

Parish Report – October 2024

Councillor
Penny Otton
Thedwastre South

Cuts to Winter Fuel Payments

At Council on 17 October, a motion was passed that the council would write to the government and ask them to reverse the decision they have made to cut the eligibility for the winter fuel payment for pensioners. It is estimated that this will affect thousands of pensioners in the county.

The council also announced a new £3m fund for interest-free loans to residents wishing to undertake energy efficiency upgrades such as insulation, solar panels, batteries,

or heat pumps. The loans (up to £15,000) to be repaid over a maximum of seven years at 0% interest. The scheme will be open to homeowners across Suffolk from November, but you can register your interest now at <https://www.lendology.org.uk/warm-home-suffolk-loan>. My group are obviously in favour of retrofitting homes to make them more energy efficient, although as the council will be returning an unspent £5m to the government in March from their previous retrofitting scheme, we would urge people to apply if they are eligible - to make sure we are reducing as many energy bills as possible across the county.

Pavement safety and preventing trips and falls

At Council on 17 October my group brought forward a motion that the county review its priorities for repairing pavement defects. Currently, if there is a difference in the surface level of the footway of 20mm or more, this will be repaired, but we argued that in areas of high footfall or where a trip or fall had been recorded, this threshold was too high. Most members of the public who trip or fall are over 65, would make sense for the repair policy to be more flexible. The administration at the council did not vote to pass our motion, but reported that a review of their highways processes was being undertaken.

Protection from Flooding

You may have seen in the press that Suffolk County Council have announced an extra £1.5m of funding to deliver the first phase of works identified in the flood investigations following Storm Babet. The council is writing to the government requesting £20m for flood protection to help prevent future flooding in the county, as it is likely extreme weather will become more likely due to the effects of climate change:

My group raised concerns about other areas of flooding and whether the council had a strategy for dealing with the problems or a list of priorities when it comes to protecting local infrastructure.

Finally, at Scrutiny Committee on 24 October, a report was presented on highways flooding and the responsibilities held by the council, water companies and the Environment Agency. Suffolk County Council is the lead flood authority for Suffolk and although it has responsibility for surface water flooding, it does not have the capacity to manage it all and has to prioritise its response. Priority is given to works to address internal flooding to five or more properties, or flooding to major infrastructure for 10 hours or more.

If you have a stream or watercourse on your land, you have responsibilities to mitigate against flooding. You can find information about this in the council's guide to riparian

ownership: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/flooding-and-drainage/maintenance-of-ditches-and-other-watercourses/riparian-ownership-in-suffolk>

There are also some links at the bottom of this report on how to protect your property from flooding and advice on how to deal with the aftermath of flooding.

Improving Access to GPs

At Health Scrutiny on Wednesday 9 October, we heard from the NHS Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) about what they were doing to improve access to GPs in the county. Low numbers of GPs and a high demand for appointments has caused problems recently with many people unable to make appointments to see their doctors. The committee heard how practices were switching to cloud-based telephony to decrease the reliance on a limited number of phone lines (which contributes to the chaos of the 8am rush for appointments each morning), and digital booking so that AI can prioritise the urgency of appointments based on symptoms (it is still possible to book appointments by phone and in person if patients are unable to book online). Members of the committee expressed concern that community pharmacies are also under pressure currently, and also that GP surgery buildings were in a poor state, with some plans for new surgeries abandoned due to cost,

SURVEY OF PHARMACIES; I have sent details to clerk but would be good to publicise.

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Suffolk Local Transport Plan

A newly-developed plan which details the long-term vision for transport in Suffolk has been launched for public consultation. Local communities helped shape a new draft of the Suffolk Local Transport Plan by sharing their views back in February of this year and the council is now asking for feedback on the final proposed document. The plan details activity between 2025-2040 and sets out a long-term vision for transport in Suffolk, including decarbonisation of transport, strengthening the local economy, promoting health, wellbeing and social inclusion, and creating better-connected places that encourage a range of transport choices.

The council has also produced fifteen 'Area Transport Plans' and a 'Suffolk Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan' which are the funded implementation plans for the wider Suffolk Local Transport Plan. These plans outline how the Local Transport Plan's vision and objectives will be delivered in key locations across the county. The consultation is available via www.suffolk.gov.uk/LTP and will close on Monday 25 November 2024. The Local Transport Plan and its associated plans will then be presented to Suffolk County Council Cabinet in 2025.

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Cost of Living help and advice:

<https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/family.page?familychannel=6>

Benefits advice and support:

<https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/adult.page?adultchannel=0>

Flood preparation advice: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/suffolk-fire-and-rescue-service/fire-and-rescue-safety-advice-in-the-community/preparing-for-flooding>

Flood recovery advice and support: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/about/flood-recovery-information-for-suffolk>