

Annual Parish Report – 2022/23

Peninsula Division

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Ukraine: One Year Anniversary

A year has passed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It was on the 24th 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 continues to provide hosts for refugees, but is in 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.

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

Full Council: Successful Motions and Conservative Pushback

In 2022, our Group submit 6 motions – one for each Full Council meeting. The largest group have voted against many of our ambitious policy ideas.

In July, we asked Council to declare a cost-of-living emergency in the county of Suffolk. Rising inflationary pressures, food shortages, and stagnant wages have meant so many more households have fallen below the poverty line. 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 Conservatives 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. The Conservatives voted the motion down.

We put forward a motion that was passed through the Council to promote cleaner rivers in Suffolk. 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.

Carbon Budget – SCC is Not on Track

At the beginning of 2023, the Scrutiny Committee met to discuss the Carbon Budget. This is a document that aims to calculate the amount of carbon SCC emits through its services. More importantly, it shows the Council's progress towards achieving Net Zero by 2030 – a declaration made by SCC in 2019.

This year's carbon budget shows that SCC is not on track to reach Net Zero by 2030. Current forecasts show that SCC will still be producing 10,000 tonnes of CO2 in 2030 – that's still half of what we are emitting now. In addition, the Council's calculations are not accurate enough to develop the full assessment of carbon impact our services have on the environment.

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.

2023/24 Budget Meeting: GLI Amendments Declined

At the beginning of February 2023, the Council's budget for 2023/24 was voted in. The 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.

Council services have faced a gruelling year of demand and additional cost pressures. In addition, the Council is not on track to achieve Net Zero by 2030, as they have promised to do so. Therefore, we proposed an additional 0.89% increase (19p weekly increase) to ensure vital services were protected from cutting support to residents, and that more direct action is taken to reduce carbon emissions.

Our Group proposed to invest in a Carbon Budget Officer, to help develop a stronger pathway towards Net Zero. In addition, we proposed to facilitate a review into Suffolk's speed limits, in the hope to provide residents with a clearer path to more appropriate travel in their communities.

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.

Report into SEND Provision: Review & Recommendations

Back in 2021, Suffolk County Council commissioned an independent review into its Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision. The report found severe failings in the delivery of Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plans for children, serious issues in communicating with parent/guardians, as well as an inefficient work environment within the service revealing high absenteeism. Recommendations were given, in which SCC have worked to implement them.

In January 2023, our Group were briefed on the subject and have been informed that all recommendations outlined in the review are now fully completed. Their priorities moving forward continue to be the timeliness of EHC plans, the number of school exclusions, availability of provision, and the ongoing rise in demand for SEND services.

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. In December 2022, government met with SCC to sign an initial county deal. A public consultation will now follow, asking residents if this is what communities want.

Our Group have questioned whether this is the 'big win' that the Conservatives are portraying this as. £16m a year to deliver 'long-term' transformation is less than what the Conservatives have cut from the council's annual budget over the decades. Other agreements include:

- £5.8m for housing on brownfield sites
- Devolved Adult Education budget (amount undisclosed)
- Transport settlement starting in 24/25 (amount undisclosed)
- £3m to improve energy efficiency in houses

In addition, the deal will look to install a directly elected leader, commonly known as a Mayor – when the Conservatives have said that this wouldn't be the case. 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. However, this deal is being wrongfully lauded as the all-encompassing answer, when currently it is not. The public will now need to decide whether this is something they want.

Failed Conservative Bids

Despite the Suffolk devolution deal aiming to bring us closer to Government, the Conservatives have suffered a plethora of failing bids this year.

The Department for Transport confirmed in May 2022 that SCC will receive no funding for their Bus Back Better bid. The strategy aimed to improve and expand bus services in Suffolk, connecting rural areas to local and important towns. Government confirmed that the bid was unambitious, something that our Group criticised the strategy on frequently before its submission.

In addition, the Suffolk bids for the Levelling-up fund were unsuccessful. In comparison, Norfolk received £24m, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough received £48m, and Essex received £40m.

Sizewell C: Where are we now?

In November 2022, the Autumn Statement confirmed they would be pushing ahead with Sizewell C and was fully backed by Government. In November, Government confirmed a £700m investment into Sizewell C, becoming a 50% shareholder with EDF – this verifying that the Government bought out the state-owned Chinese business' stake in the project.

Our Group has consistently questioned this project, arguing the environmental and socio-economic impacts on local communities are far too great – as well as the compensation for economic impact being not enough. The Group continue to argue that wind and solar provides a quicker and cheaper route to net zero, and that building on eroding coastal land is unsafe for the public and biodiversity.

Experts forecast that project to take 15 years to build – 17 years under gloomier predictions – costing up to £30bn, with an expectation of producing 7% of the country's energy needs.

Cllr Ash Lever: Newest GLI Addition!

It was with regret that we sadly saw Cllr Peggy McGregor leave our Group – we wish her all the best in her endeavours. In November 2022, the triggering of the Beccles by-election resulted in the Green candidate, Cllr Ash Lever, winning 70% of the vote.

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