

Ray Herring

East Suffolk District Council (to 04/05/2023)

Annual Parish Meeting Report for 2022/23

Whilst I'm disappointed at not being re-elected on May 4th 2023, I look back over my 36 years as a SCDC/ESC District Councillor & 20 years as a Council Leader, and feel very fortunate to have served my local communities over that time and to be given the opportunity to deliver (with others) significant benefits to the district including:

- Merger of Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District councils following a 10 year partnership resulting in large savings for the benefit of the Tax Payer.
- Building of new offices East Suffolk House at Melton thereby retaining an administrative hub locally, at no cost the Council Tax payer.
- Creation of the original Suffolk Coastal Services and established a very dynamic & efficient partnership with Norse.
- Developed our successful and efficient waste collection & recycling service.
- Producing a comprehensive Local Plan which protects small villages from development and places housing proportionate to the size of the community and employment opportunities.
- Proposed to Government the now nationally established 30% Social & Affordable Housing requirement for all substantial new housing developments.
- Successfully lobbied Government and the Suffolk Local Authorities to retain & develop the Business Rate Retention funding scheme to support the Council Tax Payer following a SCDC led pilot scheme.
- Full employment and a successful business community for the last 20 years.
- Established a Coast Protection partnership with other Suffolk & Norfolk Local Authorities and the Environment Agency.
- Designing software for our efficient ESC Felixstowe Port Health Service administration which is now leased out to many of the nations ports. Felixstowe handles the majority of the country's food imports.
- Supported and decision maker in retaining the iconic 'Scallop' at Aldeburgh.
- Instrumental in the planning of new Rendlesham (USAF Bentwaters)
- Developed the generous Enabling Community Partnership & Grant schemes.

May I thank all those who have supported me as their local District Councillor. I have greatly enjoyed the role and regard representing the area where I was born, brought up, and work as a privilege. I have also like to express my appreciation to the many very professional Council Officers and colleagues who have been a pleasure to work alongside.

Finance

East Suffolk Council continues to be in a very sound financial position, both in capital & cash reserves.

This years 2023/24 CT increase is 2.85%. Last 4 years all under 3% with one year at Zero%.

We successfully lobbied the Government to close the loophole allowing 2nd homeowners to avoid paying both Council tax and Business rates.

We will be charging a 100% Council tax premium on second and empty homes unless established as bona fide businesses.

Climate Emergency

Our focus is on renewable energy, energy security and saving CO2 output. Our waste disposal fleet will be renewed with more fuel-efficient vehicles. Through our decarbonisation programme we will be installing solar panels on our leisure centres, buildings and car parks to produce low-cost energy sources.

Our fleet of vans and waste collection vehicles have been replaced by electric or run on Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil, not diesel, saving thousands of tonnes of carbon. We plan to invest in Hydrogen fuel technology to find a possible long-term replacement to Diesel. We have continued to encourage individual residents to make their homes more energy efficient through grant schemes for solar panels and insulation. We have introduced a programme of upgrading the energy efficiency of our housing stock.

Economic Development

ESC provided COVID supported businesses, both financial and advice. Over £130million in grants was distributed to assist our business community. New grant schemes are planned to be introduced to continue the ethos of adaption including incorporating Net Zero and digital support. Including extending our free wifi zones within high streets.

We were successful in our joint bid to government for Freeport status - one of only 7 in the country – as lead authority we will continue to support this project and see that the £25million seed capital benefits are felt as widely as possible.

Cultural lead regeneration – our Lowestoft First Light Festival is going from strength to strength; gaining National Portfolio Status from Arts Council England. While we were not successful in our bid for City of Culture our determination has not faltered our district-wide Cultural strategy will bring further creatives to the district and bring greater breath and strength to our economy.

We successfully bid for the government's Town Fund scheme, securing £25million. This administration will see further development in Lowestoft, leveraging that £25million and building on further investments such as gigabit broadband installed in the town and, bring the former Post Office back into use with innovative new ideas.

ESC continue to support the Gull Wing Bridge project, Lowestoft's 3rd river crossing. This much needed bridge is under construction and due to be completed shortly.

Energy projects: Whilst we are not the developer nor the decision-maker for these large important projects we will continue to work with the developer to get the best deal we can for residents. With Scottish Power Renewables EA1N and EA2 Nationally Significant Infrastructure project we have secured improvements to the construction, design and further mitigation and compensation for our district; this included £500,000 for an environmental exemplar project. With EDF, the size of the compensation and mitigation is approximately £250million, with £100million for the creation of an environmental land trust. Securing commitments to local supply chain and employment.

Enabling Communities

We have continued to enable our communities to invest in themselves through our Community Partnerships Board and its eight geographical committees. This initiative, is open to Town and Parish Councillors and local stakeholders who decide how a budget of £500,000 is spent over the next four years on community-based initiatives. In addition, all District Councillors are given an Enabling Community budget of £7,500 each year to fund local projects in their Wards. I have been able to financially support with ECB grants a wide range of local projects including sport & play facilities, community events, food banks, family support services, Ease the Squeeze support, the Rural Coffee Caravan, better access projects, village Hall improvements and environmental schemes.

£1.74m has been provided in total for a range of community led projects e.g. isolation and loneliness, mental health and wellbeing, transport and travel, the impact of Covid, and financial inequality.

Housing

Because of the pandemic and lockdowns, it was impossible to meet our full social & affordable housing targets for the last four years. However, despite this we did build 113 new homes with a further 125 nearing completions. Permissions are already in place to meet our targets of an average of 50 new houses per year over the next four years including 41 council houses built to passive house standards in Deben Fields, Felixstowe.

Health and Wellbeing

Renovations have been carried out to all of our Leisure Centres with new equipment and facilities being installed. We have granted additional funding to our Leisure providers to enable them to meet the additional energy costs particularly for our swimming pools. Plans have been put in place for the introduction of a new Leisure Centre and new bowls and cricket facilities in Felixstowe and a continuation of the investment in the well-being of our residents.

Local Rural Transport

Finding a solution to rural public transport is a key objective in all of our communities. The Katch Bus project between Framlingham and Wickham Market enjoyed limited success mainly due to the disruption caused by Covid. East Suffolk Council are now renewing this project with a £80K grant, driving it from the two wards most benefiting from the service and working with businesses, visitor attractions and stakeholders to create an efficient and reliable on-demand local mini-bus service. Links will also be created with other local providers to extend the routes which can be covered as the project progresses.

Investment in our coastal communities.

With grants of over £43m we have built tidal flood walls to protect Lowestoft and work continues the design of a tidal barrier. An additional grant of £8.3m will be used to create a resilient coast from Lowestoft to Felixstowe. Over £15m has been allocated to work with Southwold Town Council and a Stakeholder group to improve the amenities and facilities at Southwold Harbour and Caravan site.

Along with ESC, I have continued to support the Alde & Ore Estuary river defence project. The project has now been extracted from the Environment Agency investigation on recycled clay and has just been awarded £12m grant from the Regional Flood Defence Committee, with another £20m still find, expected to primarily come from public funding and partly from local fund raising. Local landowners initially contributed £3.5m through contributions to the East Suffolk Inland Drainage Board.

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