

THE PARISH OF HEPWORTH

NOTICE OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

**Thursday 21 May 2026 at 7.00 pm
at Hepworth Pavilion.**

AGENDA

1. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held 16 May 2025
2. Annual report from the Chairman of the Parish Council
3. Parish Council accounts
4. Reports:
 - a) Parochial Church Council
 - b) County Councillor
 - c) District Councillor
 - d) Hepworth Recreation Ground (Hepworth Pavilion)
 - e) Hepworth Charities
 - f) Hepworth Voices
 - g) Hepworth Herald
 - h) Community Speed Watch and Team Hepworth
 - i) Art Club
5. Open Forum

The Parish Meeting is an opportunity for everyone to hear what has been happening during the year. It is also an opportunity for residents to express their views on any matter pertaining to the village.

Please make every effort to attend—your support is important.

Garry Bloomfield
Chairman of Hepworth Parish Council
14 May 2026

ITEM 1

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HEPWORTH PAVILION
THURSDAY 15 MAY 2025
7.00 PM

PRESENT:

Councillor Garry Bloomfield (GB) (Chair)
Councillor Marjorie MacPherson (MM)
Councillor Perry Penn (PP)
Councillor Nicholas Bennett (NB)
Richard Hinton (RH) (SpeedWatch)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Andy Osman (Parish Clerk) (AO)

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

It was agreed the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 16 May 24 be accepted as a record of that meeting.

2. REPORT FROM PARISH COUNCIL CHAIR

GB summarised the key points from his report that had been pre-circulated, copy attached.

3. PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTS

A copy of the unaudited Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2025 had been pre-circulated. AO summarised the significant areas and confirmed these had now been audited, copy attached.

4. VILLAGE REPORTS

- a. District Report. The annual report by District Cllr Bull had been pre-circulated, copy attached.
- b. Hepworth Pavilion and Recreation Ground. MM reported the following:
 - Still a challenge to secure volunteers to serve on the committee but enough people came forward at the last AGM to allow the committee to continue and for the lease to be extended.
 - Committee looking at improvements to the hall floor, kitchen and toilet areas.
 - A new cooker and tea urn has recently been installed after a locality grant from District Cllr Bull.
- c. Community Speedwatch. RH indicated that the team membership is stable at 6 but new members are always welcome. Speedwatch activity has shown that there continue to be a small number of persistent speeders and those whose speed has

drifted upwards but who react to the visible SpeedWatch presence. The Speed Indicating Device on Barningham Rd was currently broken but is due to be fixed shortly.

5. PUBLIC FORUM

None

The meeting closed at 7.28pm.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Andy Osman', written in a cursive style.

Andy Osman
Parish Clerk
22 May 2025

CHAIRMANS REPORT – HEPWORTH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING MAY 2025

The last 12 months has again had the continuity of having the same Councillors and Clerk as the previous year, but it would be helpful if we could find new councillors that would allow us to get back to our maximum number.

We still have two vacancies for Councillors, so if anyone knows someone who would enjoy the challenge of helping the village by being part of the Council then please ask them to contact the Parish Clerk.

I would like to thank all the councillors for their help this year and to Nick for supporting me in his role as Vice Chair. I would like to thank Carol and Joanna for their help and support over the last 12 months, also to Perry for his work as Tree Warden and to the Speed Watch Team for continuing to encourage drivers to keep to the speed limits and to make the village safer. Thanks also to Neel for continuing to produce the Hepworth Herald, and for all the people that distribute it within the village, also to Neel for ensuring both the Speed indicators Devices are working in the village, and that the data is downloaded and reported to us, I believe this also helps to encourage drivers to respect the 30mph limit through the village.

I would like to thank Andy, our Parish Clerk, for his help and guidance in the last 12 months, it certainly has been another busy year.

It seems that most of our time over the last 12 months has been spent discussing various planning applications. Jaynic decided not to appeal the “refused” application and subsequently are working on a new Master Plan, which I suspect we will see presented to us in the next 12 months.

Due to the refused Jaynic application, Equation have not progressed with their original application, but they did apply for open storage on 3 areas within their site. The Parish Council, and residents, had concerns regarding this application, especially with the 15 metres height that was requested. Again, this went to the Development Committee, and we managed, with the help of Carol, to restrict heights to something more reasonable.

Outside the Parish Council meetings, councillors have also had discussions about the best way to support the residents' objections to the Equation application, and their concerns regarding the Glamping Pod application in Church Lane. I must thank Nick and a resident of Hepworth who has helped put our comments together for councillors to agree to the submissions sent to West Suffolk Council.

Another major concern for the residents of Hepworth, was the change to the bus service in the village, which left the village with no buses going through the Street. With help from Joanna and Louise, and with Bardwell Parish Council fronting the “Save the Buses” campaign, a new service has been agreed and financed until the end of 2025. Leaflets were distributed to all Hepworth residents to encourage use of the new service; this was to show the authorities that there is need for it in the village.

Over the last 12 months we have been involved with the following:

Village Events Notice Board

Agreeing a new Extended Lease with the Hepworth Recreation Ground Management Committee

New Street Light near the Village Sign.

The resurfacing of Bury Weston Lane – still ongoing.

The next 12 months we will be involved with the following:

Any new Jaynic Masterplan

Monitoring of the Equation development, and other developments within the village.

Continuing to support the current bus service to ensure it continues to operate through the village.

To look at the possibility of installing a new bus shelter in a central part of the village.

To ensure the resurfacing of Bury Weston Lane is completed.

Garry Bloomfield

Chair Hepworth Parish Council

HEPWORTH Parish Council

Annual statement for period ending 31 March 2025

	Year 2023/24		Year 2024/25
Income			
	7,855	Precept	7,855
	3,225	Grants	-
	29	Bank interest	103
	1	Rent	1
	125	Sundry	-
	-	VAT	24
	11,235	Total Receipts	7,983
Expenditure			
	3,456	Clerks fees	3,677
	508	Expenses	454
	90	Professional fees	125
	441	Insurance	447
	333	Subscriptions	309
	725	Donations / Sect 137	625
	82	Election costs	-
	370	Village Hall Hire	288
	18	Projects	2,451
	30	Training	-
	4,061	Village Maintainace	18
	198	Events	-
	40	Village website	40
	14	VAT	499
	7,000	Sundry	-
	17,366	Total Payments	8,932
<u>Bank reconciliation 01.04.24 to 31.03.25</u>			
Balances at 1 April 2024		£	£
Bank current account		4,139	
Less unrepresented cheques		0	
Bank savings account		<u>7,000</u>	11,139
Plus income			<u>7,983</u>
			19,123
Less expenditure			8,932
BALANCES AT 31 MARCH 2025			<u>10,191</u>
Balance as per bank statement on 31 March 2025			
		Ac No	£
Current Account	Barclays	30469823	3,191
Savings Account	Barclays	53501957	7,000
			<u>10,191</u>
Prepared by	Andy Osman	on	02-Apr-25

WEST SUFFOLK COUNCIL HEPWORTH ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2024/25

In May this year I will have been your councillor for ten years. I cannot believe how quickly those years have gone. We have seen a lot of changes, generally for the better in that time and more very significant ones are on the horizon.

COMMITTEE WORK

I am still on the Development Control and Licensing Committees, as well as the Constitution Review Group, the Environmental and Sustainability Working Group and the Grant Working Party of which I am Vice Chair.

The Grant Working Party considers all the applications which are received for funding which is available under the Council's Thriving Communities Scheme (formerly Community Chest) which offers grants towards local initiatives that support the health and wellbeing of West Suffolk residents. This year some 76 applications were received totalling £964,000. Monies available amounted to just under £267,000 so the working party had the job of sifting the applications and making some difficult decisions. Examples of this year's successful applicants include Steel Bones, Haverhill Men's Shed, Our Special Friends, Suffolk Accident and Rescue and the Rural Coffee Caravan. Very often we are able with the help of officers to direct the unsuccessful applicants to alternate funding sources.

The Environmental and Sustainability Working Group meets quarterly and its remit is essentially to monitor the progress of work that the Council is doing in this area and to suggest and consider new initiatives. Our current workstreams include Biodiversity, Communities and Communications, Housing and Planning and Regulatory. One of the initiatives to come out of this working group is the trial introduction of Reverse Vending Machines which you may have read about in the press. We are the first council to introduce them and other councils are now showing an interest.

The Licensing Committee's most recent work has been to carry out reviews of our Street Trading Policy and Taxi Fares. In addition I have sat on a number of sub-committees which have been convened to look at licensing applications where there have been objections or possible breaches of the licensing conditions to consider whether a license should be granted or refused or where there have been breaches of licensing regulations the license needs to be revoked. Recently we considered and revoked an alcohol licence for a restaurant where the Immigration Authority brought to our attention breaches in relation to the employment of illegal immigrants.

LOCALITY BUDGET AND FUNDING

From a ward point of view I have been able to support a variety of local initiatives from my Locality Budget. This funding has for example among other things enabled the purchase of:

- Sound equipment by a history group;
- Replacement kitchen equipment for a bowls club;
- A new screen for a cinema group.
- Improvements to a village hall access;
- Way sign posts for Knettishall Heath.

Other projects in the pipe line for funding in the coming year include: defibrillation signage; renovation of a war memorial; purchase of a VAS; installation of a village gateway.

UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

This scheme with monies provided by Government is administered by West Suffolk Council and has supported a variety of projects in West Suffolk including:

Hopton Bowls Club - to help improve the energy efficiency of the new clubhouse.

Abbeycroft - for in school and after school family park cooking sessions. The 12 session programme across nine West Suffolk schools will aim to give families the confidence and skills to cook healthy food on a budget.

BUDGET

The 2025 to 2026 budget was presented to the February Council Meeting and the planned average Band D Council Tax level was confirmed as £203.67, this represents an average Band D weekly increase of just 11 pence (£5.85 or 2.96% for the year). Over 70 per cent of our residents are in Bands A to C so they will actually see a lower increase (£3.90 extra per year for Band A, £4.55 extra per year for Band B and £5.20 extra per year for Band C).

Income from Council Tax is split with 77% going to Suffolk County Council, 13% to the Police and Crime Commissioner and 10% to West Suffolk Council. The 10% received by West Suffolk Council represents only 20% their overall income with the other 80% being made up from other income sources and cost savings.

Council also agreed to a further one-year extension to the West Suffolk Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS). The maximum reduction on Council Tax paid by LCTRS claimants, from 1 April 2025, will therefore remain at up to 100 per cent. The proposal is highly targeted to reach those who are already on means-tested benefits, many of whom are working, and has low administrative cost. This is expected to benefit around 4,700 residents.

LOCAL PLAN

No report over the last few years would be complete without a mention of the Local Plan. We are really on the home straight now. The public examination of the plan has taken place and officers have now completed their responses to issues raised in the inspectors report. The plan should hopefully then be adopted in July.

SAVE OUR BUSES

As you are aware a group of parish councils whose residents were affected by the proposed Simonds bus route cuts formed a task force, Save Our buses, to work with Simonds to see what could be done. Having attended a number of the Group's meetings I am aware of how hard they have worked with good results although there is still more work for them to do and they are now negotiating for some extra routes on a Saturday and campaigning to encourage people to use the buses.

Recognising the vital importance of rural bus services the West Suffolk Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committee had as an important agenda item: "Review of Rural Bus Services in West Suffolk at its December meeting which was held in Stanton to make it more accessible for villages most affected. The ensuing discussion involved evidence from Suffolk County Council, commercial bus companies, the task force and other relevant organisations. As a result of this meeting the Audit and Scrutiny committee have set up a West Suffolk Bus Working Party. Input from this will help committee members debate the current and future shape of rural bus services in West Suffolk and make appropriate recommendations to Cabinet.

WEST SUFFOLK COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Strategic Priorities, working across West Suffolk, are to support the district to flourish by focusing on the delivery of: affordable, available and decent homes; environmental resilience; sustainable growth and thriving communities.

Current initiatives include:

Solar for Business

WSC have entered into an agreement with Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils to offer companies in their area access to our successful Solar for Business initiative. West Suffolk Council will retain the income from any projects delivered in their areas and, of course, the scheme remains open to West Suffolk businesses.

This initiative allows more Businesses to reduce their carbon emissions and save money on energy bills by signing up to have solar panels provided and installed on their premises, for free. Electricity generated by the panels is then sold to the business at a rate lower than their current tariff and help reduce energy bills. Solar for Business has been running successfully in West Suffolk for nine years – helping more than a hundred companies to save a total of around £700,000 and 2,000 tonnes in harmful CO₂ emissions per year. This pilot is a great example of councils working together and using local knowledge and expertise to deliver initiatives tailored for local businesses. It also is part of our strategic priority for sustainable growth and environmental resilience.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

This Strategy (LNRS) which WSC is consulting on, identifies priorities and actions for restoring and enhancing nature across the county. It was created in collaboration with landowners and farmers, conservation experts and local communities. The LNRS aims to play a crucial role in reversing biodiversity loss, helping to adapt to a changing climate and ensuring sustainable land use that benefits people and wildlife. The strategy was developed in partnership with Norfolk under the Norfolk and Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership. Across the country 48 LNRS's are being created, together they will form a national framework for nature recovery. The LNRS won't impose changes, they are a guide for land managers, developers and planners to use when making decisions about what to do with land and indeed offer multiple options for some of the mapped sites. It will however be an important source of evidence for planners when considering the siting and nature of developments. It will also provide evidence for the creation of new legally protected nature reserves but should not hamper nature recovery work from happening in places not specifically prioritised.

Private Landlords

Private landlords play an important and integral role in how we collectively house our communities. There have been lots of scary headlines about The Renters Rights Bill which is expected to be passed this summer and, amongst other things, brings an end to Section 21 'no fault' evictions.

The Government say the move will give renters much greater security and stability so they can stay in their homes for longer, build lives in their communities, and avoid the risk of homelessness. However there are some private landlords who are worried about the changes and WSC is helping in several ways.

We are offering a no-fee lettings service and guaranteed rent to private sector landlords and lettings agents with properties to let. This includes a deposit bond for up to six weeks' worth of rent and free regular property inspections to give landlords peace of mind that their property is being managed and looked after. The aim is to support a successful tenancy which is part of our efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness.

We will also work with private sector landlords to support them and their tenants, to help ensure standards and share best practice, in conjunction with East Suffolk, through the "Safe Suffolk Renters" scheme

West Suffolk Housing Pathway

This newly launched service follows directly from our Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy whose aims are to help house and support vulnerable people and to further West Suffolk Council's work in preventing and reducing homelessness. The service will be tailored to individual needs to help people who need support either in sustaining accommodation or to maintain independent living. This will include support for people with learning difficulties or mental health needs, people battling drug or alcohol addiction, homeless people and ex-offenders. It will also help people who are working but who need additional support. There are three levels of support from accommodation only through to high level care for people with complex needs who may pose a risk to themselves and others.

Building Resilience and Nutrition (BRAN)

This fund was set up to support food projects with £90,000 given by Suffolk Public Leaders and is being delivered by WSC in conjunction with Community Action Suffolk and Suffolk County Council. Whilst a number of grants have already been made funds are still available and details of how to apply can be found at

Elizabeth.evans@communityactionsuffolk.org.uk.

Projects include:

Cavenham, the Big Community Grow, which includes community coffee mornings where growers can share skills and swap seeds while they will also be encouraged to share their produce with other people in the village, strengthening community links:

Great Barton, Soil to Supplier project, increasing people's skills and confidence in growing and cooking nutritious food;

Haverhill, The Friend Cookery Club run by The Befriending Scheme which is a project that will help people with learning difficulties become more independent through teaching them cooking and food budgeting skills. It will also help participants better understand how food is grown and will work with supermarkets to reduce food waste;

Newmarket, Community Pantry Shop which works to try to support people out of food poverty.

DEVOLUTION

This change runs alongside the Local Government Reorganisation and will involve the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk. Elections for the post of the mayor will take place in May of 2026 and it is already clear that there is going to be a lot of interest in this post.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

As you are aware we will be moving into a new era of Local Government in the next few years, changing from a two tier system to a Unitary Authority. At the Government's request both the County Council and District Councils are preparing full business cases for their proposals for reorganisation and the way forward for Suffolk which need to be with Government by September of this year. The County Council is proposing a single unitary authority whilst the District Councils favour two or possibly three. The final decision will be made by the Government.

The time scale indicated at the moment is that in May 2027 there will be an election for a Shadow Unitary Authority which will operate alongside the County and Districts Councils and whose function will be to set up the new council whilst the existing councils carry on with the day to day work. Then in May 2028 the County and District Councils will be abolished and the Shadow Unitary Authority will take over all their functions and become the functioning Unitary Authority. Parish Councils will remain albeit their role may develop to ensure that a strong grass roots contact can continue with councillors from the new Unitary Authority. I appreciate that many Parish Councils and residents are concerned about this aspect of the move to a Unitary Authority but it is something that is recognised by all involved in the reorganisation.

I know from personal experience that my attendance at Parish Council meetings is critical to my role as your councillor. Whilst I am always happy to deal with matters by e-mail and telephone the personal contact I get from these meetings with councillors and residents helps me understand more fully local concerns and aspirations and I shall continue to attend until I am abolished!

Carol Bull
Member for Barningham Ward
May 2025

ITEM 2

CHAIRMANS REPORT – HEPWORTH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING MAY 2026

The last 12 months has again had the continuity of having the same Councillors and Clerk as the previous year, but it would be helpful if we could find new councillors that would allow us to get back to our maximum number. We still have two vacancies for Councillors, so if anyone knows anyone who would enjoy the challenge of helping the village by being part of the Council then please ask them to contact the Parish Clerk.

I would like to thank Andy, our Parish Clerk, for his help and guidance over the last 12 months, it certainly has been another busy year. Unfortunately, Andy is resigning in June, so we are now in the process in looking for another Parish Clerk. I would also like to thank Andy for implementing the new website, and new Clerk's contact e-mail address for the Parish Council, so that we now meet the latest legislation, also to thank him for the last 3 years for being our Parish Clerk, and to wish him all the best for the future.

I would like to thank all the councillors for their help this year and to Nick for supporting me in his role as Vice Chair. I would like to thank Carol and Joanna for their help and support over the last 12 months, also to Perry for his work as Tree Warden and to the Speed Watch Team for continuing to encourage drivers to keep to the speed limits and to make the village safer. Thanks also to Neel for continuing to produce the Hepworth Herald, and for all the people that distribute it within the village.

After 37 years as our Suffolk County Council Joana announced not to stand at the recent local elections and our recently elected Councillor is now Harry Richardson. We are certainly going to see some changes over the next 12 months, with a new Clerk, a new County Councillor to work with, and working with the new Unitary Council that we will now come under.

It seems that a lot of our time in the 12 months has been spent discussing various planning applications etc. The new Master Plan for the Jaynic site has now been approved by West Suffolk Council, so would expect to see a planning application follow in the future.

Over the last 12 months we have been involved with the following:

- To replace one of the Speed Indicator Devices
- Discussion with residents regarding the new Masterplan for the Jaynic site
- To endeavour to get a bus service for the village
- To give the information required to the flood investigation team as part of the investigation into the flooding of the village from Storm Babet

The next 12 months we will be involved with the following:

- Any new planning applications
- To replace the second SID in the village
- To see the completion of installing a new bus shelter in a central part of the village.
- Monitoring the condition of Bury Weston Lane to ensure it is safe to use for everyone.

Garry Bloomfield
Chair Hepworth Parish Council

ITEM 3

<i>HEPWORTH Parish Council</i>				
Annual statement for period ending 31 March 2026				
Year 2024/25			Year 2026/26	
Income				
7,855		Precept		6,250
-		Grants		3,350
103		Bank interest		84
1		Rent		
-		Sundry		-
24		VAT		499
7,983		Total Receipts		10,183
Expenditure				
3,677		Clerks Salary		3,876
454		Expenses		461
125		Professional fees		90
447		Insurance		453
309		Subscriptions		374
625		Donations / Sect 137		725
-		Election costs		-
288		Village Hall Hire		-
2,451		Projects		240
-		Training		-
18		Village Maintainace		3,116
-		Events		-
40		Village website		265
499		VAT		554
-		Sundry		-
8,932		Total Payments		10,154
Bank reconciliation 01.04.25 to 31.03.26				
Balances at 1 April 2025		£		£
Bank current account		3,191		
Less unrepresented cheques		0		
Bank savings account		4,000		7,191
Plus income				10,183
				17,374
Less expenditure				10,154
BALANCES AT 31 MARCH 2026				7,220
Balance as per bank statement on 31 March 2026				
		Ac No	£	£
Current Account	Barclays	30469823	3,220	
Savings Account	Barclays	53501957	4,000	
				7,220
Prepared by	Andy Osman	on	02-Apr-26	

ITEM 4

WEST SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL HEPWORTH - ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2025/26

The years seem to go by so quickly. It feels only a short time since I was writing last year's report! This report doesn't cover all that has happened through the year but I hope it will give you a flavour of some of the things that have been going on.

COMMITTEE WORK

I remain on the Development Control and Licensing Committees, as well as the Constitution Review Group, the Environmental and Sustainability Working Group and the Grant Working Party of which I am Vice Chair.

Whilst the Grant Working Party workload is pretty heavy, sifting through all the applications for funding, it remains a very satisfying committee to sit on. This year 38 organisations will have benefitted from the £266,734 we have available. The successful organisations are wide ranging from drop-in centres and food banks, to youth initiatives and mental health and wellbeing projects. Recently members of the group have had the opportunity to visit some of the projects and see the work they are doing. I had the great pleasure of visiting the Lyward Colley Trust at Bradfield St George. This organisation, based in a rural environment has created a new learning space for young people between the ages of 11 and 25 who are outside of mainstream education and /or are experiencing learning difficulties. They offer 1:1 support tailored to each child's interests, abilities and needs and have an excellent attendance record.

The Development Control Committee also requires a big time commitment but is very interesting. The applications are varied ranging from applications for solar farms and solar panels, individual house builds and extensions, large developments of hundreds of houses, dog breeding kennels and large industrial sites.

LOCALITY BUDGET AND FUNDING

From a ward point of view I have again been able to support a variety of local initiatives from my Locality Budget including:

- VAS equipment for two villages;
- Replacement water heater for a village hall;
- Repairs to a war memorial;
- VE Day celebration events.

Thriving and healthier communities is a goal of another new grants scheme, Get Back Into Sport which is designed to provide opportunities for people to get into a variety of sports and activities ranging from running, football, cricket, and rugby through to bowls, boxing training, pickleball and dance. The money is

intended to be used to pay for kit, equipment and other costs that will see clubs expand their membership, create new opportunities. In total just under £26,400 is being paid out to 41 clubs and other community organisations.

Several of my villages have been awarded the Warm Spaces Grant. These grants are intended to encourage and assist in the set up of places where residents can come together for a chat and a coffee. This is important to counter social isolation and in cold weather to offer some where warm as heating costs rise. The take up has been very good and they are proving very popular.

A number of my Parish Councils and village halls have benefitted from funding from The Communities Capital fund which was aimed at funding towards:

- New or replacement equipment to play areas not owned and maintained by West Suffolk Council.
- Repairs, new equipment or other enhancements to community buildings such as community centres or village halls.
- Capital grant funding for local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities that will bring the community together and support health and wellbeing. This could include associated equipment or building costs.
- Equipment to improve the offer of clubs within facilities.

COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2026-2027

The 2026/27 budget was presented to the February Council Meeting and the planned average Band D Council Tax level was confirmed as £209.70 this represents an average Band D weekly increase of just 11 pence (£6.03 or 2.96% for the year). Over 70 per cent of our residents are in Bands A to C so they will actually see a lower increase.

Income from Council Tax is split with 77% going to Suffolk County Council, 13% to the Police and Crime Commissioner and 10% to West Suffolk Council. The 10% received by West Suffolk Council represents only 20% their overall income with the other 80% being made up from other income sources and cost savings.

Council also agreed to a further one-year extension to the West Suffolk Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS). The maximum reduction on Council Tax paid by LCTRS claimants, from 1 April 2025, will therefore remain at up to 100 per cent. The proposal is highly targeted to reach those who are already on means-tested benefits, many of whom are working, and has low administrative cost.

Also included was a proposal for further free parking slots in council carparks in Bury St Edmunds and other West Suffolk towns which it is hoped will help to increase footfall and aid business growth.

BETTER RECYCLING

This is a nationwide scheme to help improve recycling and is particularly important for us as Suffolk has one of the worst recycling rates in the country.

It is hoped that this initiative will create a more environmentally conscious society where more items can be recycled and reused. The new legislation aims to enhance recycling rates and encourage a more consistent national approach to recycling across England. Under the changes, launching this June in West Suffolk, residents will be able to recycle glass, cartons, and plastic film and bags from the kerbside for the first time. Food waste will also be collected separately each week. Residents across West Suffolk will receive new green-lidded recycling bins and two food waste caddies in preparation for the new Better Recycling service. Deliveries of almost 80,000 recycling bins started from Monday 23 February and in April we started delivering nearly 160,000 caddies to households across the district.

SOLAR POWER

An innovative scheme is being introduced at the Mildenhall Hub to harness solar power and save over £130,000 and 120 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. It is proposed to install solar photovoltaic (PV) canopies in the main car park. This invest-to-save project is funded as part of the council's strategic priority to improve environmental resilience and work towards net zero for its own buildings and vehicles by 2039, as set out in the council's roadmap. Mildenhall Hub already has solar PV panels on the roof of the main building and other forms of renewable generation, as well as capacity on site to store surplus energy using the existing battery. However, due to the many different users at the hub, from leisure through to education, there remains a substantial demand for electricity. The solar canopies will further reduce the Hub's reliance on grid electricity, thereby lowering utility costs and enhancing the site's environmental resilience. Additionally, the canopies offer other benefits such as sheltered parking from the rain and sun and will serve as a pilot for other car parks across West Suffolk. The same fund has also delivered other projects including new electrical vehicles (EV) for the council's operational fleet, as well as the installation of EV chargers at public car parks such as The Guineas in Newmarket and Parkway car park in Bury St Edmunds.

LOCAL PLAN

The Local Plan was finally adopted in July but we are already being required to look to the future housing and employment growth needs in West Suffolk over the period to 2045. The first stage of this is to issue a call for sites before beginning the local plan making. This call for sites will run from March 23rd until 20 May 2026. Any sites put forward will be assessed to ensure they are suitable, available and achievable for potential development and will inform the preparation of the next Local Plan and ensure we maintain a minimum five year Land Supply to avoid speculative development.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION SERVICE

With the rising cost of living this service has been set up to support residents with money concerns. The Financial Inclusion team offer help to:

- check you are getting all the benefits you are eligible for
- check if you can apply for any grants
- provide information about discounts and deals to help reduce spending

- help you on a pathway to deal with debt or access money advice if necessary

They can also help with specific queries as well as more general support with your finances and connect you with other local support services where necessary.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

This time last year we were anticipating Mayoral elections and proposals from existing Suffolk councils as to what the new unitary authorities would look like. As you are aware Suffolk County Council put forward a proposal for one Unitary Authority for Suffolk and all the other councils put forward a proposal for three unitary authorities. Whilst the mayoral elections have been postponed with no indication of when they may now take place Government have published their decision, choosing the three Unitary Councils option: West Suffolk, Central & East Suffolk, and Ipswich & South Suffolk. Elections to the three new councils will be held in May 2027. The first year will be as a 'shadow authority' with the Unitary Authority being formally established on 1st April 2028.

Suffolk County Council elections were held this May but the District Council elections due in May 2027 have been postponed with sitting councillors continuing an extra year. These councils will continue to operate alongside the shadow authorities but be abolished when the new Unitaries are formally established on April 1st 2028.

So from a District Council point of view you will have me as your councillor for another two years and it will be work as usual!!

Carol Bull
Ward Member for Barningham May 2026

ITEM 5

Open Forum