



# Saxmundham Town Council

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of Saxmundham Town Council held on  
Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2024 at the Market Hall, High Street, Saxmundham at 6:00 pm.

## Minutes

### 1. Attendees

Cllr Di Eastman (Chair)  
Cllr John Findlay (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr John Fisher  
Cllr Jeremy Smith  
Cllr Benjamin Gulliford  
Cllr Elizabeth Clark  
Cllr Charlotte Hawkins  
Cllr Marianne Kiff  
Cllr Tim Lock  
Cllr Geraldine Barker

### Apologies

County Cllr Richard Smith  
Cllr James Sandbach

### Also Present

Sharon Smith (Town Clerk/RFO)  
50 members of the public

### 2. Welcome from the Chair

Cllr Di Eastman welcomed all present to the meeting.

### 3. Minutes of Annual Town Meeting 2023

Cllr Elizabeth Clark advised that she was not present at the Annual Town Meeting held on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023. Following acceptance of this amendment, the minutes of the meeting were approved.

### 4. Civic Year 2023-2024

- a) The Chair of Saxmundham Town Council presented her Annual Report.
- b) The Ward Member for East Suffolk Council presented his Annual Report.

### 5. Public Participation Session

The following local organisations presented their reports:

- a) Saxmundham Green Team
- b) Saxmundham Blue Spaces Team
- c) Citizens Advice – East Suffolk
- d) Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal
- e) Saxmundham Judo Club
- f) Saxmundham and District Community Interest Company
- g) The Art Station
- h) Disability Advice Service
- i) Christians Against Poverty

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **6. South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood**

a) The Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group presented a report on the South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood and answered questions from the members of the public.

b) Dr Havard presented a report on his aspirations for a new medical centre in Saxmundham and answered questions from the members of the public.

The formal part of the meeting closed at 7:45 pm and was followed by:

## **7. Saxmundham on Show**

A range of stalls from local voluntary groups, clubs and charities were provided to allow members of the public to browse and converse informally whilst enjoying light refreshments provided by the Town Council.

**Sharon Smith**  
**Town Clerk/RFO**

Signed\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_



# Empowering Nature

Sharing our vision for a greener future for the Fromus communities





# Our Town, Our choice

National Grid's plans for converter stations outside Saxmundham will permanently alter our town and the neighbouring communities of Kelsale, Carlton, Benhall and Sternfield. No mitigation can fully offset the ecological damage to this precious and ancient landscape. Productive, arable land will be lost, soil composition altered, and irreplaceable habitats destroyed. Yet, we believe if we can set aside our differences and come together, these projects could also become a catalyst for positive change – both for our people and for the many species that rely on this beautiful natural environment. This is our proposal to the National Grid companies: we need a future landscape which will allow all of us to thrive. And this is our invitation to the residents of Saxmundham, Kelsale, Carlton, Benhall and Sternfield to shape that future - by sharing their views about what this new landscape should become.





## Our Vision


- **A green corridor from Saxmundham to the sea, where wildlife can thrive along the route of the proposed bridge and cable trench, and where people can walk and cycle.**
- **A Fromus boardwalk where residents can engage with the river and surrounding nature.**
- **A community fund for new wildlife havens in our gardens: nature-friendly improvements for all, including water butts, bat boxes and ponds.**
- **Healthy, affordable food grown in a community orchard and allotment.**
- **Water harvesting to support biodiversity and to protect us from flooding.**
- **Restoration of the Great Wood for community use and biodiversity.**
- **Converter stations that also support locally-commissioned art projects, wildlife habitats and solar panels.**
- **Training and support for local people to manage these initiatives.**





# Project Proposal Map

 Access point

 Connection to green corridor

 Green corridor

 Fromus boardwalk

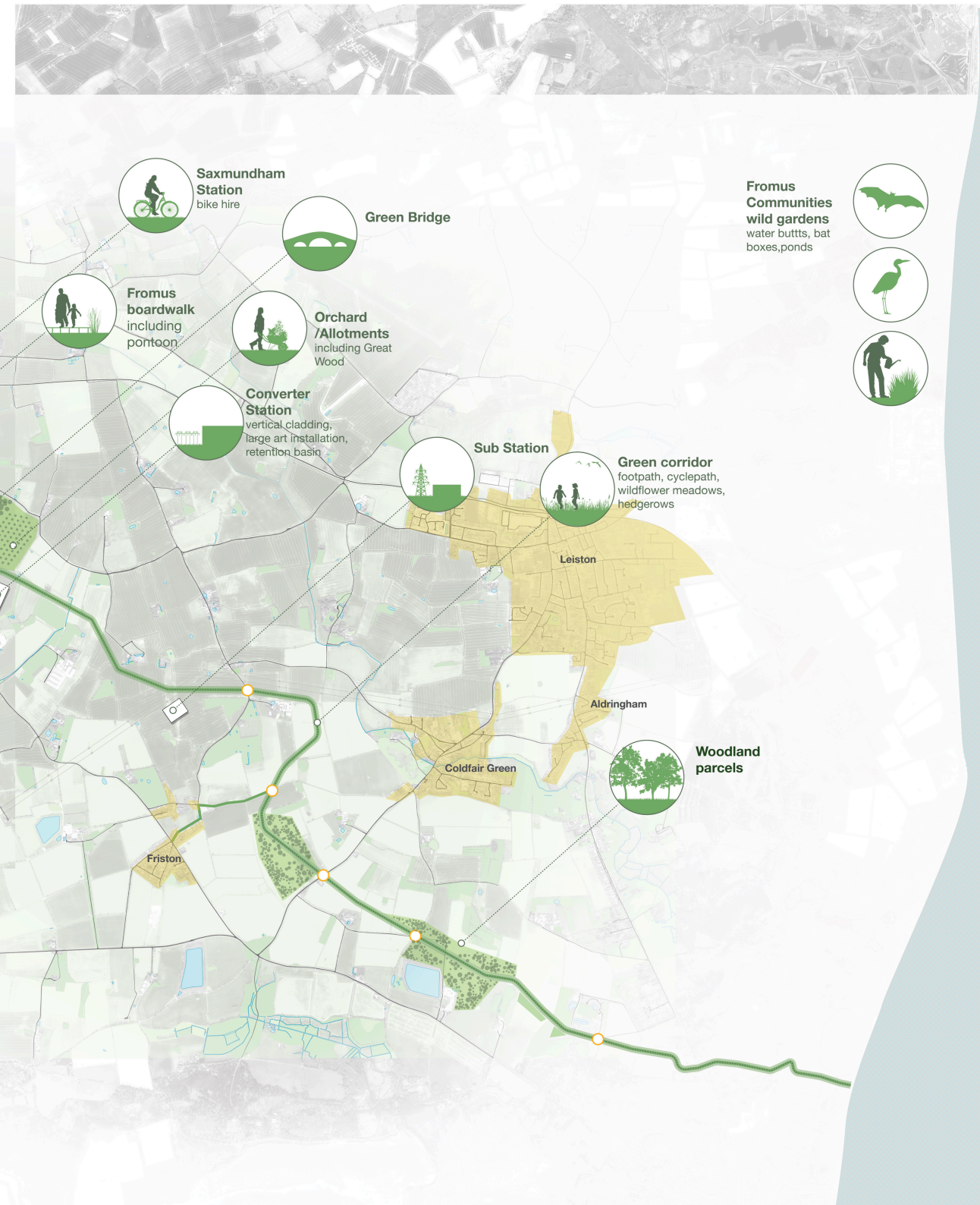


0m

1km

2km

**Artist's Impression - For Illustrative Purposes Only**  
This image represents a conceptual visualisation of a proposed large-scale landscape intervention. The design is subject to ongoing development and will evolve through further design, consultation, and planning processes.



**Fromus Communities wild gardens**  
water butts, bat boxes, ponds







## A green corridor from Saxmundham to the sea

Farmland, compulsorily purchased for cable trenches, will not be able to go back into food production. We envision it taking on a new purpose as a nature corridor, featuring hedgerows and wildflower margins, and offering an accessible route to the sea for cyclists, walkers, and wheelers. The required bridge over the River Fromus should be future-proofed as a rewilded, living structure and include an otter ledge to ensure safe passage for wildlife. The project will support local wellbeing, boost our tourism economy and enable other species to move in and out of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths National Landscape. We would also like to offer free bike hire from Saxmundham Station to promote sustainable and active travel.

## A Fromus boardwalk and nature trail

After construction concludes, we propose a River Fromus boardwalk and a nature trail linking Fromus Green to the town centre. These features will allow the community to reconnect with nature and encourage sustainable tourism and footfall in the High Street via a circular route. Visitors will be encouraged to spend more time in our town—shopping locally and using it as a base for exploring the surrounding countryside on foot or by bike. The boardwalk, which will include a pontoon for safe river access, will put the river back at the heart of our community and enable the people who live here and who visit us to appreciate the rich diversity of the species it supports.

## Community funds for all to support nature

We propose a Fromus Communitites Scheme funded through a toll on energy transmission passing through the converter stations and revenue from solar panels on their roofs. This fund would offer all households in the five affected communities a choice of nature-supporting products with free installation (to support the wildlife species affected by the National Grid proposals).

Residents would select from a list of items which would include:

- Hedgehog highways
- Native hedgerow saplings
- Ponds
- Bughouses
- Hedgehog hibernation and feeding stations
- Bat boxes
- Swift boxes
- Draught excluding products
- Water butts

The fund should also support solar and battery storage for community buildings.



## Growing our own food

We propose creating an inclusive market gardening zone surrounding the converter station site. This can include allotments and a community orchard run on permaculture principles to support and feed local people as well as visiting swifts, pollinating insects, hedgehogs and other wildlife. Our new green space will support health and wellbeing, and reduce food miles and packaging waste. It can be irrigated by water harvested from hard surfaces and will benefit from native hedgerows, scrub and carefully managed wildflower meadows.

## Managing our water to protect us and to improve our environment

Our water is a precious resource. The new bridge and converter stations will create hard surfaces which cannot absorb water. This could provide an opportunity for water harvesting solutions such as attenuation ponds, swales or bio-retention basins, which could be fully landscaped. This could help prevent runoff - reducing flood risk and mitigating the risk of pollution to the River Fromus.

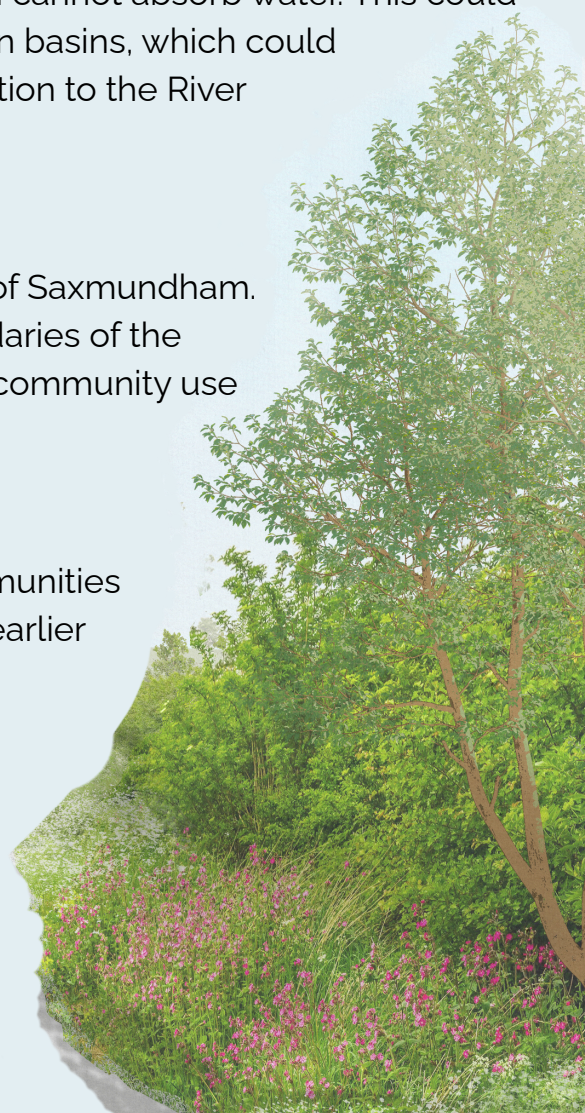
## Restoration of the Great Wood

The Great Wood lay to the south of Leiston Road, and historically was a place of leisure for the people of Saxmundham. Some years ago most of the trees were cut down to increase farmland, and it now lies within the boundaries of the Sea Link proposal. Post-construction, we propose that native trees are planted to restore the wood for community use and biodiversity.

## Jobs and training for local people

The converter stations will not result in long-term job creation therefore we propose the Fromus Communities Scheme is expanded to enable businesses and community groups to manage the proposals outlined earlier and to support new initiatives such as:

- Training and employing local people to run the Fromus Communities Scheme.
- Employing local people to develop a website and an app to support the scheme as well as other projects such as citizen science, energy and water management.
- Green space management of wildflower meadows and hedgerows.





## Creating community benefits from the converter stations

We propose three key ways that National Grid companies can improve the visual amenity of the converter stations:

- 1. Art Spaces:** large-scale nature-themed murals commissioned by the community to reflect the local environment and to highlight flagship species.
- 2. Living Walls:** two sides of each building should feature vertical planting to create habitat for pollinators, swifts and bats.
- 3. Solar Energy:** rooftops could host solar panels to contribute to clean energy generation and feed the Fromus Communities Scheme.

## A call for collaborative, nature-positive infrastructure

Planning expert Dr Andy Tickle supports many of the principles at the heart of these proposals. His report 'Greening the Great Grid Upgrade', published by CPRE, the countryside charity, calls for a more strategic and environmentally responsible approach to infrastructure delivery. He urges a new planning culture that aligns grid expansion with long-term social, ecological and landscape priorities.

It echoes our call for local voices to help shape how infrastructure is embedded into landscapes, ensuring places like Saxmundham and its neighbouring villages are not simply altered, but actively improved - with nature, community wellbeing, and heritage at the centre of design and delivery.

We call on National Grid companies to work with us; to go beyond the statutory minimums and show real leadership by delivering infrastructure that can enhance, rather than erode, the landscapes and communities it affects.





# Empowering Nature

A community-driven project, in collaboration with Local Storytelling Exchange and Saxmundham Town Council.



Have your say - we welcome community views on this proposal.

Scan the QR code or visit [www.surveymonkey.com/r/XRPZLVT](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/XRPZLVT) to take part in a feedback survey.

The closing date for all feedback is Saturday 14 June 2025.



# **SAXMUNDHAM TOWN COUNCIL**

## **CHAIR'S REPORT 2024-25**

### **INTRODUCTION**

I am pleased to present the Annual Report for 2024–2025. The report sets out our key achievements over the past year and outlines our strategic direction for the years ahead.

Saxmundham continues to grow and change, and through strong collaboration with residents, businesses and local organisations, we have made real progress in priority areas.

We have welcomed new councillors, set up new working arrangements and developed our dedicated team of professional staff to ensure we provide the best possible service to the town.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

A cornerstone of our work this year has been improving community engagement. We have been committed to creating meaningful opportunities for residents to have their say and shape the future of our town. Key achievements include

- Regular Council meetings and targeted community surveys have enabled residents to share views, raise concerns, and suggest improvements
- Public events and cultural programmes have helped strengthen community identity and cohesion
- Financial support for a wide range of community organisations has helped voluntary activity in the town
- Volunteer-led initiatives, such as the dedicated Saxmundham Green Team, and our support for other volunteer groups, have played a vital role in environmental stewardship.

### **STRATEGIC CHALLENGES**

#### **Energy Infrastructure Projects**

Saxmundham continues to be a focal point for nationally significant energy infrastructure proposals, including converter stations and associated renewable energy developments. While these may contribute to national sustainability goals, they also raise complex local concerns. Key elements include:



- The impact on the community: concerns remain about the effects of multiple energy projects on local landscapes, wellbeing, and infrastructure
- Transparency and access: the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects process remains difficult for many residents to engage with meaningfully
- As set out in the *Empowering Nature* paper, we continue to promote developments that enhance, rather than diminish, the character and biodiversity of our local environment, ensuring that infrastructure projects contribute positively to nature recovery and long-term landscape resilience.

In response to these challenges, we established the Fromus Energy Projects Team, comprising councillors from the town and neighbouring parishes, and engaged local residents. This team plays a key role in guiding our approach, coordinating community input, and promoting responsible and transparent development.

### **South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood**

This major development, allocated in the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, will deliver 800 new homes and an employment area on the west of the A12

There is also a proposal for a new service area, also on the west of the A12, but this is not included in the Local Plan and will require separate approval from East Suffolk Council.

Challenges include:

- Integration: ensuring the new neighbourhood connects seamlessly with existing communities and infrastructure
- Community facilities: securing adequate provision for education, healthcare, and recreation
- Sustainability: promoting design principles that prioritise green space, active travel, and energy efficiency.

We have engaged directly with the site promoter, Pigeon and their consultants LDA, to influence the emerging Masterplan framework and to ensure that the development delivers meaningful benefits for both current and future residents.

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2025-2030**

The coming five years will be pivotal in the development of Saxmundham as we navigate population growth, evolving infrastructure needs, and a changing landscape of local government.

Our Strategic Plan 2025–2030, adopted earlier this month, sets out a clear vision for a resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking town. This includes:

### **Town Centre Regeneration**

- Improving the town centre and High Street
- Supporting local businesses and attracting inward investment
- Enhancing accessibility and connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists
- Revitalising key public spaces and underused assets

### **Population Growth and Community Development**

- Managing the 40% population increase linked to the Garden Neighbourhood
- Expanding healthcare, education, and public transport provision
- Strengthening social cohesion through inclusive community initiatives

### **Energy Projects and Environmental Sustainability**

- Promoting responsible onshore energy infrastructure development
- Safeguarding natural landscapes and habitats

### **Local Government Reorganisation**

- Preparing for the transition to a new unitary authority
- Ensuring continuity of local services and democratic representation
- Building strong partnerships with regional stakeholders to champion Saxmundham's interests

## **CONCLUSION**

I would like to thank all our councillors, the Town Clerk and her staff, volunteers, local organisations and, above all, our residents, for their commitment to making Saxmundham a thriving place to live, to work and visit.

With continued collaboration and shared ambition, I am confident that Saxmundham will meet the challenges ahead and flourish as a progressive and community-driven town.

**CLLR JOHN FINDLAY**

**CHAIR**

**SAXMUNDHAM TOWN COUNCIL**

**2024/25 ANNUAL REPORT**  
**TO THE TOWN COUNCIL AND PARISH COUNCILS**  
**OF BLYTHING DIVISION, SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**FROM COUNCILLOR RICHARD SMITH, MVO**

It has been an eventful and momentous year, my fifteenth as a County Councillor and my eighth representing Blything Division.

Last May the Leader of the County Council, Councillor Matthew Hicks, reshuffled his Cabinet and asked me to become his Deputy and also to bear responsibility for Finance, Economic Development and Skills. As I had previously held the Finance portfolio, I was pleased to resume responsibility for that crucial area of Council work which will spend, in the 2025/26 financial year, a net £803 million delivering its services throughout Suffolk. I was also pleased to be able to continue with my responsibilities for Economic Development and Skills, both of which are vitally important to all our futures.

Last year saw the demise of the New Anglian Local Enterprise Partnership, which had successfully steered business spend from Government to Suffolk and Norfolk. It has been replaced in Suffolk by a new Suffolk Business Board, who work under the brand 'Suffolk Economy' and the leadership of its dynamic and much-respected Chair, Mark Pendlington, a businessman and former High Sheriff of the County, who initially agreed to chair the Board for its first year, but has recently been persuaded to continue his chairmanship for one further year. The Board also keeps its eye on initiatives for up-skilling young people and those already in the workforce. I work in close liaison with the University of Suffolk and our three further education institutes, Suffolk New College, East Coast College and West Suffolk College to co-ordinate efforts to produce a skilled workforce which meets the demands of today's world of work.

Many of you will have heard from me how tight local government finances are. Suffolk County Council spends 77 pence of every pound on social care and services to people who are disadvantaged in one way or another. To keep elderly people in care homes who can no longer pay their fees, to provide caring accommodation to adults with a wide range of disabilities, and to keep young people safe and properly safeguarded costs huge sums

of money, in our case considerably over £300 million pounds this year. The care sector has been widely affected by the Government's rise in the National Minimum Wage – which must be welcomed – but also by the rise and widening of the scale over which Employers' National Insurance is paid – which most certainly is not. The care sector initially looked to us to pay for their extra costs, but we simply are not able to do so, nor should we assume responsibility for extra costs imposed by central government action. So the situation and prospects for this year in the sector are a matter of concern.

The County Council wants to spend more money on maintaining the road network than it is able to do. While many of us do not use the care services, we do all use the roads. Resurfacing and mending of potholes all costs money, and that money is rationed severely. However, we try to do our best with the resources available and thanks to a relatively mild winter there have been fewer potholes occurring, but they are still annoying to the motorist when they do open up, and we try to fix them as quickly as possible. To that end we have brought in two 'dragon patcher' machines to help. They dry the road and the sub-surface before effecting a permanent repair, and they have made a difference. But their cost has been £3 million, so we need to assess their effectiveness before taking a decision to pay to use them again next winter.

This time last year we were negotiating a local government devolution deal with the then government. The new government, elected in July, cancelled those negotiations, and a few months later started again with their own plans, with which we are faced now. They want to see a Mayor covering Suffolk and Norfolk elected in May 2026 to sit at the table of the Council of Nations and Regions, through which most money for local government will be distributed. Their plans also mean the abolition of both our District Councils and the County Council - to be replaced, I hope, with one Unitary Authority for Suffolk. Preliminary figures, and I stress they are preliminary, shows that if Suffolk ends up with one Unitary Authority, savings of around £110 will be realised over the next five years. But the view of our District Councils (and I will let them elaborate on this for themselves) is that Suffolk should have either two or three Unitary Authorities. Two authorities would still save money over a five year time-span, but ninety per cent less than one authority – around £10 million. And if we had three – East Suffolk, West Suffolk and a Greater Ipswich which would probably take in Felixstowe,

Woodbridge and Needham Market, then this option would cost you and I as Council tax payers at least £50 million over five years, with considerable extra costs continuing into the future.

All councils had to put their initial ideas to Government by 21 March, and we now have until 26 September to work up a full, detailed business case. The Government will then make their decision before the end of this calendar year. Undoubtedly we now face six months of political controversy about which of the various options is right for Suffolk but, ultimately, we will have to do what the Government tells us to do. My final point for the moment on this subject is that I hope we find some really top-class candidates for the post of Mayor, as we need a figure who is a hard-hitter for our two counties on the national scene.

Elsewhere, taking decisions is never easy, and sometimes our influence is not great. Here I mention the LionLink and Sea Link projects to which we are opposed, but to which our opposition does not count for as much as it should. The final decision is in the hands of Ed Miliband, Secretary of State for Energy, and he has been over-riding local opposition and approving every project that goes across his desk. The Sunnica wind farm in West Suffolk was a terrible project which was recommended for refusal by the Planning Inspectorate. He approved it. So, I fear, that the projects affecting our area will also ultimately be approved, whatever the feelings are in the local area where the full effects will be felt – be they cables coming ashore under Walberswick beach or the building of one or more giant converter stations on high ground just outside Saxmundham. As to the effects of a yet-to-be sanctioned Sizewell C, I am almost lost for words. No final investment decision has yet been taken, although I suspect we all know that you and I as taxpayers will end up funding it. The developmental works are already proceeding at a vast pace, and from my own anecdotal, unscientific experience, the traffic along the A12 in the month of March has been not far short of what we usually experience in high Summer.

Finally, I want to say a few words about Libraries. Suffolk Libraries have run the service over the last 13 years, but the back-office costs have grown from single figures up to 33%. We could not reach agreement with them during extensive negotiations, complicated by the legalities of the procurement process, and the County Council's Cabinet agreed in March to bring the Library service back into house. Last year we gave them an

emergency loan amounting to an extra 12% and we were not convinced that they could keep to their budget in future, over 92% of which is supplied by the County Council. My Cabinet colleague laid out in very great detail all about the process and negotiations, and this is now all on the public record to counter certain mis-information which has been circulating. Our guarantee is that all 45 library sites will remain open, at present opening hours. In addition, new mobile library vans will be purchased to guarantee the continuance of the service to villages across Suffolk, and we will invest in bringing the IT systems up-to-date. I firmly believe our libraries have a very bright future, not just for the borrowing of books, but for their continued development as community hubs encompassing many useful social and economic functions. The transfer of responsibility takes place on 1 June.

Without the advent of local government reform I had planned not to seek re-election and to retire on 1 May this year. Those plans are now on hold and I will continue to serve as your County Councillor until the government-defined end-of-term of this administration. We know the Government has postponed elections by twelve months, so retirement still beckons before too long! I am proud to represent Blything Division, but retirement still looks tempting...

Richard Smith, MVO  
County Councillor for Blything Division  
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development  
and Skills  
Suffolk County Council

April 2025

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