

Cllr Julia Ewart's Community Update

August & September 2026

Cllrs & Residents

As we move from summer into autumn, I wanted to share an update on some of the key issues affecting our communities and the work I have been undertaking as your Suffolk County Councillor.

Over recent months I have spent time listening to residents, attending meetings, engaging with schools, supporting communities affected by major incidents and ensuring that local concerns are heard at County Hall. From education and transport to flooding, highways and major infrastructure projects, there is much happening across our Division and wider East Suffolk.

Education, Schools and Young People

One of my key priorities is supporting children, young people and families across the Saxmundham Division.

Over the coming weeks I hope to visit schools in Kelsale, Saxmundham, Benhall, Snape and Orford. My aim is to develop strong relationships with school leaders, governors and staff, and to ensure that our schools receive the support they need from Suffolk County Council.

I want schools to know they have a County Councillor who is prepared to listen, raise concerns and champion their interests wherever possible.

Particular attention must be given to children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), especially those transitioning between schools this autumn. Families often face complex journeys through the SEND system and it is essential that the right support is available at the right time.

Having recently attended a school transport appeal hearing, with another due shortly, I remain concerned that policies do not always fully reflect the differing needs of individual children and families. Whilst policies are necessary, they must be applied with common sense, compassion and an understanding of each child's circumstances.

My view is simple. Every child deserves access to the educational setting that is most suitable for them.

Every Child Matters

I am increasingly mindful that there are children and young people who are currently "off roll", receiving limited provision or whose educational pathway is not as clear as it could be.

We also have young residents who struggle within traditional educational settings and may benefit from alternative provision, vocational opportunities or different approaches to learning.

Whatever their circumstances, we must ensure that no young person is left behind. I am determined to sort out school transport to be less discriminatory.

Too often families find themselves battling systems rather than being supported by them. We should start with the needs of the child and work from there.

If a young person requires a different pathway, we should help them find one. If they need greater support, we should provide it. If they have lost confidence in education, we should work together to help them rediscover their potential.

The future of Suffolk depends upon the success of all our young people and I will work throughout 26-27 to bring all I can to the attention of those aged 11-19.

Work Experience and Supporting Teenagers

Another initiative that I am particularly passionate about concerns opportunities for our teenagers. This autumn I will be exploring how work experience placements are organised for students who will undertake their placements next summer. Work experience can be transformative. It provides confidence, develops skills and helps young people understand the opportunities available to them.

Suffolk is fortunate to have a huge range of employers, including farms, tradespeople, manufacturers, retailers, healthcare providers, professional firms, public services and entrepreneurs. I would like to see more businesses involved in supporting young people through work experience opportunities, mentoring and workplace visits.

Quite simply, I believe we must support our young people with more enthusiasm, ambition and care than we do today.

Can You Help? Please Contact Cllr. Ewart

If you run a business, work in a profession, operate a trade or have skills and experience that you would be willing to share with a young person, I would be delighted to hear from you. Whether you can offer a work experience placement, workplace visit, mentoring opportunity or simply some time to explain your career journey, your support could make a lasting difference.

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Climate Change and Suffolk's Future

At Suffolk County Council's Full Council meeting in July, councillors debated the future of the Council's Climate Emergency declaration. Whatever views people may hold on that discussion, the reality is that the environmental challenges facing Suffolk remain.

Flooding, coastal erosion, drought, extreme weather and wildfires are becoming increasingly familiar issues for our county.

The recent Dunwich Heath wildfire was a stark reminder that we must continue to invest in resilience, preparedness and practical solutions. Climate resilience is not simply an environmental issue. It is also about public safety, public health, infrastructure and community wellbeing.

As Suffolk faces changing weather patterns and increasing environmental pressures, these conversations will remain important for years to come.

Dunwich Heath Fire: Community Spirit at its Best

We will all remember where we were when we heard that Dunwich Heath was alight.

I received the call during the first evening of the fire and quickly realised that this was developing into a major incident.

Drawing on my nursing background and major incident training, I wanted to help while ensuring that any support offered would genuinely assist the emergency response. Before mobilising residents, I checked with those on the ground that additional drinking water would be helpful and that access to and from the site could be managed safely.

Once that clearance had been given, residents from Saxmundham came together to help provide drinking water for firefighters working under extremely challenging conditions.

Later that evening we attended Westleton Village Hall where a rest centre was being established. East Suffolk Council subsequently stepped in and activated its emergency arrangements, providing valuable support throughout the incident.

What struck me most throughout the response was the willingness of local people to come together and help one another. The fire showed Suffolk at its best.

Since the incident I have attended public meetings, spoken with residents and emergency responders and reflected on the lessons that can be learned.

In my role as Chair of Suffolk County Council's Scrutiny Committee, I have asked that one of our first pieces of work this autumn should be a 'review of major incidents' and what we can learn from the Dunwich Heath fire.

One issue repeatedly raised has been communication, particularly mobile phone coverage in rural areas. Reliable communication during emergencies is essential, and I believe resilience and public safety should play a greater role when considering future telecommunications provision. I am already looking at how to extend our mast provision locally.

If you were affected by the fire, involved in the community response, or have views on how emergency planning can be improved, I would very much like to hear from you.

Being "Match Ready" for Emergencies

One of the biggest lessons from Dunwich Heath is the importance of being prepared before an emergency occurs.

Whether the challenge is flooding, wildfire, severe weather or another major incident, preparation can make all the difference.

Westleton demonstrated this superbly. One reason the village responded so effectively was because it already had a Community Emergency Plan in development. Although the plan was only just reaching its final stages at the time the fire broke out, much of the groundwork had already been completed. Residents knew who to contact. There were volunteer networks, contact lists and clear communication arrangements already in place. Potential accommodation options had also been identified should evacuation have become necessary.

Most importantly, people remained calm, supportive and kind to one another throughout an incredibly stressful situation.

East Suffolk Council were responsible for delivering a Rest Centre and coordinated the wrap around service to ensure efficiency.

There is a valuable lesson here for all communities. Good preparation, strong local networks and effective communication can make a remarkable difference during a crisis. Do say if you need to meet up with any of the Resilience team officers or support staff.

Autumn Readiness: Drains, Ditches and Flood Prevention

As autumn approaches, now is the time to think about flood preparedness.

One of the simplest but most effective ways of reducing flood risk is ensuring that drains, gullies, ditches and watercourses are clear and able to carry water away efficiently.

When leaves, silt and debris build up, water can no longer flow freely. This can quickly lead to flooding of roads, gardens, properties and farmland.

If you are aware of blocked drains or significant accumulations of silt, please report them through Suffolk County Council's reporting system to have **Freeflow** carry out inspections and clearances which can be arranged where appropriate and well in advance.

Landowners should also consider whether ditches and watercourses on their land remain clear and operational. Riparian duties are so essential.

With weather patterns becoming increasingly unpredictable, it makes sense to prepare now rather than react later. A little preventative work today may prevent significant flooding tomorrow.

The message is simple: **Let the water flow before the rain arrives.**

Useful Emergency Contacts

Emergency Services (life-threatening emergencies): 999

Suffolk Police (non-emergency): 101

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (non-emergency): 01473 260588

NHS: 111

Suffolk Emergency Help Line (activated during major emergencies): 0345 603 2814

Environment Agency Floodline: 0345 988 1188

Suffolk Highways (immediate danger to public safety): 0345 606 6171

National Highways Information Line (A12, A11, A14 and A47): 0300 123 5000

Power Cuts: 105

Gas Emergencies: 0800 111 999

Sizewell C: Who Gives a Van?

Over recent weeks I have become increasingly concerned about the number of planning applications seeking to convert established holiday parks, caravan sites and visitor accommodation into worker accommodation linked to Sizewell C.

Many of these sites have welcomed visitors and supported local tourism for decades. They form part of the character and economy of our coastal communities.

Whilst I recognise the national importance of Sizewell C and the benefits it will bring, I am concerned about the cumulative impact these proposals could have upon communities around Leiston, Saxmundham and the wider Suffolk coast.

A particular concern is that some changes currently presented as temporary may ultimately become permanent. There is a genuine fear amongst residents that sites which have traditionally provided holiday accommodation may never return to that use.

If significant numbers of these sites were ultimately converted to permanent residential development, we could see the gradual creation of satellite settlements surrounding Leiston and Saxmundham without the strategic planning usually associated with growth on that scale.

We must also acknowledge that many of these locations are accessed via narrow rural lanes and roads that were never designed to accommodate large increases in traffic.

Most importantly, we should not lose sight of what may be lost. These are treasured caravan and lodge parks that support tourism, employment and the unique character of the Suffolk coast.

If you are concerned that your site may be impacted, do get in touch.

Sizewell C, Highways and Local Traffic

One of the most important pieces of work I am currently pursuing is a review of traffic management and road safety issues across the network of villages that support Saxmundham and Leiston.

Residents from Snape, Tunstall, Blaxhall, Kelsale, Orford, Friston and many other communities have raised concerns about traffic volumes, speeding and road safety.

These concerns are entirely understandable.

I have raised them directly with Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways, Councillor Christopher Hudson, who has been positive and supportive in his engagement with local communities.

On 11 September I have arranged for several County Councillors and portfolio holders to spend time in our area, including Councillor Tristan Gale, Cabinet Member for Planning and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

The purpose is simple: I want decision-makers to see East Suffolk through the eyes of residents.

I would particularly like to thank Councillor Fox of Sternfield and Benhall for her focus, commitment and considerable effort in helping organise this important day.

The programme will begin in Benhall with presentations examining the many Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects currently affecting our area.

Too often projects are considered individually. Residents, however, experience all of them simultaneously.

My hope is that by seeing conditions on the ground, councillors will gain a clearer understanding of the cumulative impact that these projects are having on local communities.

Essex & Suffolk Water: Suffolk Water Recycling, Transfer and Storage Project

Another issue beginning to generate significant local interest is the proposed **Suffolk Water Recycling, Transfer and Storage Project**. The project includes a new Advanced Water Recycling Plant near Lowestoft, new underground pipelines and water storage infrastructure, including a proposed reservoir near Sibton Green.

The route is expected to affect areas including Walpole, Sibton, Kelsale and Saxmundham. Agents working on behalf of Essex & Suffolk Water have already begun contacting property owners and landowners regarding surveys and investigations. For many residents this may be their first experience of a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and understandably it can feel concerning.

Being contacted does not necessarily mean that land will be acquired or directly affected, but it does indicate that work is taking place to develop the proposals. [nsip-docum...ate.gov.uk]

If you have questions, concerns or would like support in understanding the process, please do get in touch.

Better Recycling Update

As many of you will know, recycling and waste collection services are delivered by East Suffolk Services on behalf of East Suffolk Council.

To say that the rollout of Better Recycling has been challenging would be something of an understatement.

As your County Councillor, I have remained in regular contact with Councillor Morgan Brobyn and colleagues involved in Suffolk's wider waste management arrangements to ensure that concerns raised by residents are heard and understood.

Whilst collection services have improved in many areas, I continue to receive reports of problems, particularly from residents living in rural locations, smaller villages and harder-to-reach lanes.

My assessment is that some properties may not be correctly listed within collection systems, resulting in repeated missed collections.

If you continue to experience problems, I would encourage you to contact East Suffolk Council and ask one straightforward question:

"Can you see my address on the collection list?"

It sounds simple, but establishing whether your property is correctly recorded can often be the first step towards resolving a recurring issue. I believe in the reorganisation many 'dropped off' the transfer list.

Reliable waste collection is a basic public service and residents should be able to expect consistency regardless of where they live.

I will continue to monitor the situation closely and raise concerns whenever necessary.

Looking Ahead

The coming months will continue to bring challenges and opportunities.

Whether the issue is education, SEND provision, work experience, transport, flooding, communications, recycling or major infrastructure projects, my commitment remains the same.

I will continue to listen, challenge where necessary, and work to ensure that the voices of local residents are heard clearly and effectively.

If there is an issue affecting you, your family, your business or your community, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

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Working to put residents at the heart of every decision.