Councillor Report

Cllr Julia Ewart

East Suffolk Councillor for Kelsale & Yoxford Ward

November – December 2026

The period from late October through to November has been a particularly busy one at East Suffolk Council, with significant activity across environmental services, planning, scrutiny, community resilience and engagement with local residents. Alongside the day-to-day work of supporting constituents and attending parish meetings, I have continued to represent the interests of Kelsale & Yoxford Ward residents through Council meetings, scrutiny panels and community events.

Major Incidents, Community Resilience and Emergency Planning

One of the most informative meetings I attended during this period was the scrutiny review examining Suffolk's response to major incidents, including the flooding associated with Storm Babet and the Dunwich Heath wildfire.

Although the resulting recommendations remain subject to formal approval, the discussion provided valuable lessons regarding emergency preparedness, community resilience and partnership working. Particular attention was given to the experiences of Westleton and Dunwich, where residents, volunteers, businesses and public services demonstrated remarkable resilience and community spirit during extremely challenging circumstances.

The concept of becoming **"Community Ready"** featured heavily throughout the discussions. Strong local leadership, volunteer networks, effective communication and accessible community facilities were all identified as factors which helped support those affected during the Dunwich Heath fire.

Residents provided accommodation for displaced families, local businesses supplied food and essential provisions, and volunteers coordinated support arrangements over several days. These examples demonstrated the enormous value of preparation, organisation and community spirit.

The review reinforced the importance of:

- Parish Emergency Plans.
- Up-to-date local contact lists.
- Identifying vulnerable residents.

- Community volunteer networks.
- Accessible community facilities.
- Knowledge of key emergency contacts.

Particular importance should be attached to maintaining current contact details for:

- The Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU).
- Suffolk Resilience Forum.
- Emergency Services.
- Utility Providers.
- Community volunteers and local support networks.
- Community resilience groups.

Whilst the Committee's recommendations are yet to be formally adopted, there is already broad recognition that Suffolk must continue to strengthen resilience arrangements. Discussions are taking place with town and parish councils to encourage emergency planning, identify local skills and resources and share best practice.

I also greatly enjoyed hearing from Jon Lacey, Chief Fire Officer of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service. His presentation highlighted both the professionalism of the service and the increasing challenges posed by flooding, severe weather and wildfires. It also provided an opportunity to acknowledge his distinguished service to Suffolk ahead of his retirement. Taking over leadership of the service will be Henry Griffin, currently Deputy Chief Fire Officer, whose appointment brings continuity and considerable experience at an important time for resilience planning.

Looking ahead, I would like to see every parish within the ward either establish or maintain an up-to-date Community Emergency Plan. The flooding events of 2013, together with more recent incidents, demonstrate why preparation and resilience remain so important.

Resilience is not simply about responding to emergencies. It is about ensuring communities are connected, organised, informed and prepared to support one another when challenges arise.

Funding Opportunities and Community Resilience

I would encourage parish councils, village organisations and community groups to remain alert to the various funding opportunities that become available throughout the year.

District Councillors are often aware of grants, community funds and partnership opportunities that may not be widely publicised and can provide valuable support when developing local projects. I would therefore encourage parish councils and community groups to maintain regular dialogue with their District Councillor when exploring opportunities – I will be sharing the info and links in the next few weeks as they become available.

At present, discussions are taking place regarding potential resilience-related funding opportunities through East Suffolk Council. These opportunities are particularly important because they may help communities strengthen local emergency preparedness and develop practical resilience measures.

One area I am especially keen to explore is how available funding might support a **Rest Centre approach** to community resilience. In the event of major flooding, prolonged power outages, telecommunications failures, severe weather events or other emergencies, communities often require a suitable location from which support can be coordinated and vulnerable residents assisted.

A well-prepared Rest Centre could provide:

- Emergency power generation.
- Alternative communications facilities.
- Welfare and support services.
- An information and coordination hub.
- Space for emergency responders and volunteers.
- Temporary support for vulnerable residents.
- Whole-community support during prolonged disruption.

The experiences of recent major incidents have shown the value of local preparedness and community leadership. Increasingly, resilience is about ensuring that communities have the ability to support themselves during the critical early stages of an incident before wider assistance arrives.

Our aspiration should be simple: every community should feel confident that, should an emergency occur, there is a clear plan, trusted local contacts, a suitable location from which to operate and the resources necessary to support residents when they are needed most.

Better Recycling Service Roll-Out

The Better Recycling Service has continued to attract considerable attention across East Suffolk and was the subject of detailed examination by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during November.

Residents wishing to understand the issues in greater detail can view the public discussion through East Suffolk Council's webcast arrangements. The Committee heard evidence regarding the implementation of the scheme and the operational challenges experienced following its introduction.

From my perspective, a number of concerns became apparent during the meeting. In particular, it was not always clear where ultimate responsibility for the programme sat, nor who held overall ownership of the rollout from inception through to delivery. Whilst operational matters were discussed at length, several questions remain regarding project governance and oversight.

There were clearly lessons to be learned from what has been, for many residents, a difficult and frustrating transition. At times, the scrutiny session made for uncomfortable viewing as members sought answers regarding service performance, missed collections and the impact on local residents.

One area that received relatively little attention during the scrutiny session was the overall financial cost of delivering the Better Recycling programme and the subsequent recovery measures required to stabilise the service. Residents are entitled to understand not only what went wrong but also the full financial implications.

For that reason, at the forthcoming Full Council meeting on **25 November 2026**, I will be asking **Councillor Vince Langdon-Morris**, Cabinet Member for Environment, for an update on the total cost of delivering the Better Recycling programme, including any additional expenditure incurred through implementation difficulties and subsequent recovery measures.

In addition, members attended a separate briefing with **East Suffolk Services Limited (ESSL)**, the arm's-length company responsible for providing waste collection services on behalf of East Suffolk Council. This briefing was held in private and therefore no public webcast or recording is available. However, it provided councillors with an opportunity to question those responsible for service delivery directly and gain a broader understanding of the challenges faced and the remedial actions currently underway.

Whilst the environmental ambitions underpinning Better Recycling are widely supported, residents rightly expect a reliable and effective service. Continued scrutiny

will therefore remain essential in ensuring lessons are learned and improvements delivered. The youtube link for the public is: East Suffolk Council - YouTube

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Seasonal Waste Collections

With regard to the seasonal waste collections, I have sought clarification regarding any changes to collection schedules and how residents will be informed.

I have been advised that residents should monitor the Council's online services and app-based updates as the primary means by which collection information and service changes will be communicated. I have also been informed that a small number of residents who are unable to access digital services will continue to receive hard-copy notifications where appropriate.

Whilst digital updates allow information to be shared quickly, I appreciate that not everyone relies upon online communication. I would therefore encourage residents who subscribe to the service to check regularly for collection updates and service information during the winter period. Here is a link: East Suffolk app | East Suffolk Council

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Community Bulb Giveaway and Environmental Projects

Many residents will have seen or participated in local bulb planting initiatives taking place across East Suffolk.

These projects do far more than simply brighten our villages and open spaces. They help support pollinators, encourage biodiversity and contribute towards creating attractive public environments that residents can enjoy throughout the year.

The enthusiasm shown by volunteers, parish councils and community groups demonstrates a growing commitment to environmental stewardship across the district. Often, it is these small-scale projects that make a significant contribution to both the appearance of our communities and the health of our local environment.

The link with an article for parish clerks to use is here: Thousands of spring bulbs to be given to East Suffolk communities | East Suffolk Council

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East Suffolk Council Community Cake Off

On **Saturday 14 November**, I was pleased to host East Suffolk Council's **Community Cake Off** at the Assembly Rooms in Peasenhall for residents and community representatives from across the Kelsale & Yoxford Ward.

Whilst attendance was not as high as we had originally hoped, the event was well supported by members of Peasenhall Parish Council and representatives from neighbouring villages. The smaller gathering allowed for constructive conversations and provided an opportunity to discuss local issues in greater depth.

A particular benefit of the event was the opportunity for residents and parish representatives to speak directly with representatives involved in resilience planning and community preparedness. Having attended the scrutiny discussions on major incidents only days earlier, it was particularly valuable to continue those conversations at a local level.

The event reinforced the importance of building strong local relationships before emergencies arise. Community resilience is not simply about plans held by public bodies. It is about ensuring residents, volunteers, parish councils and local organisations understand how they can work together when challenges occur.

Whilst the Community Cake Off was undoubtedly an enjoyable social occasion, it also demonstrated the value of bringing people together to share knowledge, discuss concerns and strengthen the networks that support our communities during difficult times.

I would like to thank everyone who attended and contributed towards what proved to be a worthwhile and informative afternoon. You know who you are!

Planning and the Local Planning Authority

Planning remains one of the most significant responsibilities of East Suffolk Council as the Local Planning Authority. Decisions made through the planning process have long-term consequences for our communities, affecting everything from housing and infrastructure to the character and sustainability of our villages.

Disappointingly, following a vote in October, a number of the democratic mechanisms previously available ensure planning applications went to a committee for public debate and determination were removed. As a result, a greater number of planning applications will now be determined under delegated powers by planning officers rather than by elected members sitting in public committee. Frustratingly they have also collapsed the committees being in the North and South to being joint.

This sees local issues being bypassed as those responding may now know the area quite as well.

This change places both district councillors and parish councils in a more challenging position when seeking to influence planning outcomes. Whilst consultation remains an important part of the process, there are now fewer opportunities for applications to be publicly debated by elected representatives.

For that reason, I would strongly encourage every parish council to engage with planning applications from the earliest possible stage. Where a proposal affects your community, it is increasingly important to ensure that any concerns, recommendations and suggested planning conditions are submitted from the outset.

The reality is that many planning applications will be approved unless there are clear and robust planning policy grounds to justify refusal. Given this, communities should focus not only on whether they support or object to a proposal, but also on the conditions under which any development may proceed.

Matters such as landscaping, drainage, biodiversity measures, construction management plans, lighting, noise mitigation, traffic movements and future site management can all have a significant impact on how a development affects local residents.

I therefore strongly recommend that parish councils consider carefully, from the very beginning, what protections and conditions they wish to see attached to applications within their parish. Keep eye open when it comes to the 'calls for sites' because with fewer opportunities for later intervention, it is increasingly important that the needs of local communities are clearly articulated from the outset and reflected in the planning process wherever possible.

Supporting Residents Across the Ward – Could you Be A Councillor?

Alongside formal Council duties, a significant proportion of my time continues to be spent assisting residents with local concerns, attending parish meetings, supporting community organisations and working with officers to resolve issues raised by constituents.

Whether the matter relates to planning, environmental concerns, housing, open spaces, community facilities or local services, I remain committed to ensuring that residents of Kelsale & Yoxford Ward receive effective representation and support.

The role of a district councillor extends beyond attendance at committee meetings. Much of the work takes place behind the scenes, helping residents navigate council

services, raising concerns with officers and partners and ensuring that local voices are heard within the decision-making process. If you would like to be a councillor, why not check out the web page for more information? Become a councillor | East Suffolk Council

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Looking Ahead

As we move further into the winter period, key priorities will include:

- Strengthening community resilience and emergency preparedness.
- Supporting parish councils in developing and maintaining Community Emergency Plans.
- Exploring resilience funding opportunities and Rest Centre proposals.
- Continuing scrutiny of the Better Recycling Service and its associated costs.
- Monitoring planning reform and advocating for local democratic involvement.
- Supporting environmental improvement projects and biodiversity initiatives.
- Continuing to represent the interests of residents across Kelsale & Yoxford Ward.

As always, if you have any concerns, questions or matters you would like to discuss, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

PLEASE NOTE In future **I will be writing a report every other month** as so many of the parishes only sit 6 times a year and this sees the get much more information.

Wishing everyone a good Christmas and a healthy 2027 when we get there!

Best wishes

Cllr Julia Ewart

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