

Report for Nedging PC by County Councillor Robert Lindsay 12.11.24

Road closure signs - "Tavern Street"

Following complaints I have asked that the signs on Bildeston High Street saying "road closed Tavern Street" are altered to make it plain the closure is in Stowmarket. Hopefully this will be done v shortly. Apparently Highways can not insist that utilities, as a matter of course, state the location of the closure in their roadwork signage.

White lines Newberry Farmhouse, Bildeston High Street

I am pleased to see the new road markings, funded from my locality budget, have been done to try to stop lorries hitting the medieval porch at this location. The scheme was arrived at after talks and meeting with myself, the home owners and Highways as the most cost effective potential solution. Speaking personally it certainly feels like the sudden change in markings, particularly driving south, does make one pay more attention and slow somewhat as you come past the porch. I hope it will have an effect.

Flooding prevention – Storm Babet a year on.

The county's cabinet on November 5th allocated an extra £1.5m to deliver flood prevention work it has indentified in the parish-based investigations it has by law to conduct (seven out of an estimated 50 total investigations dones so far).

It is asking for another £20million from government. They had a ten year backlog even before Babet of drainage work that needed to b done.

Separately, cabinet in October agreed to contribute £2m to a scheme to protect Benacre, south of Lowestoft. The Environment Agency is contributing £30m and Sizewell C £27m. The scheme will protect the A12 with a bank but will allow the valley, drained years ago, to be reflooded by the sea, creating hundreds of acres of saltmarsh habitat which will also act as a powerful carbon sink.

Warm Homes

The council announced a new £3m fund for interest-free loans to home owners wishing to undertake energy efficiency upgrades such as insulation, solar panels, batteries, glazing, or heat pumps. The loans (up to £15,000) to be repaid over a maximum of seven years at 0% interest. The scheme will be open to homeowners across Suffolk from November, but you can register your interest now at <https://www.lendology.org.uk/warm-home-suffolk-loan>. Unlike the earlier Warm Homes grants, which failed to get adequate take up, these loans are not means tested.

Pavement safety and preventing trips and falls

At Council on 17 October my political group brought forward a motion that the county review its priorities for repairing pavement defects in order to ensure quicker interventions where tripping incidents are most likely. Currently, if there is a difference in the surface level of the footway of 20mm or more, this will be repaired, but we argued that in areas of high footfall or where a trip or fall had been recorded, this threshold was too high. Most members of the public who trip or fall are over 65, and it would make sense for the repair policy to be more flexible. The administration at the council voted down our motion. They claimed a

review of highways processes was being undertaken. Our group will try our best to input into this. My feeling is that there ought also to be some flexibility over the maximum width of pavement that highways will clear of encroaching vegetation – currently no more than 50cm.

Some devolution after all

After the new Government scrapped Suffolk's plan for devolution, it is now "exploring" whether to put the county in charge of some £9.4million a year (60% of the £16m a year on offer in the original devolution deal) to have control of adult education schemes. That includes funding the three Suffolk further education colleges – currently directly funded by central Government. A cabinet report is recommending the council take up the offer of an annual "Adult Skills Fund" and officers have drawn up a "Strategic Skills Plan".

NB Part of this plan identifies that Babergh residents have the lowest median annual pay of any district in Suffolk (£30,901) and that unlike other Suffolk areas, that median rate fell from 2021 to 2022. Babergh also has the lowest proportion of adults with higher education certificate or above qualifications (equivalent to first year of a degree). The figure is 30.6%, compared to 37% for and 48% nationally.