

March Report from Cllr T-J Haworth-Culf and Cllr Maureen Jones.

Protecting the tax payer

Suffolk Coastal has vowed to develop a more commercial approach to providing services, in order to protect the local tax payer.

At its Full Council meeting on the 23rd February, Suffolk Coastal District Council agreed its budget and set its portion of the Council Tax for the coming financial year.

The Members decided that, in order to continue to provide high quality services, the Council would increase its part of the Council Tax bill for 2017/18 by 3.25%.

In real money, this equates to a rise of less than £5 for people living in a Band D property, with the Council Tax on Band D increasing by £4.95 from £152.37 to £157.32 a year.....or by less than 10p a week!

“I remain very positive about the future and believe Suffolk Coastal has a key role to play in fostering a strong economy by helping businesses develop, driving the provision of more housing, particularly extra affordable homes, and creating new jobs in the district,” said Suffolk Coastal’s Leader, Cllr Ray Herring.

“While east Suffolk has a robust economy, the Council has recognised the need to adopt a more commercial approach to providing services. We need to make sure we get a fair market value for services, if we are to keep council tax down and protect the tax payer.

“No one wants to pay more for services or pay more council tax. But we are faced with dwindling financial support from central Government, so we have a difficult balancing act to ensure everyone pays their fair share to support the services we provide to the community.

“By being more commercial in our approach, we create the funds to be able to invest in important community projects, such as improving our leisure centres, as well as continuing to deliver our Enabling Communities agenda to provide essential grants and support in order to help make our communities stronger and more able to do things for themselves.”

Through its partnership working with Waveney District Council, Suffolk Coastal has already drastically reduced its staffing numbers and made joint saving of over £16million since 2010. These savings have been achieved while safeguarding frontline services provided by the Council.

“We need to build on our success and continue to drive down costs. We need to focus on how we will successfully deliver our ambitious Business Plan, while supporting the local economy,”

“We are driving forward on all fronts, from the proposed merger with Waveney District Council through to moving to new, more economical offices in Melton at no cost to the tax payer.

“There are financial challenges ahead, but we are confident we can deliver quality services, while continuing to make efficiency savings and investing in the future.”

Suffolk Coastal District Council has an annual budget of about £12 million. About £7.7million of this comes from Council Tax. Although Suffolk Coastal collects the Council Tax (on behalf of Suffolk Coastal, the County Council, Police and Town/Parish Councils), only about 10p in the pound goes towards providing our district council services.

We are also facing a steep reduction in central Government grants. Grant income from central Government has dropped from £7.4million in 2010/11 to £600,000 in 2017/18 – and is projected to fall even further in the future.

Because the district’s economy is so strong, the Council has benefited from what is called ‘incentivised income’, through New Homes Bonus and business rate retention, although there is still a projected budget gap of £2.1 million in 2018/19.

Rather than make cuts to services, Suffolk Coastal is committed to reducing its dependence on central Government grants by becoming more financially self-sufficient, through reduced spending and becoming more business-like in order to generate the income we need to make up this shortfall.

Planning documents given the go-ahead

Suffolk Coastal's Full Council formally agreed to adopt the recently approved planning documents which set out site allocations for new homes in the district over the next 10 years.

The Site Allocations and Area Specific Policies Development Plan Document and the Felixstowe Peninsula Area Action Plan were considered by the Planning Inspectorate and found to be “sound” with the Inspector’s report being received by the Council on 16 January 2017.

In August and September 2016, the public examination into the documents took place and identified a series of Main Modifications which were then subject to a period of public consultation. The Council has included all the Main Modifications as required by the Inspector within the documents that have been formally adopted as part of the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan.

The documents will together establish and agree the most suitable land to meet the forecast demand for housing in the district as well as considering the requirements for employment land, town centres, open spaces, infrastructure and

other land use planning issues as the Council seeks to implement the Core Strategy.

The documents will now become part of Suffolk Coastal's Local Plan alongside the Council's Core Strategy which was adopted in July 2013.

Implementation of Civil Parking Enforcement in East Suffolk.

We had a key decision to make on whether we should take over responsibility for parking enforcement. Suffolk is one of the few counties in England where district councils do not have this responsibility, and parking enforcement is still carried out by the police.

The lack of enforcement action is seen in communities across the district, with mounting discontent over 'unpoliced' illegal parking – in particular at pinch points around schools. There are significant safety issues associated with this and, under current arrangements, District Councils are powerless to enforce a solution. CPE would provide those powers. The law permits the responsibility for parking enforcement to be transferred from the police to local authorities and income from tickets stays with the authority, potentially enabling self-funding.

This proposal includes a range of options such as on-street pay and display or the development of new car parking facilities, and putting in place a very streamlined enforcement operation, fully integrated with our current off street parking enforcement service. There is a lot of work to be completed to implement this and we urge you to continue to report items to the police.

Funding revitalising the Suffolk Coast

Suffolk Coastal are celebrating the accomplishments achieved through the Coastal Communities Fund Programme as the team prepare to launch another project this week.

The Council received £490,000 in funding from the programme launched in 2012, which was developed to promote sustainable economic growth and jobs in coastal communities.

A wide range of projects have so far been supported to encourage more people of all ages to visit our coastline.

For kids, a new children's viewing sculpture became an iconic part of Snape Maltings last summer. The sculpture called Myriad created by artist David Rickard and architect Germano Di Chello, was created following a competition in 2016 and gives visitors a different way of looking at the landscape. After a successful summer, the sculpture is set to be moved to a new location.

A year long series of events for children, including a Children's Film Festival, was also established across independent cinemas in east Suffolk by Aldeburgh Cinema's Audience Development Project. The group have been busy organising screenings of acclaimed films as well as running creative work shops for children of all ages to get involved in. During the summer, there were 79 screenings of

classic and new family films in Aldeburgh, Halesworth and Ipswich, reaching a total 4,450 people.

Home grown and locally produced food and drink is also helping to bring more people to the Suffolk coast. The development project led by young people through the Young Producers Group, aims to support members and new start-ups, sharing knowledge and experience and promoting new businesses in the area. The group have now held the first Suffolk Young Producers Food Fair and link to the Aldeburgh Food & Drink Festival.

Work is now also taking place to develop an interactive food trail web platform, celebrating the best of the Suffolk coast to encourage visitors to explore undiscovered parts of east Suffolk. The map will enable people to create their own trail of places to visit and enjoy across the county.

A new volunteer tourism project run by Wild Days Conservation Holidays has been established and aims to link volunteering with holidaying opportunities along the Suffolk coast. Supported by Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), three holidays have now taken place in Dunwich, Orford and Walberswick and four more are planned for this year. The development of these holidays is part of a wider 'Volunteer Tourism' project to help both local volunteers and visitors to pass on their passion for the Suffolk coast.

This also links to the Suffolk Coast Greeters project to form the Volunteer Tourism Network which recruits volunteers to welcome visitors to the area who will share what they love, what they know and their personal experiences of the area.

All these projects are brought together to promote the area as a visitor destination by the Suffolk Coast website. Launched in April 2015 by the The Suffolk Coast Ltd Destination Management Organisation (DMO) and enhanced thanks to the funding received, the website showcases what the area has to offer to visitors and tourists with high profile PR campaigns, increased social media coverage as well as connecting and boosting the profile of a string of local businesses.

Walking is becoming a major draw for people visiting the Suffolk Coast leading to investment in the creation of four new walks and improved route marking to enable easier access to some of the coast's best loved areas. New walking guides have also been developed for the four paths in Aldeburgh & Thorpeness, Rendlesham & Staverton, Sutton & Hollesley Heaths and Walberswick to enable people to navigate the routes easily and safely.

The Suffolk Coasts and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty team are launched the newly renovated coast path in Walberswick on Friday 24 February, along with the collection of Outstanding Landscapes walks guides to link the best walks in the area. The team hope the improved path will encourage more visitors and residents to explore and discover more of the Suffolk Coast.

New Volunteering Website: There is a new and easy way to discover volunteering opportunities in Suffolk, thanks to the Volunteer Suffolk website. The site has been created as a one-stop shop for people to discover how they can gift their time, and for local organisations to advertise their volunteering opportunities.

The website already boasts more than 100 volunteering opportunities, added by local organisations and charities. These range from short-term and one-off roles, to temporary positions and long-term roles.

Current opportunities include being a tour guide for the Tide Mill in Woodbridge, a marshal at the Midnight Walk in aid of St. Elizabeth Hospice, preparing animal feeds at Banham Zoo and assisting with play sessions for children who have suffered from domestic abuse or violence at home.

There are also “10 minute volunteer” opportunities on offer which simply involve sharing a Facebook post to raise awareness, sourcing a raffle prize or putting up a poster at work.

The website also provides helpful volunteering tips, latest news and volunteers’ stories.

Volunteer Suffolk is a product of the Suffolk Volunteering Strategy and was made possible thanks to a steering group of representatives from Suffolk’s public, private and voluntary sectors.

For more information visit www.volunteersuffolk.org.uk

‘Love East Suffolk’ returns: The ‘Love East Suffolk’ litter pick scheme is back for 2017 to encourage, enable and reward people to show some love for the environment we live in.

Last year the incentive based community litter pick scheme helped clean up over 7.6 tonnes of waste across Suffolk Coastal and Waveney whilst also giving groups funding to spend in their community.

In 2017 both Councils hope to encourage even more groups to take part – beating the 2,035 people who got involved during 2016.

To incentivise more groups of volunteers to help litter pick in East Suffolk, the Love East Suffolk scheme offers a £20 payment to all groups who register their litter pick to take place between 1 March to 31 May 2017.

All registered groups who carry out their pick during this period will also be entered into a prize draw, with prizes of £200 awarded to winning groups in each of five “neighbourhood areas” in Suffolk Coastal and in each of four “neighbourhood areas” in Waveney with funding once again provided by Norse.

Both Suffolk Coastal Norse and Waveney Norse can provide volunteers with equipment including sacks, disposable gloves, to groups on request and will also arrange for gathered litter to be collected. Litter pick sticks, bag hoops, and green vests can also be loaned out, subject to availability.

For more information, visit: www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/waste/litter/love-east-suffolk

Return, recycle, reuse: The NHS has launched a community equipment amnesty across Suffolk to get people to return as much unused NHS equipment as possible during March. Anything including crutches, walking frames and mattresses, can be returned easily as part of a month-long NHS amnesty from 1 to 31 March 2017.

Last year local health services issued over 100,000 NHS community equipment items to Suffolk patients in need at a cost of more than £8.5m. By the end of the year nearly 40,000 items, costing £3.4m, had not been returned to the contractor Medequip. While some patients need equipment for long periods of time, NHS services lose thousands of pounds each year due to missing equipment.

Some of the equipment the NHS is keen to get back includes alternating air mattresses, which cost £1,650 each, and wheeled adjustable frames, costing £12.70 each. In one month alone last year, nearly £8,500 worth of wheeled adjustable frames and nearly £600,000 worth of air mattresses were issued by Suffolk NHS services.

NHS equipment can be returned to any of the Medequip locations listed below, Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 5.00pm. As part of the month-long NHS equipment amnesty the Medequip sites will also open every Saturday 8.00am to 2.00pm.

Nearest site: Ipswich Depot Unit 31, Bluestem Road Ransomes Europark, Ipswich Suffolk IP3 9RR

For those unable to drop off at collection points, Medequip will collect items for free. Contact Medequip on 01473 351805 to arrange a suitable time for collection. The Medequip collection service is available long-term, alongside its weekly openings at its depots, and not only as part of the March amnesty.

Thorpe Road Car Park: Work is not far away from being completed at Thorpe Road car park where the work involves improving the drainage of the site and surface of the car park.

Other news:

Felixstowe to celebrate our Armed Forces

A celebratory event to show appreciation of the work of the Armed Forces is to be held in Felixstowe this year.

2017 marks the 350th anniversary of the Dutch attack on Landguard Fort in Felixstowe and to mark the occasion, and to recognise the huge contribution made by our servicemen and women from the past until the present day, Felixstowe has been chosen as the venue for Suffolk Armed Forces weekend.

A weekend of action-packed entertainment is planned for Saturday 24 and Sunday 25 June 2017 and plans to be a high profile, one off free event for all age groups.

There will be a unique package of entertainment including music from choirs and military bands to an evening of pop and rock, military displays, food stalls, children's activities and fireworks, and some thrilling battle re-enactments between the Dutch and English with cannon, muskets and swords. All this by Felixstowe's fantastic seaside with all that has to offer as well!

Cllr T-J Haworth-Culf, Cabinet Member for Customers, Communities and Leisure said "We're very excited about hosting Suffolk Armed Forces Day in Felixstowe. We hope the weekend will raise public awareness of the contribution made to our country by those who serve and have served in Her Majesty's Armed Forces as not many people, locally or nationally know that Felixstowe played an important role in the history of our nation. We're proud to be bringing together the community, armed forces personnel, their families and service veterans for this celebratory weekend that is set to be the biggest Armed Forces event in the region. This important event puts Felixstowe on centre stage and promises to bring history to life for all the family and is a fantastic opportunity for us to showcase what we have to offer.

The event is being organised in partnership by organisations including the Suffolk Armed Forces Covenant Group, the Landguard Fort Trust, Royal Marines Association and Royal British Legion, with assistance from local authorities and military units.

To make this an event we can all be proud of we need the support of businesses, organisations and individuals who understand and value our armed forces, our community and our history"

If you would like to talk more about how you could be involved, please feel free to give our project officer Paul Grant a ring on **07850 427928**, or email: paul.grant@eastssuffolk.gov.uk

Volunteers needed to help Suffolk get composting

Suffolk Master Composters are inviting green-minded enthusiasts to join their ranks and master the art of composting this spring time.

New volunteers will receive expert training from the Suffolk Waste Partnership and Garden Organic to enable them to act as composting ambassadors – encouraging the public to compost through promotional talks, events and demonstrations.

The next two-day Suffolk Master Composter foundation course takes place in March. Those who attend do have a choice of dates for attending day two.

All sessions will take place at Stowmarket Community Centre, Hillside, Stowmarket. Day one takes place on Saturday 18 March and day two is either on Sunday 19 March or Tuesday 21 March.

Composting resources and ongoing support will also be provided throughout the volunteers' involvement. In return, volunteers are asked to commit a minimum of

30 hours to the scheme – promoting the composting message through a wide range of methods including talks to local organisations, visits to schools, writing articles and running information stalls at public events.

No experience is required to join the scheme – all that is needed is an interest in composting and a desire to support your local community.

If you are interested in attending please contact Craig Renton, Waste Advisor on 01473 264795 or email mastercomposters@suffolk.gov.uk

Come along for the stride

Suffolk residents are invited to 'come along for the stride' to celebrate 10 years of the Suffolk Walking Festival.

This year, the Suffolk Walking Festival is celebrating its 10th anniversary and it promises to be bigger and better than ever before.

Novice or expert, young or old, with your family or walking alone, there is something for everybody in this year's festival. With over 100 walks on offer between 13th May and 4th June, the festival boasts a selection of brand new Family Walks and family friendly activities, along with the return of popular Themed Walks and Challenge Walks.

The walks range from short distances of 0-4 miles to over 50 miles and can be completed at your own pace, with a group or against the clock.

They offer a range of new family walks this year in addition to the festival's ever growing line-up. Walking should be sociable and fun and we hope that the new activities will help to encourage children to start walking regularly from a young age. Walking can help us to feel happier and healthier, it's an activity which is easy to build into a busy lifestyle. The event has always proved very popular and now in it's 10th year, they hope to see even more people taking part. Whether you prefer to amble in the Suffolk countryside, or challenge yourself against the clock, get out there and have fun!

BBC Radio Suffolk's Lesley Dolphin, patron of the walking festival said:

"I'm really looking forward to this year's Walking Festival and very proud to be part of it as it celebrates its 10th anniversary. Over the decade the festival has grown hugely and now there are walks across the whole county and for all sorts of people - there's bound to be something for you whether its history or nature you love or just the chance to have a sociable stroll."

And if you love a longer walk you're not forgotten either because there are also the Challenge and Mega challenge walks again this year! In these days, when we're being encouraged to be healthy, walking is one of the things that most of us can do without it costing a fortune or being too physically demanding. All you need is some suitable footwear and a raincoat – just in case! I love the way walking gets me up close and personal to the county I live in – whether it's

strolling through the town or plodding along the coast. This year there are over 100 walks programmed so far – so have a look and book yourself in!"

The end of the 2017 Suffolk Walking Festival will coincide with the ending of Suffolk's Year of Walking, a campaign celebrating walking in Suffolk. It provides a platform to promote walking events and activities, as well as provide inspiration and opportunities to encourage people to walk more often. It began in May last year and was launched at the 2016 Suffolk Walking Festival.

Tickets for the walks are now on sale. To buy tickets or find more information including a full list of the walks on offer, visit www.suffolkwalkingfestival.co.uk

(More info: <https://www.suffolk-secrets.co.uk/suffolk-walking-festival-2017/competition>)

And finally Grass Cutting - It's that time of year when the grass needs cutting and we thought it would be useful to include some of the Q&A's regularly asked about grass cutting to keep you updated.

1. When do you start grass cutting and for how long?

This season, our grass cutting cycles begin week commencing 13th March and we anticipate completing this first cycle on or around week commencing 10th April. Typically, the first cut of the season can take slightly longer, particularly if grass has remained active during the winter period.

In general terms, depending on the weather, grass cutting in east Suffolk typically starts mid-March and continues until the season ends (typically October). The planned schedule involves dedicated teams focussed on areas throughout the growing season. These teams also undertake occasional urgent works in addition to the schedule.

For example, a location may be cut at the end of a monthly cycle (as part of scheduled planning) and will receive its final cut that much later; using the monthly cycle, all areas receive an equal attention.

2. Will the standard of grass cutting this year vary from previous years?

We have now had three consecutive mild winters and though grass cutting actually commenced earlier in 2016 than 2015, this year we are expecting a colder period which may delay cutting until mid-March. It is difficult to predict grass growth, particularly at the beginning of the year and when peak growing ("flushes") will occur. Thick grass as well as rain can slow the schedule down, as it takes longer to cut and the height of grass through this speed of growth becomes more obviously noticeable.

3. Has the service been cut this year and if so is it to save money?

There are no plans at present to reduce the amount of resource provided to undertake grass cutting in 2017 and resources remain the same as in previous years.

We aim to cut all grass across the district a minimum of 8 times during the season, which equates to around once per month. There will naturally be some variation, due to the weather for example, but this is the frequency for the majority of locations.

4. I am confused as to what the various agencies do in respect of grass cutting across the district?

Waveney and Suffolk Coastal Norse – the Councils’ operational services partners undertake cutting of grass on public open spaces across the districts.

Norse also carries out grass cutting on behalf of Suffolk County Council on its highway verges within Towns and Parishes and additional cuts are paid for by east Suffolk (SCDC and WDC) to “top up” the County set frequency.

Highway grass on the main trunk roads and areas outside of the main towns is generally carried out either by Suffolk County Council or Highways England.

5. Why not have extra resources ready when the grass is growing strongly?

There will always be grass flushes during a growing season, although it is very difficult to predict and consequently to apply extra resource.

It would be inefficient to invest in additional resource at the start of the season, so we use a tested method of utilising seasonal operatives who can be applied during peak growth periods.

To confirm, additional resource is applied during peak growth.

6. Why do you not collect grass like you used to do?

We have never collected grass on verges, communal areas or open spaces. When grass is growing slowly, it can appear that we have collected cuttings as there is little to show, but when the grass is long then the arisings (cuttings) are more apparent. However, arisings do not kill that which is underneath and new grass soon shows as the arisings quickly breakdown.

7. You say you cut the grass approximately once a month but the grass in my area has not been cut for months...

As previously mentioned we do operate to a schedule for the district grass cuts so you should see our teams on a monthly basis.

If you feel an area of grass has not been cut when generally similar areas in your neighbourhood have, please do let us know.

8. Why are some green areas cut more often than others?

There are a few areas cut more often, like formal open spaces near sea fronts and some main routes, however given the total area covered, these represent an extremely small percentage.

9. Why is my Churchyard cut so infrequently and what happens within Cemeteries?

Where east Suffolk has responsibility for Churchyards, the grass is cut four times per year, spread over the growing season. This was reduced in recent years as a cost saving agreed with Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils. Some Churches raise additional funds to increase the number of grass cuts, whilst others have used the lower frequency to provide an attractive and more biodiverse enclosed space.

In the majority of cases within Cemeteries, burials take place within ‘Lawn sections’ which mean the grass will be maintained approximately every two weeks. Currently and unlike some authorities, we do not use herbicides around memorials as we believe this can detract from a cemetery’s overall appearance and can be distressing for mourners.

Due to the restrictions in space, during the process of grass cutting, arisings can sometimes be distributed or blown onto memorials. We endeavour to keep this to a minimum and while unavoidable, we feel this is less intrusive than using herbicides. In older sections of cemeteries where burials still take place, cutting is less frequent than 'Lawns' and are still cut on a regular basis.

There are also some areas which by their very nature lend themselves to being managed for the benefit of conservation. These areas will appear longer in order to allow the plants and insects the full benefit to this approach.

10. Why is it that herbicides appear to be used on other open spaces?'

Whilst we feel it inappropriate to use herbicides within cemeteries and Churchyards, using them around lampposts on a highway verge for example, can dramatically reduce the amount of strimming required. This allows more time to be spent on mowing the verge and eliminates the damage that strimming would otherwise cause. We are only able to use products which comply with Government legislation and all staff that undertake such operations are licenced to do so.

11. If you fall behind with grass cutting, when would you expect to catch up?

If we experience conditions similar to late spring of 2016, where we received torrential rain followed by warm and humid conditions, grass growth is always going to be a challenge, as it is in household lawns. During such extreme conditions, the grass in our public areas will appear longer and we need to balance providing the service to the District, whilst ensuring whatever we do represents Value for Money. It is perfectly reasonable that during periods of rapid growth questions are raised about frequency, but generally with the onset of drier conditions in the summer and colder conditions in early autumn, growth will slow to the extent that the same monthly cutting cycle will be sufficient to leave an improved standard.

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Many thanks and as always please do get in touch if we can help.
TJ & Maureen.