These proposals are also at odds with the climate emergency declared by the Council. We are supposed to be reducing road traffic, but we seem to be enabling it here".

The consultation is open from 9 February to 19 March 2021, and can be commented upon at the link below:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/consultations-petitions-and-elections/consultations/a12-improvements/>

LDGI Group opposes Government's last-minute approach to local authority grants

Suffolk County Council will receive £27m for highways repairs, maintenance and drainage in 2021-22, a reduction in from £31m the previous year. This has necessitated the use of £2m of reserves to top up the grant. In the view of my Group, these cuts in Government funding make it impossible to plan long-term for road maintenance and repair. Due to the uncertainty as to whether this grant would materialise at all, some vital work has already been postponed.

Cllr Stringer, speaking on behalf of the LDGI Group, gave the following quote:

"It's a bit like someone telling you that they're going to punch you twice in the face and then expecting you to be grateful if they only punch you once."

LDGI Group submits response to Post-16 Travel Policy consultation

The LDGI Group has submitted a joint response to Suffolk County Council's consultation on the Post-16 Transport Policy, which manages transport to schools and education for young people after the age of 16. The LDGI Group's views included:

- Support for the expansion of the post-16 travel eligibility criteria for sixth form students and adult learners aged 25 and under with EHC plans, reflecting the change in age range for compulsory school attendance.
- Support for keeping prices lower for SEND students.
- Use of buses and trains for school transport must be supported. The needs of students and the numbers currently forced to use taxis or private cars to reach their schools must be taken into account when considering public transport. Students should be steered towards buses first, and the school transport service should support our local bus network in maintaining services to rural areas.
- The Travel Training Scheme must be better funded, so that it can expand and promote its services.