

ANNUAL PARISH REPORT 2024-2025

ORWELL & VILLAGES

The past year has been dominated by two main issues, planning and local government organisation.

Planning

As background in 2019 the merger of the old Waveney and Suffolk Coastal district councils took place forming East Suffolk Council- the largest district council in England. Separate Local Plans for Waveney and Suffolk Coastal were already under completion covering the period to 2035 / 36. The Waveney Local Plan came into effect in 2019 and the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan in 2020.

The Government requires local councils to provide for a five-year supply of housing land. Up to earlier this year both the Waveney and Suffolk Coastal Local Plans were sufficient for between 5 and 6 years. In 2024 East Suffolk Council was required to build an average of 905 homes per year.

The new Labour Government has now upped the number of houses East Suffolk council is required to provide from 905 homes to 1,644 per year – an increase of 82%. The effect of this is that in Waveney there is now no longer a five-year supply of approved housing land and in Suffolk Coastal we will cease to have a five-year supply from around September 2025.

This means that speculative developers may now put forward plans for substantial developments. Their plans would still need to comply with the policies under the existing local plans but there will be a presumption for development to be approved. The Government have also introduced legislation to remove the decision for approval from the elected planning committee members and pass to council planning officers except for the largest developments.

Whilst it was already the intention to commence revision of the Local Plans (and combine into a single East Suffolk Local Plan) this year, this process even shortened will take three years to complete and come into effect.

Some residents have queried why the council does not simply ignore the housing provision requirements. If this was done it is likely that the planning functions would be taken over by government appointed inspectors. There is a need for local housing but in our view, it has to be the right housing to meet local need at a price locals can actually afford and in the right place with the needed infrastructure with a larger proportion of social housing to meet the needs of the 4,500 residents on the waiting list for social housing.

Local Government Re-organisation

As indicated above Waveney and Suffolk Coastal district councils merged in 2019 after a period of planning and consultation lasting around four years. The new Labour Government now wishes to switch from a two-tier local authority position to a unitary authority where all services which are now provided by district councils and county councils will be provided by a single council.

Suffolk and Norfolk have been fast-tracked – at the request of the two county councils- which has led to the County council elections which were due to be held this May being postponed. The Government intends to produce a Strategic Mayoral Authority which would provide for one elected Mayor covering both Norfolk and Suffolk. The Mayoral election is intended to take place in 2026. This is intended to be the basis for devolution of some services from central Government.

The existing local authorities have offered three suggestions for re-organisation of councils within Suffolk.

These are:

A single unitary council for the whole of Suffolk – current population circa 790,000.

Multiple unitary authorities – either two or three. Most of the current district councils believe that a single unitary authority for Suffolk would be too unwieldy and would probably require local councillors to represent up to 11,000 residents each rather than the current 3 – 4,000. This could result in the local link between councillors and town and parish councils being lost and the “local” element of local government removed.

Ipswich Borough Council has put forward the three unitary authorities solution which would expand into a Greater Ipswich would include areas such as Felixstowe, Martlesham, Kesgrave and Woodbridge and their surrounding villages being absorbed with Ipswich, leaving East Suffolk as largely the rural and coastal areas up to and including Lowestoft.

Our own preferred option at present would be two unitary councils – one covering the current district council areas of West Suffolk, Babergh and Mid-Suffolk and the second covering the current East Suffolk Council area plus the current Ipswich Borough Council area.

Both options were put forward to the Government from the full council meeting of East Suffolk Council by their deadline of 21st March 2025. All councils have until September to provide full costed and consulted plans for their preferred option. This is an extremely quick requirement given that this would be the largest reform of councils for 50 years.

Enabling Communities Budget

Each year councillors are provided with a locality budget of £7,500 to allocate to deserving causes within or assisting their local parishes. Over the past two years we have sought to provide funding, in particular, to village halls, which are often the main focus for activities within each parish, to ensure that they are sustainable and remain a community asset. We have also signposted parishes to alternative sources of funding, including the District Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and the new CIL play equipment fund.

Funding for 2024-2025 included:

£ 4,098 for the Welcome Hall, Trimley St Mary

£ 5,000 for roof insulation at Kirton Village Hall

£ 2,800 for Newbourne Village Hall to fund boiler replacement and hand drier

£ 600 to Nacton Community Council for a new community beacon

£ 1,000 to Bucklesham for play equipment

£ 500 for Felixstowe Area Community Transport

£ 645 to Trimley Red Devils

Ease the Squeeze on Cost of Living

Are you, or someone you know, worried about the increasing cost of living? We understand the pressures faced by many people today and we are working closely with key partners to ensure support is available to help ease the squeeze for households in East Suffolk.

To make it as easy as possible for you to access the services and support available, locally and nationally, we have gathered information about them in one place:

www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/community/squeeze/

For the most up to date information regarding East Suffolk Council, please visit:

www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk

View the Well Minds East Suffolk booklet: tinyurl.com/9xhka624

As local councillors we have provided our parish councils with regular monthly reports and have endeavoured to attend as many parish council meetings as possible.

If residents do have need to contact us regarding any issues within the ward, please do feel free to contact us and we will seek to respond as soon as possible.

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Cllrs Mike Ninnmey & Lee Reeves

26.03.2025