

Annual report Cockfield Parish Council by Robert Lindsay, Suffolk County Councillor 25 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. I have used my locality budget to contribute to flashing speed signs in several villages and 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. I and the parish council have been quoted £37k by Highways for the speed limit change in Bildeston. 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 in the Cosford division which are national speed limit but where a safe speed would be no more than 40mph. I am aware of the desire for reduced speed limits on the A1141 between Cross Green and Jeffries Green. However the current county council policy for reducing speeds is too strict to allow this reduction to happen. That said, following a campaign by a local businessman in Semer which involved putting 40mph signs up illegally on the A1141 at Union Hill, I have commissioned a report as part of a request to reduce speed limit on that stretch of road from 60mph to 40mph. We shall see if that gets approval.

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.

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.

Cost of Living - Food Bank

The rising cost of living is affecting many residents and for me the barometer of this is the Bildeston Food Bank, which 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.

Suffolk "Devolution":

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

A public consultation will now follow. It is not clear if this idea will now go ahead. The political complexion of the county has changed somewhat since May 4th elections with Greens taking control of Mid Suffolk Council, sharing leadership at Babergh and leading East Suffolk council.