



East Suffolk Council: our year and our ambitions

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has greatly impacted local communities and as a Council we have worked as hard as we possibly can to support those affected, through schemes like 'Home But Not Alone' - which has helped vulnerable residents in Suffolk - and the distribution of critical grants and funds to businesses.

As a Council, we have huge ambitions to improve the lives of everyone in East Suffolk and while the pandemic has set us back, we remain in a strong position financially to fulfil our ambitions.

The East Suffolk Plan

The East Suffolk Council Strategic Plan (2020-2024) is our framework to deliver a huge range of vital services for our local communities. We want everyone who lives in, works in and visits East Suffolk to have the best possible quality of life and this Plan guides all our decision making. We agreed five key themes to show us the direction we will take: Growing Our Economy, Enabling Our Communities, Remaining Financially Sustainable, Delivering Digital Transformation and Caring For Our Environment:

www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/east-suffolk-strategic-plan

Budget

Our budget for the 2021/22 financial year will see us spend £129 million, delivering essential services across 57 different service areas and to provide further financial support to local residents during the pandemic, there will be no increase to East Suffolk Council's element of council tax; with a property in Band D paying £171.27 for 2021/22 (£14.27 per month), which is the same as in 2020/21.

Covid-19 has presented significant additional financial challenges for the Council. However, robust reserves have enabled the Council to continue to thoroughly support residents, communities and businesses during the pandemic whilst remaining financially sustainable.

We are in a well-balanced financial position for the year ahead, and while the outlook is uncertain due to the additional impact of the pandemic, our robust reserve position has enabled us to meet these challenges.

As part of the budget setting process, are also required to agree a four-year programme of capital expenditure which focuses on the delivery of essential projects and ensures resources are aligned with the Council's Strategic Plan. The programme, which was approved at Full Council on Wednesday 27 January, aims to maximise resources by actively seeking external funding and making efficient use of Council assets and commercial opportunities.

Covid - helping our communities

We have been working with volunteers, businesses and local organisations to support the most vulnerable members of our communities during the pandemic. We have played a leading role in the local response and our Communities Team, working with partners and volunteers, have helped a large number of people in need since the pandemic began.

As part of the Suffolk-wide Home But Not Alone scheme, our Communities Team dealt with 2,172 requests during the first lockdown, including 750 urgent food or medicine needs. To provide further support, we created a Hardship Fund worth over £130,000, with contributions from every councillor, our Community Partnership Board and Communities Team. Grants of between £50 and £1,000 were given to local groups to support pop-up food banks, telephone befriending services and volunteers delivering medicines across the district.

We also supported over 500 residents who are clinically extremely vulnerable to ensure they received food parcels and supplied foodbanks across East Suffolk - not just with food but also with free sanitary items for those in need.

Due to a lack of Wi-Fi, equipment or skills, some older people have been unable to contact their loved ones. To reconnect them, we introduced the Grandpad Loan Scheme. Grandpads are specially designed tablets with large buttons and an intuitive interface which makes them easier for older people to use. The devices have unlimited 4G internet, 24/7 personalised support and unlimited minutes, so users can easily make phone calls at no extra cost.

Covid - supporting our businesses

The Government introduced a series of grant schemes to assist businesses who are affected by Covid-19 restrictions. We have paid out over £89 million to over 6,000 local businesses since the start of the pandemic. A further lump sum payment totalling £792,000 was made to 280 businesses who qualify for the Additional Restrictions Grant mirroring the Closed Business Lockdown Payment which recipients of the Local Restrictions Support Grant received in January. The Finance, Economic Development and Business Solutions Teams are currently finalising a new one-off payment for businesses in the hospitality sector which will be worth up to £9,000, reflecting the severe pressure this sector had faced due to Covid

trading restrictions.

We have also been awarded £7.1 million of Additional Restrictions Grant funding to cover the current and next fiscal year. Part of this is intended to cover longer-term business support measures. The Economic Development Team has developed draft business support proposals that are in line with our current economic growth priorities and build on the district's economic strengths. Subject to Cabinet approval in March, these business support programmes will be fully developed and implemented in the spring.

Additionally, we are offering a Digital Advice Service which provides free support to small businesses in East Suffolk, especially those in the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors, who may need help with creating or improving their website, online shop or social media presence. Businesses will be offered 1-2-1 advice and access to Digital Skills Talks.

A report setting out the Council's response to ensuring a strong economic recovery will be considered at an extraordinary Scrutiny Committee on 18 February. The report analyses the impact of the pandemic on the local economy, our initial response and longer-term recovery which is focused the strategic economic growth programmes established pre-pandemic.

Community Partnerships

During the consultation on forming the new East Suffolk Council, it was recognised that councillors would be covering larger geographical areas, more town and parish councils, more people, and would need to stay connected to local residents.

As a result, the East Suffolk Community Partnerships were established through a programme of local workshops in October and November 2019. Each has been allocated funding by the Council to focus on specific issues in their neighbourhoods.

Community Partnerships have been particularly important this year as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The East Suffolk Community Partnerships are:

- Aldeburgh, Leiston, Saxmundham and villages
- Beccles, Bungay, Halesworth and villages
- Carlton Colville, Kessingland, Southwold and villages
- Felixstowe Peninsula
- Framlingham, Wickham Market and villages
- Kesgrave, Martlesham and villages
- Lowestoft and northern parishes
- Melton, Woodbridge and Deben Peninsula

Examples of how our communities are benefiting from funding from the Community Partnerships:

£100,000 was put into a Bounce Back Fund to help reduce the impact of Covid-19 on voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations. So far, 60 community projects have benefited from the fund.

£20,000 was allocated to a Covid-19 Hardship Fund to provide financial support for new and existing groups who help vulnerable people in their homes, and to relieve the financial hardship of residents. So far, 92 projects have received funding.

£20,000 went towards creating 2,000 EAST bags to help vulnerable people in East Suffolk keep active, both physically and mentally, during the colder winter months.

£75,818 has been allocated across the eight Community Partnership to tackle local priorities, such as loneliness, youth services and community meeting points.

£90,000 has enabled the relaunch of our Hidden Needs Programme to help fund projects which supports people of all ages who are particularly vulnerable due to social isolation and loneliness during the pandemic.

Lowestoft

A huge amount of investment in improvement and regeneration projects is breathing new life into our major towns and we are delighted that Lowestoft is benefiting from the ambitious vision of its stakeholders and partners. These schemes are spearheaded by the Lake Lothing 'Gull Wing' Crossing, construction of which is due to get underway this year.

Lowestoft Flood Risk Management Project

Flood risk has long been an obstacle to growth and regeneration in the town, however the creation of Lowestoft's own permanent flood defences will provide certainty for the prospects of the town, galvanising its huge economic potential and heralding a bright and secure future for residents and businesses. Last year, we celebrated an incredible award of over £43 million from the Government - a 'once in a century' opportunity to deliver tidal flood walls and a tidal barrier to protect and safeguard the future of Lowestoft. When complete, the defences will reduce the risk of flooding to over 1,500 homes and businesses, unlocking further growth, creating jobs and apprenticeships and securing the future of Lowestoft for generations to come.

London Road North Post Office

As part of a wider programme of regeneration in Lowestoft's town centre, the former Post Office building in London Road North, which has been empty for four years, will be given a new lease of life. The Council's Planning Committee North unanimously approved plans to redevelop the site of the Grade II listed building into a mixed-use development, comprising a refurbished commercial unit and nine affordable homes, which will sit behind the former Post Office.

East Point Pavilion

The East Point Pavilion on Lowestoft's seafront will be repurposed following an advance grant of £720,000 through the Government's Towns Fund. The interior of the Pavilion will

be redesigned, providing flexible space for community and cultural activity, space for small entrepreneurial 'pop-up' businesses to operate from and a year-round café venue, which will be managed by the team behind the First Light Festival. Led by internationally renowned designers Hemingway Design and Hudson Architects, bringing this prominent building back into use will act as a catalyst for further regeneration along the seafront.

Lowestoft Heritage Action Zones (HAZs)

East Suffolk Council is working with partners on heritage-based regeneration projects led by Historic England. The North Lowestoft HAZ focuses on the North Lowestoft Conservation Area with its medieval High Street and Scores, as well as the Ness - the UK's most easterly park. The newly created London Road, Lowestoft High Street HAZ runs from the Surrey Street junction on London Road North to the Carlton Road junction on London Road South in Kirkley. Both schemes are working to secure lasting improvements and help breathe new life into the country's historic high streets for the benefit of local communities and businesses.

Town Investment Plan

In November, a Town Investment Plan which sets out Lowestoft's ambitions, opportunities and challenges over the next ten years was submitted to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government as part of a £24.9 million application to the Government's Towns Fund. Accessing this funding will enable our ambitions for the town to move forward. In 2019, Lowestoft was chosen as one of 101 UK towns to benefit from the Government's £3.6 billion Towns Fund. Each town was invited to develop a proposal for a Towns Deal, with up to £25 million available to bid for. The Town Investment Plan forms part of the application for Lowestoft.

Town Centre Masterplan

The Lowestoft Town Centre Masterplan is our response to the challenges Lowestoft town centre faces and provides a clear plan and direction to create a prosperous town centre whether as a place in which to live, work or have fun. It provides the blueprint for change over the next 10-15 years but also incorporates more short-term plans which will help bring activity, jobs and business to the town centre. Led by East Suffolk Council in partnership with Lowestoft Town Council, Lowestoft Vision, Suffolk County Council and the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, the masterplan considers ways to re-purpose and guide future development in the town centre and secure inward investment to revitalise the heart of Lowestoft. See the interactive masterplan at www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/ltdcm.

The Environment

Since the creation of East Suffolk Council in April 2019, we have had an ambitious environmental vision to build the right environment for East Suffolk and we are committed to be carbon neutral by 2030. As a result, a climate emergency was declared in June 2019 and a cross-party Environment Task Group established to ensure the environment plays a key role in all decisions, choices and policy formation.

We're continuing to proactively take steps to reduce our carbon emissions and introduced six new electric vehicles to our fleet run by partners, East Suffolk Norse, in August 2020. Last year we also created 40 wild spaces across East Suffolk where grass was left to grow longer and wildflowers planted to help wildlife thrive. These spaces are cut back for winter and the signs removed but they will be back this spring.

Leisure

East Suffolk Council has invested over £10 million in improving our leisure centres in recent years and we remain entirely committed to providing access to high quality leisure facilities for everyone who lives in East Suffolk.

Following a rigorous and competitive procurement process, despite the challenges presented by Covid-19, East Suffolk Council agreed an eight-year management contract in January for two leisure centres with "Everyone Active", part of Sports and Leisure Management Ltd, who will now take on the day-to-day running of Waveney Valley Leisure Centre and Waterlane Leisure Centre from 1 March 2021.

We have a responsibility to ensure that our investments provide value for money and maximised benefits for our communities, so it was important that we found the best fit when choosing a new operator. Everyone Active's bid impressed East Suffolk Council because of the level of understanding they had of the district, and the issues that exist in different urban and rural locations.

Waveney Valley Leisure Centre, formerly Bungay Pool & Gym, was closed in September 2019 as part of the Council's ongoing improvement programme for its leisure centres. The centre reopened in October 2020 after undergoing a major £3.4 million refurbishment to bring state-of-the-art leisure facilities to the area which is fit for purpose for the next 20 – 30 years.

Meanwhile, Waterlane Leisure Centre is currently undergoing improvement works as part of the programme, including replacing the equipment and flooring in the gym, upgrading the lighting and adding new flooring in the sports hall as well as repairing showers and decoration throughout. The pool area will also see improvements with plans to empty the pool to repair the teaching pool moveable floor and the pool tiles.

The work is expected to be completed this month and will bring Waterlane Leisure Centre into the East Suffolk family with a strong and vibrant brand, offering some of the best leisure facilities to our communities.

Housing

East Suffolk Council is committed to delivering vital new housing and is fully focused on addressing housing shortages with a target to build 50-plus new homes a year ourselves. We have a programme of redevelopment, bringing older properties back in to use and new

build homes which will see a further 148 more homes available over the next three to four years.

And we are also developing a minimum energy efficiency standard to ensure our housing development programme is actively contributing towards the Council's aim for carbon neutrality by 2030.

As part of our programme, we introduced six new shared-ownership properties to our housing stock towards the end of last year – the first of their kind in the district. The properties are located in Brampton with Stoven near Halesworth and provide an affordable ownership scheme, which combines purchasing a share in a home with a rental agreement for the remaining unowned share.

We want to develop more schemes like this for the benefit of our communities, and to support locations which desperately need new, affordable and high-quality housing option.

Parking

We have undertaken a widespread and detailed review of our parking services to make the process of purchasing tickets and permits, simpler and fairer for all.

RingGo

Available in all of East Suffolk's car parks, the simple RingGo app allows people to park quickly and easily, paying via a credit or debit card rather than using cash at the machine. We're keen to use technology to make life easier but we want to ensure parking is still accessible to everyone, and so cash payments can still be made at the ticket machine. Last year, almost 300,000 parking sessions were booked in East Suffolk's car parks using RingGo.

Tackling inconsiderate parking

To help reduce nuisance and illegal parking, parking management moved from the Police to East Suffolk Council in April 2020. This enables the Council to tackle parking problems which can cause ongoing issues within our communities. Inconsiderate and illegal parking can impact on businesses and residents and pose a danger to other road users and pedestrians. By tackling this and enforcing existing regulations, we can ensure sufficient parking is available for residents and visitors alike. Our parking services staff patrol approximately 70,000 streets and off-street parking places in the district.

Permits

We have also introduced a new 'parking portal' for on-street parking permits, exemptions and dispensations. This enables residents to apply for, and manage, permits online. The system recognises valid permits from a vehicle's registration number, meaning that permit holders will no longer need to remember to display their permits.

New tariffs

To make parking prices fair and consistent across the district, we have introduced new

simplified tariffs in our car parks. In many areas, ticket prices remain the same or are reduced. 75% of people parking in our car parks will pay just £1 or £1.50 for a two hour stay.

We have also introduced free half hour parking in many towns to support people making regular short visits. This will also support local businesses who will benefit from drivers making quick turnarounds in our car parks.