



## **Somersham Annual Parish Meeting**

MINUTES of the Annual Parish Meeting held at the Village Hall on Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2025 at **7pm**

**PRESENT:** Cllr J Rook (PC), Cllr S Wright (PC), Cllr T Hallett (PC), Cllr J Caston (PC), Cllr S Barrell (PC), J Hutchinson (TC), G Sherwood (CS), T Fordham (S&DCA and WD) and one member of the Public.

### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mrs J Blackburn (Clerk)  
District Cllr A Marriott

### **SPC021/25/26 - CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME**

The Chairman of Somersham Parish Council, Cllr James Rook, welcomed those present.

### **SPC022/25/26 - APOLOGIES**

Apologies had been received from Cllr P Jousiffe (PC), J Hutchinson (CS), D Luck (FC), A Becker (School), K Dines (TL), S Dines (C), C Burrows (NW), S Bullard (BP), County Cllr Oakes.

### **SPC023/25/26 - MINUTES 1<sup>st</sup> MAY 2024**

The minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting, held on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024, were approved as a true record and were duly signed by the Chair.

### **SPC024/25/26 - REPORTS RELATING TO THE PARISH**

Representatives of the following organisations were invited to speak and answer any questions. Where received, their reports are attached to the Minutes.

- a) Report of the Chairman of the Parish Council – *Cllr James Rook*  
(Full Report attached to these Minutes)

Cllr Rook read his report, which would be published on the village website.

- b) Report of the County Councillor – *Cllr Kay Oakes*  
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Cllr Oakes was not present at the meeting. Her report was circulated prior to the meeting and would be published on the village website.

- c) Report of the District Councillor – *Adrienne Marriott*  
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Cllr Marriott's report had been circulated prior to the meeting and would be published on the village website.

She read through her report.

- d) Report of the Duke of Marlborough Public House – *David Thorne*

David Thorne was not present at the meeting and a report had not been received.

- e) Report of the Community Shop – *Gloria Sherwood*  
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Gloria Sherwood read through the report, which and would be published on the village website.

- f) Report of The Link Magazine – *Kate Dines*  
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Kate Dines was not present at the meeting. Cllr Rook read out the report, which would be published on the village website.

- g) Report of St Mary's Church PCC – *Steve Dines*  
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Steve Dines was not present at the meeting. His report had been circulated prior to the meeting and would be published on the village website. Cllr Caston read out the report.

- h) Report of the Baptist Church – *Stephen Bullard*  
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Stephen Bullard was not present at the meeting but a report had been circulated prior to the meeting and would be published on the village website. Cllr Rook read out the report.

- i) Report of the Somersham & District Community Association – *Terry Fordham*  
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Terry Fordham read through his report, which would be published on the village website.

- j) Report of the Wheelie Day – *Terry Fordham*  
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Terry Fordham read out his report, which would be published on the village website.

- k) Report of the Tennis Club – *John Hutchinson*  
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

John Hutchinson read out his report, which would be published on the village website.

- l) Report of the Football Club – *Darren Luck*  
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Cllr Hallett read out the report, which would be published on the village website.

- m) Neighbourhood Watch – *Colin Burrows*

Colin Burrows was not present and a report had not been received as the full data was not yet available.

n) Report of the Primary School – *Alastair Becker*

Alastair Becker was not present at the meeting. His report had been circulated prior to the meeting and would be published on the village website. Cllr Barrell read out the report.

**SPC025/25/26 - PUBLIC FORUM**

One member of the public was present, but no matters were raised.

The meeting closed at 8.05pm

Chairman ..... Date .....

## Report of the Chairman of the Parish Council

**Good evening, everyone,**

Although I have only recently taken on the role of Chairman, I feel privileged to present this annual report and reflect on the Parish Council's work over the past year.

### **Remembering Former Councillors**

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the sad passing of two former councillors and Chairs of Somersham Parish Council Penny Pearson and Stella Salter. Both individuals gave so much of themselves to our village, and their legacy of service, dedication, and community spirit will not be forgotten. They played a significant role in shaping the strong foundations we continue to build upon today.

### **A Thank You to Thomas Hallett**

I also want to extend a huge thank you to Thomas Hallett, our outgoing chairman. Thomas has led with commitment, clarity, and kindness — all while balancing a very busy life. His tireless work and deep care for the community have been deeply appreciated by both the council and the wider village. I know I speak for many when I say we're incredibly grateful for his leadership. We are very fortunate he continues with us as a councillor.

### **Looking Forward**

It is an honour to follow in his footsteps. I am committed to continuing the good work of Thomas and my fellow councillors, and to working closely with the community as we plan for the year ahead.

In that spirit, I'd like to propose three simple goals that we can agree on together — as a council and as a community. These goals are intended to be realistic, meaningful, and a way to help measure our success.

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#### **1. Community: Strengthening Connections**

Somersham is home to an incredible range of groups and amenities — from our local pub and community shop to the church, speedway, football club, tennis club, community association, mother and baby group, and many more.

Each of these plays an important role, but I wonder: could we achieve even more if we worked more closely together?

With VE Day commemorations taking place this week, there is much to celebrate, but I believe there's still potential to bring our community even closer. Let's explore opportunities for greater collaboration between local groups and volunteers to make the most of what we already have — together.

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#### **2. Aspiration: A Shared Goal for Our Village**

We are lucky to live in such beautiful Suffolk countryside. While much of our focus has understandably been on proposed developments like solar farms and pylons, I'd love us to set a goal of our own — something positive and community-driven.

One idea is to enter the **Blooming Village** competition. A shared project like this could beautify our village, foster collaboration, and strengthen community pride — while potentially adding value to our homes and surroundings.

Let's work together to choose a visible, uplifting goal that brings people together and benefits Somersham as a whole.

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### 3. Communication: Listening More, Reaching Further

In recent years, our parish council has made great strides in improving communication. I hope we can build on this further.

The council should be more than a group that meets once a month. I'd like us to continue finding new ways to connect with residents, listen to their ideas and concerns, and ensure everyone feels heard — especially those who may not be able to attend meetings in person.

This is not just about addressing issues — it's also about recognising and celebrating the individuals and groups in our community who quietly make a difference every day.

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### **Closing**

In closing, I want to say how delighted and honoured I am to serve Somersham in this role. I look forward to working with my fellow councillors, local groups, and residents to build on the strong foundations already in place.

Your ideas, feedback, and involvement will be key to everything we do. Let's move forward together — with respect for our past, pride in our present, and ambition for our future.

### **Thank you.**

James

James Rook

Chairman Somersham Parish council

March 2024

**Even more potholes filled as Roadmender trial hits Suffolk**

The Roadmender has arrived in Suffolk, as the county sees a 34% increase in pothole repairs through extra investment, more resource, and new ways of working.

The county council has been working to repair the increasing number of potholes which have been breaking out following very wet and cold weather recently. One way in which the council is increasing its repair rate is by trialling new methods of fixing potholes.

Suffolk Highways welcomed 'Highway Workforce' with their Roadmender Elastomac solution - a repair method which results in sealed, longer-lasting pothole repairs, which are quicker to carry out. The trial which began on 11 March, is eco-friendly and lowers the carbon footprint of repairs by 80% is effectively supporting Suffolk Highways in its fight against the rising number of potholes on the county's roads. The 'Roadmender' works on both asphalt and concrete roads and is designed for repairs to all types of road defects and is capable of overlaying areas with multiple defects in a single visit. The process is more efficient, reducing material and waste by 90% and avoiding unnecessary disruption on roads.

April 2024

**Highways Report and Statistics**

Since Storm Babet in October 2023 (which generally coincided with the commencement of the new highways contract with Milestone) there has been a substantial increase in the number of customer reports received by Suffolk Highways.

Annual data from 2022/23 (40,003 customer reports) and 2023/24 (60,043 customer reports to 23 February) shows there has been an increase of over 20,000 reports so far in 2023/24.

If this continues at the same rate, it is expected that the volume of customer reports could top 65,000 representing a 63% increase on last year.

Between October and February, Suffolk Highway completed in total **10,533 safety defect repairs**, a 45% increase on the last 2 years. **7,328 road defect repairs** have been completed since October. During the period October to February, the average number of reactive gangs provided is 20.2 per day (excluding Dragon Patcher).

For the same period during 2022/23, the old contract provided an average of 12.6 reactive gangs per day.

May 2024

## **East of England local authorities collaborate to appeal for more foster families to work with their council**

Eleven local authorities across the East of England have joined forces in a bid to collectively recruit more foster carers to look after some of the region's most vulnerable children.

Suffolk is taking part in a new initiative for fostering under the banner Foster East. There is an urgent need for foster carers in the East of England with more than 7,000 vulnerable children already in the care of their local authority, and a further 150 children coming into care every month.

The Foster East initiative which is funded by the Department of Education and launched today Wednesday 29 May 2024, is a new, collaborative approach to foster carer recruitment and support.

Councils will work together to provide more comprehensive training, support and best practice. Each applicant will be nurtured through their fostering journey with their local council and via a buddy network. Foster East advisors will help people find out how fostering can become part of their life.

In Suffolk there are more than 900 children and young people ranging from babies to 18-year-olds who need safe, loving and nurturing homes where they can thrive and develop. Every local authority aims to keep children and young people local to their support networks, but a shortage of foster families in our area means this is not always possible.

Fostering is a flexible role with options for short term care from a weekend a month to longer term opportunities, all providing life-changing support for local children.

June 2024

## **Residents advised - don't do business with cold callers**

Suffolk Trading Standards is reminding people to stay alert to the risk of being ripped off by cold callers knocking on their doors.

The warning comes after recent incidents of people approaching householders on the doorstep and touting for business.

Suffolk Trading Standards advises people to only use businesses registered with the Suffolk Trusted Trader scheme.

Trading Standards urged anyone thinking of having home improvement work done to use a business that has been vetted and approved under the Suffolk Trusted Trader scheme.

Residents can also protect themselves and their neighbours by nominating their area to become a No Cold Calling Zone, of which there are now more than 200 across Suffolk.

July 2024

## **Councillors recommended to approve an extra £9.1 million for SEND services**

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet will discuss a further investment of £9.1 million over three years to expand special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services at its meeting next Wednesday 24 July.

- Funding would pay for new permanent SEND staff to support children and young people
- If approved, this year more than £20 million would have been committed to expanding the service
- Investment to be discussed at Cabinet next week

The additional investment would mean that more than 30 new permanent members of staff could be recruited to help the council keep up with expected need for SEND services and deliver its important improvement plans. It would also pay for contracts to secure more educational psychology capacity – key to helping children and young people access the help they need.

This investment is in addition to the £11.2 million over three years agreed by Cabinet in February 2024, which is being used to grow the SEND team by 15% or around 60 members of staff.

In total, the council is proposing to commit more than £20 million over the next three years to bolster SEND services.

Of the £9.1 million, £2.6 million will be spent in 2024/25. This investment in permanent staff will recur in subsequent years as they continue to support children and young people with SEND. In 2025/26, £500,000 will be added to the SEND budget and in 2026/27, a further £500,000 will be added – both of which will be recurrent in subsequent years.

This investment follows an Area SEND inspection by Ofsted and CQC in November 2023, which found widespread failings across the Local Area Partnership. As a result of this, the partnership, which delivers SEND services and is made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and Northeast Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, published a Priority Action Plan. One of the actions in the plan includes increasing the timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care plans and Annual Reviews. The proposed new staff would, in part, support the delivery of this work.

August 2024

## **Small improvements needed as children’s services’ Ofsted report published**

Ofsted has published its report into Suffolk County Council’s children’s services. The report rated the service as ‘requires improvement to be good’.

The ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services) report conveys a mixed picture across Suffolk. Importantly, inspectors concluded that children’s safeguarding is strong and that the experiences and progress of children in care were good. They also reported that ‘children in care thrive’. However, they highlighted weakness in some of the processes and systems in place. These included inconsistencies with the way first contact with children and young people is processed, and the quality and support to children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless. It also found inconsistencies in the level of understanding that care leavers have about the range of support available to them.

The report outlined seven points for improvement, which have either been implemented already through small amends to systems or processes or are in progress.

September 2024

## **Uncertainty looms for 177,000 Suffolk residents currently eligible for winter fuel payments**

As many as 177,000 Suffolk residents are currently eligible for winter fuel payments and should be protected from Government plans to cut the allowance, Suffolk County Council has warned.

According to 2023 mid-year population estimates from the ONS, around 177,000 people over the age of 66 in Suffolk are eligible for these crucial payments, leaving them potentially vulnerable if they are withdrawn.

In response, Suffolk County Council's leader, Councillor Matthew Hicks, has written to all the county's MPs - urging them to vote against the proposed changes. The council is particularly concerned that rural areas, like much of Suffolk, will be disproportionately affected due to reliance on expensive oil heating and the added burden of rural deprivation.

Rural homes are statistically less energy efficient compared to urban homes, meaning they require more energy to maintain a healthy temperature. Furthermore, many rural homes are not connected to mains gas, forcing households to rely on more costly heating sources like wood, canister gas, or oil. The price of heating oil has now risen to 66p per litre, a 12p increase since 2020.

October 2024

## **Suffolk County Council set on major investment to further protect Suffolk from flooding as it calls on Government to 'step up'**

Suffolk County Council has announced its intention to invest another £1.5 million to carry out important flooding prevention work.

- Council set to agree £1.5 million to deliver first phase of works identified in initial flood investigation reports
- Authority calls on Government to recognise ongoing impact of Storm Babet and fund £20 million of further prevention work urgently needed
- Extensive work already completed since Storm Babet including more than 111,000 drains cleared and significant road repairs.

The commitment comes as initial flood investigation reports have identified that a further £20 million is needed to complete the work – a figure that the county council can't afford. The council has therefore written to the Flooding Minister, Emma Hardy MP, and demanded the government step up and plug the funding gap.

- [Read the council's letter to DEFRA](#)

Examples of the kind of projects that could be delivered include:

1. Creating flood water retention ponds in land above villages and green spaces within communities to capture water and slow the flow into residential areas.
2. Installing flood doors and non-return valves on drains to stop water entering properties that are particularly at risk of flooding.
3. Help landowners with advice and guidance, especially those within responsibilities to maintain ditches and streams on their properties (known as 'riparian ownership').
4. Bolstering Suffolk Highways' resources to deliver planned and reactive maintenance on the county's roads and footpaths.

Storm Babet struck between October 18 and 21 last year and caused substantial flooding and disruption across Suffolk. A month's worth of rain fell in 24 hours, flooding more than 900 homes and businesses. The impact of the storm was exceptional and demanded an urgent multiagency response.

So far, Suffolk County Council has committed more than £13.75 million for work to aid recovery from Storm Babet. Suffolk County Council has made several achievements as part of our continued commitment to reduce flood risk.

The council has already committed £12.25 million, including:

- £1 million on bringing in additional flood investigation specialists
- £1.25 million for repairs to Suffolk’s highways following the flood damage
- £10 million funding, which was committed in 2021, to address long-standing drainage issues over three years. This complements £2 million a year invested in drainage repairs and improvements funded from the Department for Transport maintenance grant.

The council has completed seven location-based flood investigations, with an estimated 50 to complete. This compares to an average of three or four investigations in an average year. These reports provide a detailed account of events for each flooding location and recommendations for other organisations, landowners, businesses and residents.

Carried out extensive works on Suffolk’s highways. Specifically:

- Cleared 96% of highway drainage gullies across Suffolk, more than 111,000. This involves lifting the iron grates and sucking up the debris that has washed off the roads
- Attended more than 3,500 emergency call outs for flooding related incidents – an unprecedented number. This includes pumping an estimated 2.5million litres of water from the roads, removing 53 tonnes of debris and clearing 121 fallen trees
- Rolled out the [DEFRA-funded Recovery Scheme](#) which meant that flooded property owners could apply for up to £5,000 to make their homes and businesses more resilient to future flooding. Suffolk County Council is administering the scheme on behalf of government. [Applications are open until April 2025.](#)

The new money is set to be agreed by the council’s Cabinet on 5 November.

**November 2024**

## **Suffolk’s new gritting fleet to keep county safe and moving during the colder weather**

With temperatures forecast to drop, Suffolk’s new gritting fleet will commence its winter season shortly, treating thousands of miles of roads to help minimise risk for highways users.

During the warmer autumn months, highway teams have been carefully planning for the winter gritting operations, preparing for the potential snow and ice that winter will bring.

In total, there are 36 gritters ready for action, with two additional spare vehicles available to be deployed to any location, if needed.

The new fleet is equipped with advanced digital systems and the latest route planning software to support winter maintenance drivers and enable them to grit their routes efficiently and effectively.

All gritters in the fleet use hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO), which reduces carbon dioxide emissions by around 90%, supporting Suffolk County Council’s continued commitment to protect and enhance our environment.

During the last winter season, Suffolk used around 7,822 tonnes of salt to treat a total distance of 198,594km/123,400 miles – which equates to travelling the circumference of Earth five times! Suffolk Highways currently has a stock of around 21,000 tonnes of salt across the county for the season ahead and is well prepared for any drop in temperature.

Our highway teams are responsible for gritting 36 Priority 1 (P1) routes, which amounts to around 1,259 miles, including all A and B roads, roads to fire stations, hospitals, main bus routes and rail stations.

There are also 34 Priority 2 (P2) routes, which amounts to around 843 miles of the network. This includes other bus routes where the service level is 5 days a week in the school term, roads leading to rural villages and access to schools.

P1 treatments are considered when road surface temperatures are forecast to drop below 1°C, whilst P2 routes are carried out when the forecast predicts there to be a longer period of cold weather conditions.

Further details of which roads are gritted can be found on [one.network](#), by selecting the 3 lines on the search box, then data layers, driver information then winter gritting routes.

All gritting decisions are based on forecast road surface temperatures, not air temperature, as the road surface temperature is often cooler and reflects the true risk to highway users. The timing and amount of salt we use considers factors such as traffic levels, wind and rain.

During the lead up to the winter season, our teams also dedicate their time to refilling grit bins across the county at registered locations, such as the bottom of hills, or on junctions of minor roads. To date, we have filled over 50% of the total grit bins and will conclude the remaining refills over the next few weeks ahead of the commencement of the core winter season.

Suffolk Highways fills grit bins that are approved and owned by [parish and town councils](#), however, to ensure that the contents of grit bins are used to make roads safer, communities are encouraged to monitor how and where the grit is used and request grit refills via [the reporting tool](#). Suffolk Highways do not fill private grit bins.

Suffolk's residents are requested to support us, as well as emergency services throughout the year, by parking considerately and leaving enough room so that our vehicles can grit the road – if we can't fit, we can't grit!

Drivers are reminded to always drive to the conditions; although the gritting teams have treated the roads, this doesn't mean they are completely risk-free.

Those wishing to know when and where we are gritting over the coming months, should follow Suffolk Highways' X (formerly known as Twitter) and Facebook, to keep updated of our teams' movements this winter season. Safety messages will also be issued during spells of cold and wet weather.

December 2024

## **Suffolk and East of England councils seek fairness in the face of energy projects**

Suffolk County Council is joining with other local authorities in the region to challenge National Grid and the government on energy projects, demanding fairness for their communities and environment. The county councils from Suffolk, Essex, Norfolk and Lincolnshire all face similar challenges with Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) being planned for their counties.

These are typically related to energy projects, including solar farms, wind turbines, pylons and the infrastructure associated offshore wind farms, such as substations and cabling.

Two of Suffolk County Council's main concerns, shared with the other counties, are:

- The uncoordinated approach to NSIPs - this is creating significant challenges for Suffolk's rural communities under the current planning policy as applied by the planning inspectorate and Secretary of State
- The government's 2030 target for decarbonising the electricity grid – this is too hasty, making it impossible to deliver alternative solutions to pylon projects like Norwich to Tilbury
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January 2025

### **Unique landscape to be changed forever by pylons**

A large area of landscape on the Norfolk/Suffolk border with uniqueness, rivalling those of other nationally protected landscapes, is set to be decimated by pylons as part of National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury project.

In a letter to both Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council, and other local leaders, National Grid has outlined that it has decided to install overhead lines through the Waveney Valley, rather than running cables underground, as they had set out in their previous consultation.

This is a significant blow to local communities and the natural environment, especially following last year's [Valued Landscape Assessment](#), a report jointly commissioned by Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council.

The report concluded that "the length of the Waveney Valley expresses many special qualities, and in the context of Suffolk and Norfolk, it is considered to be a valued landscape. Conserving and enhancing the special qualities articulated in this report is a key aspiration of existing planning policy."

The councils will now look to take up their concerns with National Grid and discuss the issue further.

February 2025

### **Suffolk prepares for another significant solar farm proposal**

Suffolk County Council is preparing to respond to another large solar farm proposal, set to cover around 1,500 acres, near Eye.

EcoPower Suffolk is putting forward plans to build a solar farm and battery storage facility, which would impact Yaxley, Brome, Gislingham, Mellis, Eye and Occold, with connections made at the existing substation to the north of Yaxley.

The project aims to deliver around 250 megawatts of renewable energy. At that size, it will be classed as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), requiring planning approval from the Secretary of State, rather than the local authority.

Several consultations, beginning in March 2025, will be held by EcoPower Suffolk as it shapes its final planning application.

The county council will be contributing to these, to support and represent residents, businesses, agriculture, our landscape and ecology.

EcoPower Suffolk hopes that the project will connect to the Grid in 2030.

More information can be found at [www.ecopowersuffolk.com](http://www.ecopowersuffolk.com)

## County leaders to propose one council for Suffolk

One council for Suffolk would make delivering public services simpler, cheaper and quicker, and better meet the needs of residents and businesses, county leaders have said.

Following a recent government announcement that Suffolk's County, district and borough councils will be replaced with a single-tier system, Suffolk County Council argues that consolidating all services under one unitary authority is the only effective way to deliver against the government's criteria for local government reform.

The move would see all council services, such as waste collection and disposal, housing, social care, planning, highways maintenance, leisure, school placements and travel and street cleaning, all provided by one authority - rather than the six that currently exist in Suffolk.

Bringing together district, borough and county council functions is expected to reduce duplication, lower administrative costs and ensure a more coordinated and cost-effective approach to delivering essential services.

The council warns that splitting services among multiple bodies would force the duplication of essential functions - such as social care, highways maintenance and schools - currently managed at a county level.

The key benefits of one council are:

- **Simpler for residents** – one council would make it easier to understand and contact local government
- **Clearer accountability** – there would be less confusion over who is responsible for what
- **Better use of funding** – a more coherent, strategic, financially sustainable, county-wide approach to budgeting
- **Better alignment of services** – since everything is under one roof, services can be more easily coordinated, creating opportunities to improve services for residents
- **More efficient decision-making** – with just one council, decisions can be made more quickly
- **Stronger leadership** – a single, visible and accountable body providing a clear strategic voice for Suffolk.

The council will submit its initial proposal to the government by 21 March, with a more detailed business case to follow later in the year.

The government will then undertake a public consultation.

The government's plans will also see the election of a mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk in May 2026, who would take control over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, economic development, health improvement and blue light services – along with devolved government funding to deliver positive change.

March 2025

## **Suffolk County Council confirms decision to bring Library Services back In-House**

Suffolk County Council has confirmed that it will be bringing all 45 libraries back under its care and control. The decision, made at the Cabinet meeting, will ensure continued access to high-quality, community-focused library services across the county. As part of this move, the council plans to:

- Keep all 45 libraries open
- Maintain opening hours
- Create job security for all frontline staff
- Secure a sustainable future for Suffolk's library services

In addition to continuing its core library services, the council is investing £200,000 in mobile libraries, with a further £157,000 for new books and to replace public computers in libraries across Suffolk.

Libraries have long been at the heart of Suffolk's communities. They are essential spaces for learning, connection, and support, and the council is committed to ensuring they remain hubs that bring people together. The focus is on building upon the excellent services already provided, strengthening libraries' role as trusted local resources that meet the evolving needs of residents.

Looking to the future, Suffolk County Council envisions libraries becoming even more integrated into the wider community, serving as convenient access points for a range of essential council services. This includes providing information and support around Adult Social Care, offering health and social care services, facilitating Family Hub activities, and promoting digital inclusion. The aim is to make it easier for residents to access vital services and support, all within the welcoming, familiar setting of their local library.

Suffolk County Council would like to express its sincere gratitude to Suffolk Libraries, who have run the library contract for the past 12 years. Their passion and hard work have been integral to the success of library services in the county, and the council appreciates all they have done to support local communities. We look forward to welcoming library staff back into the county council and continuing to support them in delivering outstanding services to the public.

We would also like to thank the 1,250 volunteers whose commitment has been essential in delivering high-quality services to residents across Suffolk. As we transition the library service back under council control, we remain fully committed to working with our volunteers. Their invaluable contributions will continue to play a central role in the future of our libraries, and we are excited to explore new opportunities to expand volunteer involvement.

The library service will officially return to Suffolk County Council control on 1 June 2025.

# **ANNUAL REPORT MAY 24 TO APRIL 25 – Highlights from District Councillor Reports**

## **Simpler recycling reforms**

On 9<sup>th</sup> May, the government announced the next steps of the Simpler Recycling reforms, saying that reforms to business bin collections and a crackdown on unscrupulous waste carriers will boost recycling rates and protect the environment.

A simpler common-sense approach to recycling means people across England will be able to recycle the same materials, whether at home, work or school, putting an end to confusion over what can and can't be recycled in different parts of the country.

The government proposed new exemptions to make sure that waste collectors will be able to collect dry recyclables together, in the same bin or bag, and collect organic waste together, to reduce the number of bins required.

The new plans for simpler recycling were to make sure that households would not need an excessive number of bins. The reforms would bring in a more convenient and practical system while making sure all local authorities collect the required recyclable waste streams: glass; metal; plastic; paper and card; food waste; and garden waste.

This meant manufacturers could design packaging and know it could be recycled across the nation, ensuring there was more recycled material in the products we buy and allowing the UK recycling industry to grow.

Further details of Simpler Recycling were given in my October 24 report. MSDC would need to ensure that from that date collections were made for glass, cartons, glass and food. From 2027 a further collection for plastic film would take place. Suffolk Authorities had already approved the introduction of weekly food collections by end March 26.

The Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) which processes Suffolk's recyclables would need to be retooled to cope with the new mix of hard materials, including glass. This means that significant changes will need to be made to the plant through the contract with Biffa which is managed by SCC for all the district and

borough councils in Suffolk. Such changes and their implications are currently being discussed at the council.

Options were to continue collecting all materials in one bin (co-mingling) or to provide an extra wheelie bin, box or re-usable bag (twin-streaming). The recycling would then be separated out by the households into one container for plastics, metal, cartons (including Tetra-Pak) and glass bottles and jars - let's call this Recycling A, and another container for paper and card – let's call this Recycling B.

Cabinet and the Full Council approved recommendations for twin-stream recycling to include three weekly collections for refuse, one-weekly collections for food waste and two-weekly collections for garden waste. In every three weeks there would also be one collection for Recycling A and another for Recycling B.

Special arrangements could be put in place for large families and families producing greater residual waste. Thought would need to be given to the disposal of nappies. Alternative and more easily manoevrable receptacles, e.g. a box or a bag could be provided for elderly/disabled residents. There would be an overall need to communicate the new strategy effectively with further implications for people for whom English is not a first language, e.g. using visual materials.

## **CIFCO and other Council investments**

CIFCO, as the councils' commercial property arm, is set up specifically to generate revenue for the councils. CIFCO Capital Ltd has now generated a net income of more than £12m for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, since being established jointly by councils in 2017.

During previous administrations, the councils borrowed a total of £99.2m to invest in its commercial property portfolio. This now comprises of 22 properties with 83 tenants, based mainly in the eastern region, strategically split across industrial, retail and office sectors in order to balance risk.

The cost of the loan repayments to the councils is then covered by income received from CIFCO, with further net income on top making a regular and significant contribution to the councils' finances.

A report that went before the councils' joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee in May, showed how high inflation and interest rate rises have hit commercial property values nationwide. As a result, the value of the CIFCO portfolio decreased 2.58% since March 2023. However, the report also detailed how CIFCO was outperforming the rest of the market – with rental arrears consistently below 5% and empty properties representing just 3.4% of the portfolio compared to a market benchmark of 8.3%.

CIFCO was also investing in the reducing the environmental impact of its portfolio, with 50% of its properties holding an EPC rating of C or above – and it was on track to meet its target of ensuring all properties have a C rating or above by 2027.

Both Babergh and Mid Suffolk also invest directly in property within the districts, to help regenerate towns and communities and to provide social housing.

Previous acquisitions in Mid Suffolk have included vacant units in Stowmarket town centre, including the former Aldi unit, which is now PureGym, and the former NatWest, now leased to the John Peel Centre. It has also invested in Gateway 14 in Stowmarket and the redevelopment of its former council offices in Needham Market delivering affordable and market homes.

The councils have also built or acquired 624 new council houses in the districts over the last eight years.

## **Rapid Flood Guidance trial for England and Wales**

I reported on this in May. On 14 May, the gov.uk Flood Forecasting Centre launched a trial of the Rapid Flood Guidance (RFG) service to run until 30 September. The RFG service gives short notice updates for England and Wales to supplement the flood guidance statement. It aims to support the responder community to be better prepared to mitigate the impacts from rapid flooding. Following a [successful trial in 2024](#), the RFG service will return for summer 2025.

The 2025 service will run between 2 June and 17 October 2025.

### **Improvements for the 2025 service**

The 2025 service will include improvements based on user feedback from the trial. These include:

- the ability to sign up to receive the RFG for local authority areas (rather than regions) – providing a more tailored service
- clearer mapping – so that the location of the risk area can be more easily identified
- more consistent written content – improving clarity
- amendments to the threshold for RFG issue – meaning that there will be fewer RFGs when there are no or minor impacts
- faster production – so that there is more time to respond

The service aims to support the responder community to be better prepared to mitigate the impacts from rapid flooding. The service provides a new:

- advisory badge on the front page for days when there is a heightened risk of rapid flooding
- RFG product that will be issued on heightened risk days

Signing up will also mean that you will receive RFG tests in the run up to the launch and invitations to RFG webinars.

## **River Gipping Trust**

I attended the Trust's annual meeting at Needham Market Community Centre on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2024 having been invited to join them.

The first (guest) presentation was a brief history of the River Stour Trust, showing what can be done to encourage engagement by the public, such as trip boats, clean water areas for swimmers, canoeists, anglers, all of which is relevant to the Gipping.

The River Gipping Trust Restoration Manager then presented an overview of the restoration work along the River Gipping carried out by the Trust's volunteers during the year. They have been clearing riverside paths of vegetation to allow better access. They are gradually working towards clearing the vegetation immediately adjacent to the river to give better river views and wider paths. Himalayan Balsam is a major problem and they want to cut as much down as possible before the seedpods burst and allow more plants to establish.

They described the use of "stop planks" to provide a method of temporarily damming the canal off either to drain a limited section of canal for scheduled engineering work, or in an emergency (such as a breach or structure failure) to limit the loss of water. Apparently the canal at Great Blakenham is leaking and the Trust will need to stop the water flow in order to investigate but the repairs may take some time.

I shall get in touch with the Trust again shortly to check on progress.

## **£1.5 Million Fund to Enhance Stowmarket Town Centre**

I wrote about this fund in my July 2024 report. The Stowmarket Town Centre Gateway Fund was made possible thanks to the council's income from its investment in the Gateway 14 Business Park. It would be working with landlords to bring under-utilised properties, including empty shops back into use – buying, renting or refurbishing them. The aim is to increase arts and cultural experiences, tourism and community activities in the town, encouraging retail opportunities, small businesses and leisure and food and drink activities. Round 1 of the fund closed on 15 November 2024 and a second round was to be launched in spring 2025. An external stakeholder panel of town representatives would be reviewing proposals.

## **Additional funding approved to allow vulnerable residents to stay in their own homes**

I reported in September 2024 that Babergh and Mid Suffolk cabinets had agreed to increase funding to support more households to carry out home adaptations for family members with a disability, long term illness or change in health. The enhanced grants included doubling minor adaptation grant limits and introducing offers of a 'top up' of up to £20,000 above to the national disabled facilities grant limit.

Independent Living Service grants available were:

- repairs adaptations grant up to £10,000
- minor adaptations grant - for residents living with dementia, to help cope with the challenges of living at home for those facing terminal illness or end of life care increased from £7500 to up to £15,000
- discretionary relocation grant up to £7,500
- discretionary disabled facilities grant (top up grant) of £20,000

Also in September I wrote about Suffolk Recycles Campaign from the Public Realm Team:

## **MSDC Suffolk Recycles campaign**

### **Use Your Loaf**

<https://www.foodsavvy.org.uk/use-your-loaf>

MSDC's latest Food Savvy campaign is focusing on reducing wasted bread. National research shows that a whopping 25 million slices of bread are wasted in the UK every day. That's a lot of bread!

The Use Your Loaf campaign aims to highlight this serious problem and find solutions. It is packed with tips and advice on how to use up stale bread, store bread correctly and freeze it for later use. With lots of fun recipe ideas including stale bread pasta from local chef Rowen Halstead.

## **Batteries and electrical fires**

Every year, hundreds of fires occur across the waste and recycling sector in the UK. This can cause damage to services and equipment and most importantly can put people in danger.

The majority of fires are caused by batteries which have been wrongly placed in rubbish or recycling bins. Batteries can be damaged during the collection and treatment process and this can cause some batteries, particularly lithium-based, to explode or ignite.

Many products, including vapes, contain hidden batteries that cannot be easily removed, so people can easily discard them without realising the possible consequences. Monitoring shows that thousands of vapes are placed in Suffolk's recycling bins every week. Some small fires, which fortunately were contained and rapidly dealt with, have already occurred.

## **Mid Suffolk Growth Ltd. and Babergh Growth Ltd.**

At the Joint Audit and Standards Group meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> September there was considerable discussion among members regarding the financial outcomes of these ventures.

Both councils owned 50% of the respective companies, Babergh Growth and Mid Suffolk Growth whilst the other 50% was in each case owned by Norse Group Holdings Ltd., a property management company based in Norwich. At Needham Market the development of the old Mid Suffolk Council offices was to be in two phases. Phase 1 has now been completed but Mid Suffolk have now pulled out

from the second phase, aiming to sell the remaining development land to generate a capital receipt for the council. They aim to repay the remaining loan by November 2024.

The decision not to proceed may have been affected by the loss undertaken by Babergh District Council on the development of their former council offices in Hadleigh. It was anticipated that Babergh will make a loss of around £3m.

## **MSDC Public Realm Enhancements**

In my November 24 report I wrote that on 8<sup>th</sup> October MSDC Cabinet agreed to the formation of a new REACT service to deliver non-scheduled, demand led street cleaning, grounds and environmental enforcement services outside of Stowmarket, across Mid Suffolk.

The formation of REACT in Mid Suffolk will allow a wide range of response to street cleaning issues covering litter/detritus hotspots, fly-tipping, graffiti, flyposting, access clearance and the gradual introduction of enforcement to include the use of Fixed Penalty Notices. This will allow non-REACT operational street cleansing staff to continue with their routine duties without distraction. We intend to provide in-year funding for additional operative(s), hiring of a sweeper and scrubbing machine as well as the purchase of a street hoover.

## **Treating tenants with respect and combatting social housing stigma**

My December 24 report noted that Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils were among the first in the country to sign up to a new campaign to stop social housing stigma. An introductory workshop saw tenants, councillors and council officers come together to explore how to tackle the unfair stereotyping of council tenants.

A 'tackling stigma journey planner' was drawn up by the campaign together with the University of Durham, Sheffield Hallam University, the Chartered Institute of Housing, TPAS and YD Consultants. The councils will now work to develop commitments in line with this planner.

# The Wilder Communities Partnership

Last December I noted that Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have joined forces with Suffolk Wildlife Trust alongside neighbouring councils to help local communities to protect and restore nature as part of a new partnership initiative. The Wilder Communities Partnership has received funding of £373,356 from the Suffolk Public Leaders Group (of which the councils are members) – to be distributed over the next three years for projects such as supporting local groups to create habitats for diverse species, providing guidance on habitat management, giving training sessions on species conservation.

Existing initiatives have created valuable habitats for swifts, water voles, hedgehogs and stag beetles and have helped to preserve Suffolk's species-rich ancient grasslands.

## New government housing targets

### What has changed?

In January 25 I wrote that In December 24, the Government had announced new housing requirements for every District and Borough Council in the country.

These increased the housing requirement in Mid Suffolk up to 734 (up 37%). To ensure the housing requirement can be met, councils must demonstrate there is a 'housing land supply' for the next five years. This is assessed every year, and the figures are published alongside the Annual Monitoring Report. Whilst the current housing land supply is determined against the adopted Joint Local Plan requirement of 535 homes for Mid Suffolk, the Council wants to ensure that we give our communities confidence by maintaining a plan-led approach to decision making whilst acting promptly to respond to the Government's new policy and deliver what is expected of us.

### What does this mean for Mid Suffolk's Joint Local Plan?

There was to be a formal review of the Joint Local Plan, building on the work that had already taken place. This work would be considered during the review, but it is unavoidable that the council would have to gather further evidence and carry out additional engagement ahead of the formal review process. If the Council couldn't demonstrate a five-year land supply there was a risk that national planning policies would start to take priority over the Joint Local Plan. To guard against this scenario a revised timetable, our Local Development Scheme, was published in March 25.

## **Council agrees to full support for farmers**

In February 25 I reported that at its full council meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, Mid Suffolk District Council agreed unanimously to consider all “reasonable and practical measures” to support local farming communities. This comes in the wake of Suffolk farmers protesting against the changes to inheritance tax rules which some have said will threaten the future of the family farm. Andy Mellen, Green Leader of the Council spoke of his farming heritage, the difficult financial challenges being faces by farmers and the problems they faced from climate change.

## **Recommendations from MSDC Council Meeting 27/2/25**

In March 25 I reported on these recommendations where the General Fund Budget and Medium-Term Financial Position were discussed and it was agreed that

- there would be no increase in 2025/26 for the Band D Council Tax of £175.03 due to the healthy position of the Council’s General Fund.
- The Director of Finance and Procurement would explore increasing locality grant funding to a minimum of £10,000 p.a.

Following a consultation with residents last autumn the council are working on introducing new community transport services, retrofitting their council housing stock (starting with the poorest performing properties with a rating of E and below) and delivering new local cycling and walking infrastructure.

After discussing the housing plan revenue account 2025/26 budget and 30 year business plan it was agreed to implement

- a CPI +1% increase for social rents equivalent to an average rent of £2.78 for social rent and affordable rent of £4.05
- a 0.29% increase in garage rates
- a charge of £6.41 per week per tenancy in a block in respect of General Needs
- a rent tolerance of 5% on Social Rent properties.

Sheltered housing service charges and utility charges would be capped at 10% overall.

## **Local Government Reorganisation**

I wrote in my March report that Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils held workshops on the 3<sup>rd</sup> to consider both reorganisation and devolution. We were told that Suffolk County Council is in favour of one unitary authority for the whole of Suffolk; however, other options are for two or three unitary authorities for Suffolk. If Ipswich were to combine with East Suffolk for one authority and Mid Suffolk, Babergh and West Suffolk formed another authority there would be roughly equal populations in each of these two areas. Another option which would give three unitary authorities might consist e.g. of a Greater Ipswich Authority taking in parts of Mid Suffolk and Babergh with other areas of Mid Suffolk combining with East Suffolk and finally a West Suffolk Authority.

## **Boost for community projects thanks to developer funding**

In my April report I wrote that in the latest round of CIL funding £181,861 has been allocated to five projects in Mid Suffolk. £75,000 is to be awarded for a rebuild of Little Blakenham Village Hall. Other grants will be made to upgrade the Gipping Valley River Path, for additional solar PV and onsite battery storage at Blackbourne Community Centre, Elmswell, for a community courtyard and social space at Badwell Village Hall and for the installation of a new sewage system at Batisford and District Cricket Club.

## **2.9m boost to make council homes warmer and lower bills**

In April I wrote that Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils have provisionally been awarded 2.9m by the Warm Homes Social Housing Fund which will be added to the £8 million already committed by the Councils to install energy-saving measures in social housing. Work has begun on upgrading 100 council properties with the lowest EPC ratings with improvements such as cavity and loft insulation, new windows, PV Panels and air source heat pumps. Another 150 homes are to be added to the list as a further step towards achieving a good standard of energy efficiency by 2027.

## **Expansion of Port One Logistics Park**

Port One's plan to expand into the abandoned SnOasis site in Great Blakenham was reported in Bury Free Press on 31<sup>st</sup> March. It was reported very favourably in terms of the creation of thousands of jobs. Curzon de Vere Ltd. And Valley Ridge Holdings Ltd. had previously submitted a scoping report to Mid Suffolk District Council. The new site would comprise another 304 acres and would house a vertical farm, a technology hub, a farm shop and café plus a permanent market. A concrete production facility would be built at Port One created from the recycled by-products of the waste-to-energy plant opposite.

Also included in the proposal is a reworking of Junction 52 of the A14 to include a new lorry lane. Formal plans for the expansion should be lodged in October this year.

## **Further reforms to overhaul the planning system**

I wrote about these reforms in my April 25 report. I find that "narrowing" down of the number of statutory consultees worrying but this appears to be in line with the government's rush to build.

On 10th March the government set out further reforms to the planning system which they say will help deliver 1.5 million new homes.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/bureaucratic-burden-lifted-to-speed-up-building-in-growth-agenda>

Under the new plans, organisations such as Sport England, Theatres Trust and The Gardens Trust will no longer be required to input on planning decisions. The scope of other 'statutory consultees' will be narrowed to focus on heritage, safety and environmental protection making much better use of standing guidance in place of case-by-case responses. Councils should now only consult statutory consultees where necessary and decisions should not be delayed beyond the 21-day statutory deadline unless a decision cannot otherwise be reached.

*Adrienne Marriott  
Blakenham District Councillor  
06/05/25*

**Somersham and District Community Shop: May 2024 – May 2025**

After a generally quieter feeling 2024, we hope that 2025 is going to be busier, although currently the picture remains mixed. The shop financial year runs from June to July and so far this year we have had months where we have managed to make a small profit, but also months where we have ended with a small loss, and at the moment the year-to-date figures are lower than we would ideally like.

Overall, we make a profit on sales vs purchases, but there is still work to be done to reduce our overheads, as well as on our pricing, to ensure we remain fair but profitable. We are focusing first on our energy costs, which started with a change of supplier to Octopus Energy last year and continues with the planned installation of solar panels. Following a lengthy period of research and discussions with various companies, we have decided to work with Ipswich based company Greenscape to manage the installation. With this decision made, we now need to find the funding to enable this to happen. The intention is to fund the bulk through one or two national community funds (applications to be submitted this month), with a potential later bid to the Parish Council for any remaining shortfall.

Last spring we were pleased to finally succeed in arranging the repair and resurfacing of the village car park, on behalf of Somersham & District Community Association. This has made a huge difference to our customers, giving the shop a much safer approach, as well as a more presentable and attractive frontage. This work was funded primarily by Babergh Mid Suffolk Community Grants Fund, with the remainder provided by the Parish Council, for which we were very grateful. We are also thankful to District Councillor, Adrienne Marriott, for her recent locality funding for a much-needed replacement ice cream freezer, as well as to Nettlestead Parish Meeting and regular customers for donations towards shop funds.

We feel strongly that it is important our product range caters for all, so we try to find new local and interesting options, while ensuring that we continue to offer basic groceries at affordable prices. Since January, we have been pleased to reintroduce the local tomatoes grown by Suffolk Fresh at their Blakenham greenhouses. As we moved into the 'summer season' last month, we were able to increase the range and variety we stock and happily, even when adding our regular margin, we can sell these for a very reasonable price which, in some cases, even rivals supermarket prices. We have recently introduced a new higher end range of ground coffee, provided by a Somersham-based business, Sun City Coffee, and we have expanded our wine offering by working with the Adnams shop in Hadleigh. In addition, we are selling walking booklets produced by a resident of the village, which have been very well received.

The primary purpose of the shop is as a community hub, and we are pleased that the weekly Meet up Monday and monthly Petrol Heads sessions remain popular and well supported. The Rural Coffee Caravan (RCC) visit every two months, providing information, advice, and guidance to village residents, and we continue to welcome the Suffolk Libraries van every month. We are pleased to continue to support local organisations, such as St Mary's Church, both Somersham School and the PTA, and to offer a Food Bank Collection Point for Ipswich based charity, FIND,

As always during the past year, we have been a collection point for Christian Aid Week and the Poppy Appeal and have supported various fundraising efforts, for example with our own Macmillan coffee morning as well as one of our volunteer's jams, chutneys and seedlings 'sales'. We also hosted the Scouts Christmas Post Box again, which supports their fundraising efforts at the same time as offering an extra service to local people.

We are lucky to have an excellent volunteer team of around 30 regular volunteers, but it can still be tricky to cover the shop's opening hours each week, which we would potentially be interested in extending, so

finding new people to join the team remains a key focus. As you will probably be aware, earlier this year in addition to looking for new volunteers, we also began advertising for a new manager. We hope to find a suitable candidate this year and to ensure a smooth transition with minimal disruption for volunteers and the shop in general.

Everyone involved with Somersham & District Community Shop cares a great deal about the survival of this important resource and we all work hard to ensure a positive future. We hope that the Parish Council appreciates the efforts that are made, and that they will continue to support us wherever possible, through occasional financial support from Parish Council funds, and also regular personal visits and purchases.

## Report to the Parish Council, 2025

The LINK magazine has continued to be produced throughout the year, with double editions in August-September and December-January. While it is primarily a church magazine, it also informs villagers of what is happening throughout the area, and reports on events that have been held. We get articles from the school, local clubs, the community shop as well as Parish Councils, Village Halls and the churches and chapel. The children of Somersham School continue to take up our competition for the Christmas cover picture, which is much more appealing in colour. The front letter spot is taken in alternate issues by our Rector, Revd Dan Harrison, with the other writers being chosen to highlight varying areas of general interest.

The memories of primary school leavers took the front letter spot in July and we hope to be able to do this again at the end of the current academic year.

While we do not aim to make a profit, when the cost of paper & printing goes up we do have to make sure we have enough funds. Advertisers remain our chief source of funding but this year it was also necessary to make a general appeal for donations to combat rising printing costs; the generous response to this from many individuals and some organisations was very encouraging. A small increase in charges, beginning with new advertisers, to bring more into line with other publications, will also help our finances. Each issue, depending on size, currently costs nearly £450. Our current print run totals 800 copies, including a few copies available to visitors in the shop. The LINK is distributed free of charge to every house in Somersham and our 3 neighbouring villages. Additionally there are 19 postal copies, mostly to past residents who are glad of this means of keeping in touch with local events and happy to pay the postage. It is also available on-line.

The 10 magazine distributors in our village (plus more in the others) and editorial team of 6 are all volunteers, who do it to help this community outreach and communication continue into the future.

Kate Dines,  
Chair of committee

## Parish Council AGM 2025 – Report from St. Mary’s Church PCC

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) continues to support Rev. Daniel Harrison in managing and maintaining the Church of England presence in the village, including providing for the spiritual needs of the population and maintaining the historic building. In addition to our regular services the church conducts baptisms, weddings and funeral services when required.

Dan is responsible for 8 parishes in all. As a result, we perhaps don’t see as much of him in Somersham as we would like but his telephone number and email address are included on the back cover of the Link magazine each month so anyone can contact him if they want/need to.

Everyone is welcome at our services and we regularly hold 2 per month; a communion service at 9.30am on the second Sunday and a less formal ‘Family Service’ at 10am on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday. Details are published in the Link magazine. Attendance at the regular services is generally quite low but loyal and enthusiastic. Rather more people attend the ‘big’ services such as Harvest Festival and Carol Service and our Service of Remembrance which we share with the Baptist Church.

In respect of outreach, much of what I reported last year continues to happen. We are particularly pleased that we are still able to visit the school weekly (as ‘Somersham Storytellers’) and share bible stories with the children. We are also still able to support the ‘Lighthouse’ Women’s Refuge and locally hard-pressed families as well as the annual Christian Aid appeal.

In respect of building maintenance, we are currently pre-occupied with the pressing problem of plaster falling from the ceiling of the Chancel. This has led us to move the organ and ‘fence off’ some pews in the area of the damage while we seek to identify the cause and a solution to the problem and obtain funding to help to effect that solution. With little in the way of financial reserves available we need help to tackle this issue and are looking at a number of possible funding sources.

On a more positive note, after a few years of fund raising we now have a water supply to the church. Thanks are particularly due to Christine & Michael Jarrold who organised much of the fund-raising and drove the project through seeking permissions, appointing and overseeing contractors and liaising with Anglian Water.

More generally we are very grateful to people in the village for the support that they give to all of our fund raising activities throughout the year. Even so, we continue to struggle to meet the costs of the day to day running expenses and are once again very grateful to the Parish Council for their generous help towards the cost of maintaining the churchyard. We hope that you will be able to continue this support in the future.

.Steve Dines

30<sup>th</sup> April 2025

## Somersham Baptist Church Parish Council Report 2025

Our Sunday congregation averages 25-30 people, half from the village, half from outside. There are a wide range of ages, from young to old, including two teenagers; we could do with a few more to help them develop within their own peer age group.

In 2024 giving, including Gift Aid was a healthy £42,000, some of which was designated for the refurbishment project, and nearly £4,300 was passed on to other Christian Ministries.

Like many other Churches we use courses produced by the director of Evangelism at All Souls, Langham Place, London. 'Christianity Explored' introduces Jesus, who he is, why he came and what he asks for. 'Life Explored' examines the character of God from Genesis to Revelation and shows in giving us Himself it is the best gift we can ever receive. We have hosted these courses both in the Duke of Marlborough and at the Chapel. Last year we were able to baptise one mature person from the village who has come to believe and joined us in membership.

Last year, the building works were completed and we have a nice shiny new exterior to our buildings and the more environmentally friendly interior that should make it more pleasant in winter (and quieter for our neighbours). The total cost was in the region of £60,000 including the patio works. We have been able to make use of grants and an interest free loan and people have been most generous in their giving. Last year also saw the retirement of our much-loved Pastor, Mark Newcombe. Whilst we are sad to see him leave the church, he will still continue to live in the village and be the friendly calming influence that him and Carolyn have been for the past 28 years. As a church, we are actively seeking a new Pastor to continue the Lord's work in the village and build on the work led by Mark.

Friends and Neighbours (our Ladies' meeting) did suffer from the refurbishment, but now we have settled back and numbers have picked up. Friends and Neighbours generally meet on the second Monday of each month between 7.30pm and 9.30pm

Lunch and Listen has been unaffected by the building work, we regularly get over 12 guests who do not attend church or chapel but who attend for the fellowship and good food on a monthly basis. Again, this is generally the first Thursday of each month, including coffee from 10.30am and lunch at 12.00noon. It is open to all, but please contact Edwin Mayhew to ensure that any dietary needs are catered for. We also have started a Men's Group, who will be meeting on a monthly basis. As it is a new venture, we have not yet settled on a fixed evening, so please use the Link Magazine or the notice board for the next meeting date and details. We are excited to launch this new group to both members and the wider community, and will have fun evenings as well as the opportunity to talk.

We continue to look for mature Christians to start a new children's ministry, and also for mature and gifted Christian workers to join our four church officers in leading the Church.

Stephen R Bullard (Deacon)

# Report 2024/25 for Somersham Parish Council APM

## Somersham & District Community Association (S&DCA)

- S&DCA is an association of groups and individuals from Somersham, Little Blakenham, Nettlestead and Flowton who are interested in the maintenance of the playing field and activities/facilities.
- These villages form our area of benefit.
- We are a registered charity with an established purpose to provide recreational facilities, playgrounds, community centres and other amenities of a similar character for the benefit of the community. We manage the playing field under a Declaration of Trust between Somersham Parish Council and ourselves.
- Our projects and activities are devised, funded and delivered in the interests of social welfare, and with the object of advancing education, furthering health, relieving poverty, distress or sickness by improving the conditions of life of the persons residing within the area of benefit.
- We are proud to be able to provide the community with the opportunity to enjoy sport and leisure both casually and in an organised way.
- Currently organised activity includes youth club, tennis, football (both youth and senior) and cycle speedway.
- We believe the facilities could be used for more organised activity, for example: exercise/running, netball, hockey, cricket (fielding training) creative projects and additional youth and female football.
- The new play equipment has been well received and we have now moved on to a new project with the aim to upgrade our pavilion to provide facilities that comply with current sporting regulations for changing and gender expectations, and to address the needs of the Youth Club and local community.
- With the funding support of the parish council we will soon have an outline plan. A forthcoming stage of the project will be to consult with the community on this design and also to identify how the use of the facilities can be broadened.
- We have made the tidying up of the field boundary a priority this year and we are being assisted by the parish council. Also the care of the local amenity trees surrounding the playing field, including the high-quality hedging on the north-side of the boundary

## Somersham Wheelie Fun Day

- Wheelie Fun Day is the main fundraising activity for the S&DCA, to help us afford the costs of managing the community playing field and sports pavilion.
- The event is planned & organised entirely by volunteers, who support this great day out for Somersham and area villagers and visitors from further afield to enjoy.
- The 2024 event took place on 7th July and despite some dreadful weather we managed income of £5,728.70. After expenses, the net profit was £3,300.71. We were pleased with the resilience of our event model and central to that is our independent funding from our sponsors and the Wheelie Dart Tournament held at the Duke of Marlborough.
- The **2025 event will be held on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> July** from 10am to 10pm.
- Planning is well under way for this year's event on the playing field and we should have a good selection of food & drink, market stalls, games, vintage and classic vehicles, cycle speedway, demonstrations - and of course live music on our stage all day!

Terry Fordham  
Chair, S&DCA  
(11 April 2025)

As the club treasurer I would like to take this opportunity to thank Penny Pearson for establishing Somersham Tennis Club back in 2007, raising the substantial funds for building the tennis courts and more recently the tennis club house.

When Penny sadly passed away in November last year, plans were underway to clean and paint the tennis courts, this work has recently been completed and should preserve the courts for many years to come. Thanks is also due to the Parish Council for funding the restoration work, and Cllrs James Caston and Steve Wright in particular, who came to the rescue providing gallons of water to enable the deep clean.

Thank you to Cllr Peter Jousiffe who has resumed grounds maintenance duties around the tennis courts. As we start to work more closely with the Community Association it is hoped that the playing field contactors can also assist with some of the grounds maintenance around the tennis club house.

A small committee has been formed to continue the tennis club. Unfortunately, due to personal reasons, one of the committee members is not able to lead the tennis lottery as was hoped. Talks are therefore underway to possibly develop the lottery as a larger Community Association lottery.

The Junior Tennis sessions will restart on 10<sup>th</sup> May. Last year saw a great turnout each week, and this has enabled the sessions to be split into two age groups. John Tallent will continue as the tennis coach this year, but he is due to retire from coaching at the end of 2025 and a new coach will need to be found. Thank you to Wendy Laughlin for producing the annual tennis club accounts once again, for year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

As was Penny's wish, the tennis courts will continue to be free for all to use, but any donations are gratefully received. There is a QR code on the court gate linking to a tennis club Just Giving page.

Emma Lister has provided details of a Sport England fund, and we will complete an application to try and secure some financial assistance.

John Hutchinson  
([hutchinson.john@live.co.uk](mailto:hutchinson.john@live.co.uk))

5 May 2025

## **Annual Report for Somersham F.C.**

The 2024/25 season will go down in the history books as record breaking, but is bittersweet all the same. The youth team (the Dukes) have continued to make good progress following promotion last season. The season has brought it challenges though with the goalkeeper being out for a large part, and the loss of two players to higher divisions. The team has pushed on nevertheless, finishing a very respectable mid-table. Thanks again to Steve and the team for all their hard work.

The Veteran's season has been difficult following promotion to Division 1. The fourth consecutive promotion has been one too many with the standard and depth of the squads in Division 1 proving beyond the reach of our aging veterans. A bottom place finish will see the team back in Division 2 next season, which is more like home (providing we see some new additions to replace aging squad members).

Regrettably, we had to fold the Reserve Adult Men's team before the start of the season due to insufficient player numbers. Grass roots football just doesn't seem to have the appeal it once did! We were concerned about the impact this could have on the First team, but these concerns have been unfounded. I'm pleased to inform you that at the time of writing the team has already secured promotion to the Senior Division of the Suffolk & Ipswich League (a first in the club's history). The team is currently top on the same points as second place but with a much better goal difference. The team will almost certainly be crowned champions on 6 May! This is a fantastic achievement. The club is punching well above its weight, bearing in mind the size of the village and player catchment.

I used the term bittersweet in my opening sentence and that refers to the fact that the club unfortunately is not able to progress to the Senior Division. The pitch gradient and facilities are not up to standard and whereas work is afoot to address the latter, the former is not something we can change. The club has therefore been forced to accept that it cannot progress higher. The committee has decided not to hold the first team players back and is supporting the managers to find another club where the team can hopefully play in the Senior League next season. Congratulations to Tom Winder and his players for their record-breaking season. We wish them every success in the future and will cherish the memories of this season. At the time of writing, it is looking likely there will not be an Adult Men's team next season. The Dukes and Veteran's teams will hopefully continue, and the committee sits ready to welcome anyone who wishes to start a new Adult Men's team.

A huge thanks goes out to those that give us their time to volunteer at the club. We also thank the Parish Council for its continued support by paying for pitch maintenance.

The Dukes play on Saturday mornings. The Veterans play every third Sunday afternoon. Please come along and support if you're at a loose end.

Darren Luck  
Treasurer  
Somersham F.C.

## Somersham Primary School Report to the Parish Council – Year to Date

I am pleased to provide an update on Somersham Primary School's progress and developments over the academic year to date.

This year has marked a significant period of transition and growth for our school. As of September, I was appointed Head of School—initially in an interim capacity—and I am now pleased to have taken on the role full-time. This change in leadership came as part of a broader transitional phase within the leadership of our Federation with Bramford CEVC Primary School.

Over this Summer term, Somersham and Bramford are being supported by two interim Executive Headteachers as we await the arrival of our newly appointed Executive Head of the Federation, who will officially begin their role in September 2025. Despite the ongoing changes, the leadership team—under both myself and the previous Executive Head, Mr. Palmer—has worked diligently to ensure consistency and high standards across all areas of school life.

A key milestone this year was our OFSTED inspection, which took place towards the end of the Spring term. We are delighted to report that Somersham Primary successfully retained its 'Good' rating. This outcome is a testament to the resilience, professionalism, and dedication of our staff and the strength of our school community.

Somersham Primary continues to be a vibrant and thriving learning environment. Our partnership with Bramford CEVC has gone from strength to strength, supported by a range of collaborative initiatives as part of our Federation's 'REAL Life Curriculum'. Highlights include joint school trips to each other's schools, as well as visits to places of local interest such as the Suffolk Fresh greenhouses. During this particular visit, Key Stage children gained valuable insights into sustainable agriculture, including the use of bees in tomato production.

We have also had the privilege of welcoming a variety of inspiring visitors to the school this year. These have included STEM Ambassadors, celebrated authors, and accomplished athletes, all of whom have enriched the children's learning experiences and aspirations.

As we look ahead, Somersham Primary School is committed to building on this year's successes. We aim to continue strengthening our federation ties, enriching our curriculum, and providing exceptional opportunities for all our pupils.

Thank you for your continued support of our school.

Best Regards  
Alastair Becker

Head of School  
Somersham Primary School