Autumn Update 2026 – 'Covering August/September 2026

Cllr Julia Ewart

East Suffolk District Councillor for Kelsale & Yoxford Ward

As summer draws to a close and we move into autumn, I wanted to provide residents with an update on a number of issues affecting our communities. The last two months have seen continued challenges with East Suffolk's new recycling arrangements, ongoing activity associated with Sizewell C, important discussions around emergency preparedness following both Storm Babet and the Dunwich Heath Fire, and continued concerns regarding local roads, speeding and village safety.

There is certainly no shortage of issues requiring attention across the ward. However, alongside the challenges, there have also been positive examples of community spirit, resilience and local partnership working. From the response to the Dunwich Heath Fire, to the efforts of parish councils, community volunteers and local organisations, I continue to be reminded of the strength of the communities we are fortunate to represent.

As your District Councillor, my work covers a wide range of responsibilities including refuse collection and disposal, flooding, emergency planning, public health, planning and local government reorganisation at district level. During August and September, much of my time has been focused on community concerns relating to flooding resilience, residents' safety, the impacts of Sizewell C and ensuring local voices continue to be heard during a period of considerable change across Suffolk.

In addition to my district council role, I also serve as Chair of Suffolk County Council's Scrutiny Committee, which provides oversight and challenge to county services and decision-making.

Better Recycling: Progress, Problems and How I Can Help

The introduction of East Suffolk Council's Better Recycling Service has undoubtedly been one of the most significant changes affecting households this year. The new arrangements, including weekly food waste collections and revised recycling services, were designed to improve recycling rates and meet changing national requirements. Whilst many residents have adapted successfully, it is equally clear that the transition has not been without difficulties.

East Suffolk Council has acknowledged challenges including altered collection routes, vehicle issues, staffing pressures and operational changes that have resulted in

missed collections in some areas, all of which you can read about on the East Suffolk Council website.

Fourteen weeks into the new arrangements, I continue to hear from residents who are experiencing recurring problems with refuse, recycling or food waste collections. Whilst some disruption during the initial stages of a major service change is perhaps understandable, there are cases where residents have reported issues over a prolonged period of time.

I remain concerned that some properties may still not be fully integrated into collection rounds or that ongoing operational issues continue to affect service delivery. If you have not been collected in weeks, please ask yourself:
"Am I on the list?"

If you continue to experience collection issues, please ensure they are reported through East Suffolk Council's official channels. However, if you have already done so and the problem remains unresolved, please get in touch with me. I am happy to raise persistent cases directly with officers and ensure concerns are properly investigated. Please get in touch.

Residents who have not tried it yet may find the East Suffolk Council mobile app particularly useful. The app allows users to check collection dates, receive reminders, report missed collections and receive service updates. You can find it through your phone app store. East Suffolk Council – Better Recycling.

Get Match Ready: Learning the Lessons of Storm Babet

As we head towards autumn and winter, now is the time to think seriously about flood preparedness. The flooding associated with Storm Babet in October 2023 demonstrated just how vulnerable some of our communities remain to prolonged periods of intense rainfall. For many residents in Yoxford and elsewhere, the impacts of that event are still remembered vividly.

Following Storm Babet, Suffolk County Council undertook a number of formal Section 19 Flood Investigations. One of these focused specifically on Yoxford and examined the causes of flooding, the responsibilities of different organisations and opportunities to improve resilience in future. The report remains an important document and can be viewed via Suffolk County Council's website.

The most important lesson is that resilience starts before the weather deteriorates. I would encourage residents to clear drains and gullies where it is safe to do so, ensure ditches and watercourses are maintained and understand any riparian

responsibilities that may apply to their property. A blocked ditch or culvert may seem insignificant during dry weather but can quickly become a major issue during periods of sustained rainfall.

In the coming weeks, I will also be contacting residents and businesses who previously accessed flood support funding following Storm Babet. Recovery from flooding can take much longer than many people realise, and I am keen to understand whether further support may be required. If you were affected by flooding and remain concerned about drainage, flood risk or resilience measures, please do get in touch.

Emergency Preparedness and Community Resilience

Both Storm Babet and this summer's Dunwich Heath Fire have demonstrated the importance of emergency preparedness and community resilience. We often think about emergencies only when they happen, but effective responses are usually the result of planning that has taken place months or years beforehand.

The discussions following the Dunwich Heath Fire have reinforced the importance of being prepared. Whilst flooding has often been our primary concern locally, the wildfire reminded us that communities can face very different types of emergencies. If periods of hotter, drier weather become more common, we need to ensure that individuals, communities and local agencies are ready to respond just as effectively as we do during severe winter weather.

I would encourage all residents to take simple steps to improve their preparedness. Ensuring that emergency contact details are readily available, keeping torches and essential supplies at home, checking on vulnerable neighbours and understanding local risks can all make a meaningful difference during an emergency.

We cannot prevent every incident, but we can improve our ability to respond when they occur. Community resilience is not just about emergency services. It is about neighbours helping neighbours, parish councils supporting residents and communities working together during challenging circumstances.

Useful Emergency Contacts

Emergency Services (life-threatening emergencies): 999
Suffolk Police (non-emergency): 101
Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (non-emergency): 01473 260588
NHS: 111
Suffolk Emergency Help Line (activated during major emergencies): 0345 603 2814
Environment Agency Floodline: 0345 988 1188
Suffolk Highways (immediate danger to public safety): 0345 606 6171
National Highways Information Line (A12, A11, A14 and A47): 0300 123 5000
Power Cuts: 105
Gas Emergencies: 0800 111 999

Dunwich Heath Fire: Community Resilience in Action

The Dunwich Heath wildfire was one of the most significant incidents to affect East Suffolk in recent years. The scale of the fire, the damage caused to important habitats and the resources required to tackle it served as a stark reminder of the growing risks associated with prolonged dry weather.

On 24 August 2026, I attended the public review and emergency preparedness meeting held at Westleton Village Hall. The meeting was chaired by Cllr Andrew Turner and supported by Parish Clerk Richard Green. Representatives from Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, the National Trust, the RSPB and the Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit were present to discuss how the incident was managed and what lessons had been learned.

What struck me most was the preparedness that existed before the fire occurred. It was clear that established relationships, emergency planning arrangements and local knowledge all contributed significantly to the response. Whilst no one wishes to experience an event of this scale, the meeting demonstrated that much good work had taken place behind the scenes long before the fire started.

East Suffolk Council has a statutory responsibility to support communities during major emergencies. During the incident, Westleton Village Hall was established as the community Rest Centre, providing support, information and welfare assistance to those affected. Council officers worked alongside volunteers, emergency planners and partner organisations to ensure people had somewhere safe to go and access to practical help when it was most needed.

The meeting also highlighted the challenges of maintaining communications during major incidents. Residents described difficulties caused by intermittent mobile phone

coverage, inconsistent power supplies and the practical challenges of communicating effectively when conditions are changing rapidly. These are not criticisms but valuable lessons. As extreme weather events become more common, communications resilience will become increasingly important.

Scrutiny Matters: Learning Lessons for Suffolk

Many residents will know that one of my responsibilities at Suffolk County Council, which is along side being your District councillor, is serving as Chair of the Scrutiny Committee. Scrutiny has an important role in examining how public services perform, identifying lessons from significant events and helping improve outcomes for residents.

Over the coming months, I hope to bring forward discussions around a number of major incidents that have affected Suffolk. These are likely to include the lessons arising from Storm Babet, the findings of Section 19 flood investigations, emergency preparedness arrangements and the response to the Dunwich Heath Fire.

My interest is not in assigning blame. Rather, it is in understanding what worked well, recognising good practice and identifying areas where improvements can be made. The experiences of Yoxford during Storm Babet and the lessons emerging from Westleton following the wildfire provide valuable opportunities to strengthen Suffolk's resilience in future.

One area I am particularly interested in examining further is communications during emergencies. Effective communication can often be the difference between confusion and confidence. Understanding how information flows between agencies and towards residents will be an important part of that discussion.

If you have know of anyone who would like to share information that would bolster the counties response, I would like to hear from them.

Sizewell C: Progress, Pressures and Accountability

Sizewell C continues to be one of the most significant issues affecting communities across the ward. Throughout July and August, work has continued on supporting infrastructure, including highway improvements, utility works, rail enhancements and traffic management measures designed to facilitate future construction activity.

Residents will have seen the opening of the new Yoxford Roundabout and Friday Street Roundabout on the A12. These schemes form an important part of the

transport infrastructure associated with the project and are intended to improve traffic flow and safety at previously challenging junctions.

Whilst many welcome the investment, concerns continue to be raised regarding the practical impacts on local communities. One issue that continues to perplex many residents is the apparent lack of formal pedestrian crossing facilities associated with some of the newly constructed highway layouts. As traffic volumes increase, roads must be designed for all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, schoolchildren and those with mobility difficulties, not simply for motor vehicles.

I also continue to receive concerns regarding construction traffic, road closures, diversions, noise and the cumulative impact of infrastructure works on local communities. Whilst projects of national significance inevitably bring disruption, local residents are entitled to expect meaningful mitigation where impacts occur.

I remain firmly of the view that Sizewell C should continue to be held accountable not only for the challenges it creates but also for delivering long-term improvements that leave a positive legacy for the communities hosting the project.

Residents wishing to keep informed about works, closures and traffic management can access the Sizewell C Works Tracker.

My current focus is understanding why Sizewell C is seeking, through both direct and third-party applications, to secure such a significant number of accommodation units within caravan and lodge sites (thought to be 8,500) around Saxmundham and Leiston, and what the implications may be for local communities and East Suffolk's Tourist industry.

Roads, Speeding and Safer Villages

Concerns regarding speeding, traffic volumes and road safety remain among the most common issues residents raise with me.

In particular, I continue to receive regular correspondence from residents in Sibton, Yoxford, Kelsale and Peasenhall regarding vehicle speeds, highway layouts and increasing traffic pressures. These concerns are not new, but they have become more pronounced as traffic volumes have increased in recent years.

I hope to discuss these issues further with Cllr Annette Dunning and Cllr Hudson, Suffolk County Council's new Cabinet Member for Highways, to explore what opportunities may exist for reviewing speed limits, traffic management arrangements and highway layouts. Cllr Dunning has long been supportive of many of the northern

villages within my ward and I am hopeful that, working with Suffolk Highways, progress can be made on some of the concerns residents continue to raise.

As Sizewell C continues to affect travel patterns across East Suffolk, I believe there is a compelling case for examining how the project can contribute to improvements that benefit the communities most directly affected. There is funding available, which I have identified through attending the NSIP Working Group, and I will continue to press for swift research, data collection and implementation so that many villages can benefit from revised traffic management arrangements to the advantage of both local communities and the wider region.

The A1120 remains one of the most discussed roads within the ward. I am hearing increasingly difficult stories from residents and businesses regarding bottlenecks, delays, congestion and the broader impact of traffic pressures along the route.

Whilst many of these issues pre-date Sizewell C, there is little doubt that additional traffic has intensified existing frustrations. The A1120 remains a strategic east-west route for many communities, yet its physical constraints mean that increasing traffic volumes can quickly create problems for both residents and businesses.

I will continue to gather evidence, listen to concerns and press for practical measures that improve safety and resilience whilst preserving the character of the villages through which the road passes.

Protecting Local Voices During Change

East Suffolk hosts a number of nationally significant infrastructure projects and there are ongoing discussions nationally about how decisions relating to such developments should be made. Concerns have been expressed that local authorities may lose influence over aspects of future decision-making if powers become increasingly centralised.

I firmly believe that local knowledge matters. Parish councils, local councillors and residents understand the realities of living alongside major infrastructure projects in a way that cannot always be appreciated from afar. It is therefore essential that local voices continue to play a meaningful role in shaping decisions that affect our communities.

This principle applies not only to major infrastructure projects but also to the wider changes currently taking place across local government.

Local Government Reorganisation

One of the biggest changes on the horizon for Suffolk is Local Government Reorganisation. Preparations continue across the county as councils work towards the creation of new unitary authorities. This represents one of the most significant changes to local government structures in decades.

Many residents ask whether there will be elections in 2027. At present, there remains uncertainty around the arrangements and I will provide updates as further information becomes available.

Whilst organisational structures may change, it is essential that communities continue to receive effective services and retain strong local representation. As proposals develop, I will continue to monitor progress and ensure that the interests of our communities remain at the forefront of discussions.

Funding Opportunities for Communities

There are currently a number of funding opportunities available through East Suffolk Council that may be of interest to parish councils, community groups, village halls and local organisations. These include the Thriving Places Investment Fund, winter support grants and a range of programmes designed to strengthen communities, improve local facilities and support community-led initiatives.

I would strongly encourage local groups with ideas for community projects to explore the available funding opportunities. Some of the most successful projects begin with a simple conversation, and there is support available to help organisations develop proposals and access funding.

Sam Kenward, Community Officer for the East Suffolk Community Partnership, is always on hand to help organisations explore funding opportunities, develop project proposals and access support.

Email: sam.kenward@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

The Return of the Kelsale & Yoxford Cake-Off!

Finally, on a lighter note, I am delighted to announce the return of the Kelsale & Yoxford Cake-Off. This year's event will be held at the beautifully refurbished Peasenhall Assembly Rooms, which are looking extremely handsome indeed. Parish councils and volunteers from across the ward will be invited to attend and bring a

cake that represents their village. Whether inspired by local history, local landmarks or simple village pride, I am looking forward to seeing the creativity on display and your village name flying high.

The event is about much more than cake. It provides an opportunity for parish councillors, community volunteers and residents to come together, build relationships and share ideas. We will also be discussing winter grant opportunities, community funding and local initiatives, and there will be a number of interesting speakers joining us. You may even recognise some familiar faces from the Community Partnership.

Most importantly, it promises to be a fun afternoon that celebrates the communities we are fortunate to serve.

And yes, whilst you are there, do take the opportunity to admire the refurbishment works. The transformation has been remarkable and is a great example of what can be achieved through local commitment and community effort.

Final Thoughts

The months ahead will undoubtedly bring further challenges, whether through winter weather, continuing infrastructure works or changes to local government. However, I remain committed to ensuring that residents continue to have a strong voice and effective representation.

Thank you to everyone who has contacted me, attended meetings, raised concerns or volunteered within our communities. Your efforts make a real difference and demonstrate the resilience, kindness and community spirit that make this part of Suffolk such a special place to live.

Cllr Julia Ewart
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