

Annual Report for Nedging PC by County Councillor Robert Lindsay 12.5.25

Locality and Highways discretionary budget spending.

I have now served eight years as a county councillor here – that is two four year terms, the last of which was supposed to come to an end on May 1st with another election. However, the Government and county administration have chosen to cancel that election leaving me and other county councillors in post for an undetermined amount of time, probably until the county council is abolished in 2028.

I had used up my locality budget for the past year and highways budget which for the past four financial years. However, I have been allotted an annual budget for both from April 1, of £6k for each..

My discretionary spending in the year of relevance to Nedging includes £800 for the village hall roof.

Motions during the year

Of note was my Green, LibDem and Independent group's motion in October to ask for a cross party panel of councillors to look at lowering the bar to intervening for pavement repair (currently they will not repair if the pavement is less than 2cm above the level). The administration voted this down but promised that they would review the criteria they used. We have fed in our request but we have yet to hear whether they will change things.

In December 2024 We also got unanimous approval for a motion calling on the government to adopt policies of prioritising "roofs before rural" when it comes to the roll out of panels. There is no real reason why solar panels can not be made compulsory in new builds and planning barriers to solar on existing rooftops can be eased.

A daily bus between Hadleigh and Stowmarket?

I was pleased to see that the county council are looking again at funding for a daily scheduled bus between Hadleigh and Stowmarket, after rejecting applications that Hitcham, Bildeston and Finborough parish councils made the year before. It makes no sense that there is no regular bus that can get for example students or employees to our mainline train station at peak times. I have been told that if the current operator (HCT) does not want to run the service, the council can put it to tender.

Local Government centralisation – Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk and scrapping local districts and county council

It is becoming clear that the Mayoral tier of government will add a new layer of costs, likely eliminating any hoped for savings from merging district and county councils. The election for the Mayor of Norfolk and Suffolk will happen in May 2026.

The current schedule is for elections for a "shadow" unitary councillors to be elected in May 2027 and the new unitary council(s) will commence May 2028, at which time county and district councils will dissolve. But there are doubts whether the Govt can meet this timetable. Districts are asking for two and preferably three unitaries in Suffolk, the county council wants one. Larger does not necessarily mean cheaper, since many services – such as bin emptying – are already delivered by district councils collaborating in partnership and other services eg public toilet maintenance

- are often more cheaply serviced using local contractors and more efficiently provided by those staff and councillors with more local knowledge.

Suffolk Libraries to be brought in house

On Tuesday 18th March the county's cabinet approved a recommendation to take the Suffolk Library Service in house after they failed to agree a renewal of the contract with the charity that has been running them since 2012. There were no other bidders.

Our group attempted to "call in" the decision – giving it another chance to be scrutinised at the scrutiny committee but our call in and that of the Labour group was rejected.

Council Budget 2025-26

In February 2025, the council budget for the 2025-26 year included approved the maximum rise in council tax of 4.99%, including the 2% social care precept for adult care.

The budget does not include borrowing from the council's reserves, which was a concern last year. Instead, it relies on delivering £28.4m of savings across many council services. The Schools Grant, SEND and adult social care are providing much cost pressure.

The council is also forecasting that in the next few years, it will have budget 'gaps' that will only grow: £33.1m for 2026-27, and £96.2m in 2028-29.