

## **Annual report Nedging Parish Council by Robert Lindsay, Suffolk County Councillor 11 May 2023**

### **Safer Speed Limits**

One of my key goals has always been to try and do something about the speed of traffic through our villages and places where people live. In both Bildeston and Lavenham this year I have obtained in principle agreement for moving most roads to 20mph limit from 30mph. Both are progressing though very slowly.. A year and a half ago, the county's Conservative administration rejected my motion to move to a default 20mph limit in all residential areas. But I am convinced that safer speeds in Suffolk will happen eventually.

Meanwhile there are many roads – including the A1141 Union Hill through Kersey and Semer – which are national speed limit but where a safe speed would be no more than 40mph. Following a campaign by a local businessman which involved putting 40mph signs up illegally, I have asked that a report be produced with a view to reducing speed limit on that Semer stretch of road from 60mph to 40mph.

I have also contributed to new 30mph repeater signs on Nedging Road to try to ensure better driver behaviour there.

### **Floods and drainage backlog**

In December 2021 after news of a 10 year drainage work backlog, the county council decided to allocate £10 million to tackle it over the next 3.5 years.

But the impact of climate change plus a long running dearth of investment in drainage and enforcement means that the backlog has grown as fast or faster than it can be fixed. There are a number of long-running flood issues in the Cosford division of which Nedging is a part.

I was pleased to engage Suffolk County Council drainage officers with members of the parish council to try to help sort out some of the issues with ditches, particularly on Nedging Road.

In December, I requested details of what jobs had actually been done since the extra funding was agreed. Just 17 of the nearly 1000 flood and drain problems on Suffolk county council's list have been completed. The extra £10m that was allocated in Dec 2021 to be spent over 3.5 years is being used for "low hanging fruit" – minor civil works – that are not in this list, and that work has indeed been speeded up.

### **Food Bank**

The Bildeston Food Bank, sadly, continues to be of essential service to local residents, with the cost of heating and food rising. There is now a record high of 30 plus families being supported by it, and the Food Bank has moved into providing heating oil for a few families who simply do not have enough cash to fill their oil tank.

### **Roundabout**

I was pleased during the year to be able to help this community magazine continue in existence by contributing to a new printer.

## **County Council budget**

For the 2023/24 budget the county council has now formally voted to increase the council tax precept by 4%, below the 5% cap they are allowed. An amendment by our political group (Green, LibDem, Independent) to raise it to just below the 5% cap to help fund social care and public transport was voted down. Within that alternative budget, we also asked for £2m for a trial of reducing 30mph speed limits to 20mph in the most dangerous areas of the county, as both Oxfordshire and Cornwall are doing.

## **£1bn Highways contract awarded to Milestone Infrastructure**

The county's Highways maintenance contract with Kier Group is due to expire on October 1<sup>st</sup>. Kier failed to make the three-strong shortlist for the re-tendered contract which has now been awarded to Milestone, part of venture capital-owned M Group Services. Milestone's road maintenance business was created by buying Swedish group Skanska's UK facilities management arm. It will be responsible for maintenance of roads, pavements, rights of way, drainage, hedge trimming, construction of new road schemes, snow-clearing and gritting.

## **Carbon budget – county not on track**

This year's carbon budget shows that the county council 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.

In March the council reaffirmed its commitment to net zero by 2030, approving a motion put forward by my political group, but only after removing reference to the fact that it was not on track.

## **Report into SEND Provision: Review & Recommendations**

Back in 2021, an independent review of the county's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision found severe problems and recommended a string of measures to improve things.

In January 2023, our Group was 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 rise in demand for SEND services.

## **Suffolk "Devolution":**

In December 2022, government met with Suffolk County Council and agreed a deal whereby Suffolk will get £16m extra a year (less than has been cut by the Government from the county's funding over the years) but in return must have a directly elected "leader", to be elected by all the voting public.

A public consultation will now follow, asking residents if this is what communities want. The election was initially slated for May 2024 but is likely to be delayed to May 2025 when the ordinary county council elections take place.