

Annual Parish Report – 2024/25

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Suffolk's Library Service

At Cabinet on 18th March 2025, the council administration voted to bring Suffolk's libraries back in-house at the end of the current contract for the library on 31 May. Suffolk Libraries, who have held the contract since the service was divested in 2012, were the only bidder for the contract, but negotiations broke down

The proposal to do this was passionately opposed not just by Suffolk Libraries, but also Suffolk residents including Friends of Thurston library and myself and the many volunteers and Friends groups who work for and raise money for libraries in their communities. **Richard Fawcett was amazingly helpful in highlighting many of the discrepancies between SCC and Suffolk libraries. My group then asked for the decision to be examined at the scrutiny meeting 29th April. Unfortunately this was rejected by the monitoring officer**

Devolution and Local Government Reorganization

Since the publication of the government's White Paper in December, Suffolk councils have been scrambling to develop their proposals for reorganizing local government. Under the new system, Norfolk and Suffolk will have a joint mayor (with elections held in May 2026) leading a mayoral authority replaced by unitary councils –that undertake all local services like education, adult care, waste collection, housing and highways. Opposition councillors, like my group are less convinced that one massive council would bring decision-making closer to the communities, which is what devolution is supposed to enable. Submit detailed proposals in September, with a decision from government by the end of the year. It is likely that councillors for the new council/s would be elected by Suffolk residents in May 2027, a year after the mayoral elections.

Motions

My group passed three successful motions at council over the year:

1. In May 2024, we proposed that the council lobby the government for proper, long-term funding for local councils and support policies to address the long-term funding of adult social care.
2. In July 2024, my group tabled a motion that the council would do everything it could to avoid delays with local infrastructure funded by developer contributions. but our motion acknowledged that the design and programming of works by Suffolk County Council was also often delayed. **I named Thurston as a prime example!!**
3. In December 2024, my group successfully proposed a policy for the council of 'Roofs before Rural' regarding solar panels. The motion noted that the new Labour government was proposing to triple the amount of solar power in the UK by 2030 and set out the council's position that rooftop solar was preferable to 'solar farms' and for the government to seek assurances Suffolk's best quality agricultural land would be protected.

My group also proposed the following motions which were voted down by the Conservative administration at council:

In October 2024, my group tabled a motion to revise the Highways Maintenance Operating Procedure so that repairs to footways and pavements would be prioritized in areas with heavy footfall, or where a recent fall had been reported. This motion wa

state of Suffolk's Roads

In July 2024, a report was brought to Scrutiny Committee which looked into the condition of Suffolk's roads, the amount spent by the council to repair them and how repair works were prioritised. Works are prioritised by the council's Highway Maintenance Operational Plan, which sets out the parameters for repair work and the order of priority repairs.

Unsurprisingly, main roads and roads which have a lot of traffic are prioritised over quieter roads which do not. The result of the damage to the roads by work on the A14 didn't help and despite promising National Highways DID NOT recompense SCC

THURSTON RAIL CROSSING

I cannot politely express my frustration that still we do not have a decision to go forward with this despite constantly asking whats going on.

ROAD WORKS IN THURSTON AND BEYTON

I cannot tell you how many times I have had to contact SCC highways, MidSuffolk planners and developers and contractors about the numerous road works done or more importantly NOT done .

A14 OVERNIGHT ROAD WORKS; I have made sure National Highways liase with SCC about and local road closures, I,m sure drivers will not be using the correct diversion.

THURSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE;

Be assured I have kept in touch to make sure the DFE is still working on the plans. I am meeting the head teacher on 6th May.

But it is still not confirmed if the 6th form will go to the Thurston site Scc gave the permission for the new 60 parking spaces

LOCALITY FUND; pleased to help with cost of defibrillator

Council Budget 2025-26

In February 2025, the council voted to adopt its proposed budget for the 2025-26 financial year. This included approving a maximum rise in council tax this year of 4.99%, including the 2% social care precept for adult care. Cost pressures for the council include care purchasing for adult social care, Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and placements for children in care. 26, the debt will cause a £6.8m cost pressure for the council.

Improving Services for Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)

Following the poor Ofsted/CQC inspection report published in January last year, the council has been trying to improve SEND services. In May last year they produced and submitted a SEND Strategy, and in June they produced a Priority Action Plan for improvement, including extra funding of £4.4m to recruit more staff, including Educational Psychologists.

Update on Flooding

Following the Storm Babet flooding in October 2023, the council announced it was investing an extra £1m in investigating the causes of flooding and taking action to prevent further floods.. A year later, in November 2024, the council announced it would be allocating a further £1.5m from its reserves to deal with recommendations made in the 10 investigation reports published so far.

I would like to congratulate Beyton on the work they have done and paid for their own investigations and repair work

MY LOCALITY BUDGET. Pleased to have been able to help with the cost of new VASIGNS

Warm Homes in Suffolk

- For the Suffolk Loft Insulation Offers, residents should visit <https://highloft.co.uk/pages/suffolk-council-200-loft-insulation-contribution> and fill in the form to receive a discount code
- For the interest free loan scheme, homeowners can check to see if their property has an existing Energy Certificate with an EPC band and record of their property size at gov.uk/find-energy-certificate. They can apply for the vouchers by visiting suffolkenergyassessment.co.uk. This scheme started in November and vouchers are being distributed on a first-come, first-served basis.