

# Annual Parish Report – 2022/23

Councillor: Penny Otton

Divisions: Thedwastre south

County Council Details

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## Ukraine: One Year Anniversary

A year has passed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It was on the 24<sup>th</sup> March that Councillors cross-party shared a single motion in support of Ukraine. Our Group recommended the motion, condemning the actions of Putin, as well as committed to support and welcome refugees to become a part of Suffolk communities. The 'Homes for Ukraine' programme continue to provide hosts for refugees but is in dire 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](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/Ukraine).

Hosts are entitled to £350 per month, which increases to £500 after 12 months.

**CHURCH ROAD;** having met with the highways officer, I have agreed to a traffic survey paid from my local highways budget.

**COMBS LANE;** this continues to be a problem , I have asked that Suffolk highways demand the gas company does or pays for the repair

**LOCALITY FUND;** am pleased to have been able to agree £1,000 towards new low energy street lights.

**BURFORD BRIDGE;** after some time this was eventually repaired.

**A14; MAJOR WORK;** we need to make sure that traffic is not using the side roads as a diversion.

**CORONATION EVENTS;** Suffolk county council will waive any fees for street closures.

## FULL COUNCIL:

Over the past 12 months my Group have submitted motions for Full Council meeting.

In July, we asked this Council to declare a **cost-of-living emergency** in the county of Suffolk. With Winter looming, we believed more emphasis was needed on providing emergency support to the most vulnerable households. This was voted down.

In December, we ask the Council to commit further to **Community Transport**, as well as investigate further into why the council failed in their Bus Back Better bid. Rural bus services have been frequently cut, and the council's failed bid meant millions for investment in restoring the bus network was lost. Again, this was voted down.

I am very proud that the motion I **put to promote cleaner rivers in Suffolk**. Was agreed unanimously. 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.

**CLIMATE EMERGENCY;** in 2019 our motion to declare a climate emergency was agreed, however as there are now 31 new councillors, we decided to ask for that commitment again last month which was approved

### **Carbon Budget – SCC is Not on Track**

Importantly, the Council's progress towards achieving Net Zero by 2030 – a declaration made by SCC in 2019. Current forecasts show that SCC will still be producing 10,000 tonnes of CO2 in 2030 –

As SCC has had 31 new Cllrs since the original declaration, our Group will be asking Cllrs to redeclare their commitment to Net Zero by 2030 today.

### **2023/24 Budget Meeting: GLI Amendments Declined**

At the beginning of February 2023, the Council's budget for 2023/24 was voted in. The Conservative budget will now increase tax by 3.99% - broken down into a 2% rise in the Social Care Precept and a 1.99% increase in general tax.

My Group proposed to invest in a Carbon Budget Officer, to help develop a stronger pathway towards Net Zero. We proposed a review into Suffolk's speed limits,

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.

The administration voted against our budget amendments, saying our proposals were ill thought-out and not appropriate.

### **Suffolk Devolution: Big Deal?**

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. A public consultation will now follow, asking residents if this is what communities want. The deal will look to install a directly elected leader, commonly known as a Mayor. 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, our Group will always welcome devolving more power to local authorities. The public will now need to decide whether this is something they want.

**PUMPKIN COMPETITION; delighted to have been one of the judges at such a successful event.**

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## John Matthissen - Mid Suffolk District Councillor Annual Report for 2022/23

- Budget

In the 2022/23 budget a scheme to provide two electric buses, proposed by our group, was agreed. This scheme was put on hold by the Cabinet and it is hoped to get this going in 2023.

The budget for 2023/24 was approved for approximately £15.5 million on core services (up from £13 million the year before, mainly due to inflation) with no increase in council tax. Council home rents increased by 7% (against 4.1% last year) and a 7% increase in sheltered housing service charges (against no increase last year) as well as increase in utility charges. All these increases are due to inflation, costs of energy and other cost increases.

Our group put forward budget proposals for a £2 million investment in energy efficiency measures for housing in the district and this was agreed. We hope to see this implemented in the next six months or so. The Council has reserves of over £21 million as at the end of the financial year. This is expected to increase to nearly £23 million over 2023/24. We hope this funding can be allocated to projects across the district.

- Investments

The Council has continued with local projects and after some delays the café at Needham Lakes opened in 2022 and the solar car port at Stowmarket Leisure Centre came into use.

Work continue on Gateway 14 and a first contract was signed with The Range for the company to move to the site. Discussions continue with other potential companies to be located here.

In Stowmarket, investment for a new Sports, Health, Education and Leisure facility was agreed and also funding to develop a new site for a depot for Mid Suffolk and Babergh districts.

Mid Suffolk District Council continues to hold investments in commercial property, outside the district, via its company CIFCO. This property, all outside of the Mid Suffolk area, ranges from gyms to car showrooms, in places including Epsom, Harlow, Lincoln, Peterborough, Norwich and Milton Keynes. Approximately £1-1.5 million is earned each year via rents however the overall value of this property portfolio has fallen.

- Economy

The Council continues to support the development of Gateway 14 which is now part of Freeport East. The Council is investing in an “innovation hub” specifically to support businesses in the Mid Suffolk area.

A new partnership with the University of Essex was set up to provide innovation opportunities for businesses.

The Women’s Cycle Tour was calculated to have brought about £1 million of economic benefits to the region. There is unlikely to be a Women’s Tour in 2023 due to a lack of funding nationally.

- Climate Change

The Council invested in new environmentally-friendly bin lorries – 22 out of a fleet of 35 across Babergh and Mid Suffolk. They are fuelled by HVO (Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil) produced from waste cooking oil and will reduce the carbon footprint of this service by 90%.

There was continued support for parishes with advice from the new post of biodiversity manager.

The Council encourages local groups to improve areas for wildlife and continues with the Tree for Life scheme as well as tree-planting across the district.

- Cost of living

In conjunction with the County Council, Mid Suffolk provided a number of initiatives to help with the cost of living crisis. This included an increase in the amount of funding available for those in hardship, community funding for “warm rooms” and a change to council tax for those on very low incomes. A team at the Council worked to encourage groups and individuals to apply for funding.

- Planning and Housing

For most of the year, the Council’s planning policy team continued to work on the Joint Local Plan following the Plan having been split into two parts as agreed with the Planning Inspectors last year. Part 1 covers all the social, environmental and economic policies and Part 2 covers those relating to housing numbers, distribution etc. Part 1 was progressed and is currently out at consultation. It is expected that, if agreed, this might be adopted in late summer / early autumn of 2023.

With regards to Part 2, the Inspector had acknowledged that 90% of Mid Suffolk’s housing target is already allocated (either via existing permissions or sites allocated via Neighbourhood Plans) and that this is central to future policies. It is expected that work will commence on this during 2023 but that full adoption of a Part 2 would not take place until 2025.

Mid Suffolk’s annual monitoring report showed that 862 new dwellings were built in the district in 2021/22 - 168% of the current annual target (513 dwellings) set by the national standard methodology. There are 7,929 outstanding planning permissions (as at 01/04/22) which are either not started or under construction. Separately, it was confirmed that Mid Suffolk now has 10.88 years of housing land supply, well above the Government target of five years.

Over £2 million was provided to parish and town councils in the form of the Community Infrastructure Levy.

- Planning – the year has seen only minor developments taking place, with the additional houses beyond Pear Tree Place now in doubt in the absence of an agreement between landowners about access to the site.

- Supporting the community

Almost £400,000 was allocated by Mid Suffolk District Council to communities across the district. My locality fund benefitted the following schemes:

- Bench for Paupers Graves
- Speeding Gates for Finborough
- Street lights replacement for Finborough
- Jubilee event in Onehouse
- Plants for Oaks Meadow – Combs & Little Finborough
- Trinity Hall floor – Onehouse, Harleston, Shelland
- John Peel Centre – sound system
- Tree work - Harleston

I would like to thank the Parish Council for all their work done throughout the year.

John Matthissen

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