

Annual Report to Gipping Valley April 2021

Annual Parish Report 2020-21

During this most challenging of years, the LDGI Group have worked hard to continue holding Suffolk County Council's administration to account. We have adapted to the new way of working and the introduction of online council meetings and have been present at every Scrutiny, Cabinet and Full Council, representing the people of our divisions.

During lockdown we lobbied for key residential streets to be shut down to allow people to work and exercise. We called for official objection to Sizewell C and implemented a ground-breaking biodiversity strategy, as well as creating a new database for paid and unpaid carers.

Suffolk County Council Budget 2021-22

The Suffolk County Council Budget was voted through Full Council on February 11th. This year's budget is based on a 12-month financial settlement from government, rather than the 3- or 4-year agreement which is usually offered. Key points include:

- A council tax rise of 3.99% (1.99% basic council tax and 2% Social Care Precept, representing an increase of £53.55 for a Band D property, from £1,343.61 in 2020-21 to £1,397.16 in 2021-22.
- A council tax shortfall of £7.9m less than expected, to be met by using reserves.
- Planned spending is £597.9m, 7.4% more than 2021-21.
- £15.3m of spending to address ongoing COVID-19 costs.
- No proposed reductions in council services or personnel.

LDGI Group Budget Amendment

The LDGI Group submitted a budget amendment to Full Council on February 11th alongside the administration's Budget. The key change proposed by was to authorise the use of the full 3% social care precept, unlocking the maximum available funding without impacting SCC's reserves. This would have generated an extra £3.452m for social care at a cost of £13.41 per year to a Band D household. Had it been accepted it would have freed up general council tax funds to be spent on other projects and investments including:

- £700k for establishing a COVID-19 grant scheme for Suffolk charities and arts & culture venues.
- £500k for a solar energy scheme for Suffolk businesses.
- £500k to re-enable the use of concessionary bus passes on community transport and demand responsive transport across Suffolk.

Motions from the Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group

We proposed four motions to Council in 2020-21:

- A call for the Council to publicly oppose EDF Energy's proposed Sizewell C development and retract any 'in principle' support for nuclear power.
- A 20mph scheme to reduce speed limits in all suitable residential areas from 30mph to 20mph, for a price of £4m. Communities would have been able to opt out.
- A biodiversity motion that would implement a new biodiversity strategy.
- A carer's motion that will create a database of both paid and unpaid carers and offer increased support.

If you have queries, please phone me on 01473 831306 or 07545423808 or email me at: john.field@suffolk.gov.uk

The first two were rejected, though the Council backtracked on Sizewell C just two months later and now states that they cannot support the build in its current form. The biodiversity motion and the carer's motion were accepted.

Biodiversity Motion

Suffolk County Council unanimously passed the LDGI motion that will see Suffolk County Council developing a biodiversity strategy and embracing biodiverse land management practices. It will ensure:

- Delivery of a strategy that will set out how we can increase Suffolk's biodiversity, halt the loss of habitats and species, and reintroduce declining species in suitable locations.
- Assessment of how the council can lead organisations in efforts to improve biodiversity.
- Adoption of biodiverse land management options on council land.

Cllr Elfrede Brambley-Crawshaw said "Good biodiversity supports healthy ecosystems which protect our food security, clean our air and water and enhances our lives in many ways. I would encourage everyone to do their part to support our native species, and I am thrilled that the County Council will now be doing the same thing."

LDGI Group motion on carer's database receives unanimous support

A motion designed to improve the county's support offer for carers received unanimous support. The Council will be working with Suffolk Family Carers to form an opt-in register for paid and unpaid carers, who will be offered increased support including advice, signposting to key services, and the option to be consulted on key policies affecting carers. Those who opt in will receive support for carer respite, signposting to financial help, and back-up measures for caring for their loved one if they contract Covid-19 and are required to isolate.

Suffolk County Council decides to oppose Sizewell C

The Cabinet at Suffolk County Council agreed on 22 September that they can no longer support EDF Energy's proposals for Sizewell C in their current form. However, the Cabinet maintained their support for the principle of a new nuclear power station in Suffolk.

The Cabinet's key concerns were the transport impacts, site design and the environmental impact on the Suffolk coast. The Cabinet also believe that the current proposals do not sufficiently avoid, minimise, mitigate or compensate for impacts of the proposed development. These concerns will be submitted as Relevant Representations to the Planning Inspectorate.

Calls for road closures during lockdown to enable walking & cycling

The LDGI Group called on Suffolk County Council to close roads that are used by residents to get their daily exercise, to ensure that walkers and cyclists can exercise safely and maintain social distancing. These closures were implemented, beginning with a closure of Ipswich Waterfront to through-traffic for 3 weeks. Following a Government programme of road closures, this scheme was rolled out further.

Increase in social worker pay.

In April 2020 Suffolk County Council agreed to increase the pay of children's social workers to match the remuneration offered by neighbouring councils, to attract and retain skilled people. This is an area persistently under strength which causes additional spend elsewhere and impacts children's life chances. It is estimated that the pay increase will cost £1.4m and will be funded from council reserves. The positive impact is of course more difficult to measure. This policy was first proposed by the LDGI Group in as part of our budget amendment in February 2020.

Cabinet approves 5-year cycling plan for Suffolk.

In July 2018, the LDGI group called on the council to produce a strategic costed 5-year cycling plan. In June 2020, the Cabinet approved a plan, which identified 148 potential routes to be prioritised. Funding has not yet been secured, but the cycling plan will provide a strong basis for bids.

The 148 routes identified by the plan are intended to be a starting point, rather than a fixed programme of works. The Cabinet's approval of the plan means that discussions can begin with district and borough councils on developing the five-year-plan further. I did propose the routes where there is parish interest.

Climate emergency recommendations

A motion from the LDGI group in March 2019 to declare a climate emergency and commit the council to be carbon neutral by 2030 was agreed. In July 2020, the Cabinet approved the recommendations of a cross-party policy development panel outlining how the council should respond to the climate emergency declaration and reduce emissions.

- Key recommendations include:
- All future decisions must take into account carbon emissions.
- Annual publication of a carbon budget alongside the financial budget
- Publish a cross-council action plan by the end of 2020 for net zero emissions across Suffolk.
- Changing council buildings to a 100% renewable energy tariff
- Replacing all pool cars and service vehicles with fully electric vehicles by 2025
- Develop an investment programme for renewable energy generation on the county farms estate.
- For all existing council buildings (including maintained schools), switch away from oil, LPG and natural gas use by 2030 and invest in onsite renewable energy generation.
- Provide advice for academies/free schools to develop their own net zero emissions plans.

Changes to Children's Centres challenged

In August 2020, the Cabinet agreed to reduce the number of Children's Centres in Suffolk from 38 to 17 full-time and 11 part-time Family Hubs. Eight centres will be repurposed as nurseries or SEND provision, whilst 2 will close permanently (Chatterbox in Ipswich and Caterpillar in Woodbridge). The council has said that this is not a cost-saving exercise, and that any savings will be used to fund additional staff for outreach work.

Concerned about the detrimental effect on families, particularly those in rural areas, the LDGI Group worked with the Labour group to collectively challenge the Cabinet's decision at Scrutiny. We focused on concerns over the lack of financial analysis and the lack of clarity over the new outreach model but were not successful.

Automatic number plate recognition camera project (ANPR)

Suffolk County Council is working with the police to run a 2-year ANPR camera trial in speeding hot spots across the county. The cameras will be used to help detect and deter speeding offences that have been highlighted in towns and villages and educate drivers on the importance of road safety.

An ANPR camera will be installed at a site where it has been identified by a local council, with support from their county councillor, that there is a problem with speeding and/or rat-running on roads with a 20 or 30mph speed limit. The devices will be moved between sites and will remain in situ for up to one week per site. There is the option of extending this period if needed.

I have proposed that the parishes in Gipping Valley agree a set of sites and with your new County Councillor press for allocation of a ANPR camera to rotate around those sites.

Freeport East bid successful

A combined bid from Suffolk and north Essex for a designated freeport has been approved by the Government. Freeport East will have sites at Felixstowe, Harwich, Stowmarket and Great Blakenham. The hope is that the taxation exemption advantages, and reduced customs formalities will enhance investment in the area and create 13,500 jobs over the next ten years. It is estimated that annual trade will increase by 1.3 million tonnes and £66.4m gross value added.