East Suffolk Council – Julia Ewart

Good evening everyone. For those I have not yet met, I am Julia Ewart, your East Suffolk District Councillor along with my family I am a resident of Kelsale. It remains my privilege to represent the Kelsale & Yoxford ward for the coming year, and as I look back, I am struck by how much our communities have endured, supported and achieved together. It has been a complicated year — often demanding, occasionally frustrating, particularly around the Local Government Reorganisation — but also full of moments that reveal the remarkable strength of our villages.

This evening, I want to offer a clear and honest reflection on the year behind us, and on the challenges and opportunities ahead. If I touch on the political landscape, it is only to ensure we are all fully informed about how local government is changing — nothing more.

The plan moving forward is to create three new unitary authorities in Suffolk, projected to save £34 million a year and reinvest £20 million into services. This decision has shaped much of the debate over the past year. East Suffolk will join with Mid Suffolk, while retaining its own statutory departments for education, adult care and other essential services. Boundary changes taking effect this May will move Yoxford into the new Blyth Estuary Division, while Kelsale will join the Saxmundham & District Division, which stretches down to Orford. In my view, these changes reflect two natural "orbits": Orford aligning with Woodbridge, and Kelsale with Saxmundham. As your District Councillor, I remain committed to strong, consistent representation throughout these transitions.

Across our villages, community spirit remains one of our greatest assets. Our summer fetes, dog shows and local gatherings have been lively, generous and full of neighbourly connection. East Suffolk's *HERE For You* programme once again visited towns across the district — including Saxmundham, Lowestoft, Kesgrave, Beccles, Felixstowe and Southwold — giving residents meaningful opportunities to raise issues directly with councillors and officers. The Village Hall and Community Buildings Fund has also offered grants of up to £15,000 to support essential improvements.

Here in Kelsale, the Village Hall continues to be a priority. As the heart of village life, its modernisation is vital for long-term use, and I remain committed to supporting the volunteers and trustees working tirelessly on this project. East Suffolk has also announced the £1.5 million *Thriving Places Fund*, launching in April 2026, to help smaller towns and villages protect community buildings, revitalise public spaces and build long-term resilience. This presents a real opportunity.

Much of the past year, however, has been dominated by major infrastructure projects. Sizewell C, Sea Link, LionLink and associated works have caused significant disruption — diversions, delays on the A12, and increased traffic through Yoxford, Kelsale and Peasenhall. During the Sea Link examination, I repeatedly raised concerns about poor coordination between developers and the relentless cycle of consultations. The council

is keenly aware of the mental health pressures placed on our communities; only last week I raised this directly at a Suffolk County Council meeting.

Many residents may not be familiar with SALC — the Suffolk Association of Local Councils — which now has funding for a coordinator to support parish clerks in responding to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). I have suggested that all clerks be invited to main meetings, as they are often responsible for drafting formal responses yet are not always in the room to hear the discussion firsthand.

Highways remain one of the issues raised with me most frequently. Highways responsibilities sit with Suffolk County Council, not East Suffolk, and that separation often leads to delays, confusion and unacceptable outcomes. We continue to live with long-term traffic controls relating to the Sizewell Link Road, with current schedules showing management measures running from May 2025 to December 2026. I wish I had more of an update, but this sits firmly with the County Council.

Traffic and development pressures have been particularly acute around Carlton Meres Caravan Park, especially on Rendham Road. The increased traffic, the direction of travel and the disruption caused by the rather basic installation of the new gateway have not gone unnoticed. I fully understand residents' frustration. This is an example of why the move to a unified East/Mid Suffolk Council in 2028 — bringing planning and highways under one authority — could be so significant, improving accountability and the coherence of local decision-making. In the meantime, this matter will rightly fall to Cllr Smith's successor to address promptly.

Many of you have also raised concerns about safety outside Kelsale Primary School at drop-off and pick-up times. This too is the County Council's responsibility, but I will continue supporting parents and the school. Safety should not depend on petitions — it should be assumed. I will keep pressing County Highways to act. I am pleased to see parents working so proactively alongside Reverend Dave and the governing board.

I want to return briefly to Sizewell C and similar projects. Last month, I undertook a detailed personal visit to Hinkley Point to gain an honest understanding of what hosting a project of this scale truly means. I met an SME contractor, Andrew Cockcroft from Community Services, a long-standing campaigner from Stop Hinkley, and senior staff at Somerset Council. I joined a school visit where the children's questions were a powerful reminder of who will live longest with the consequences. The key takeaway was clear: once roadworks finish, disruption does ease — but large-scale developments put sustained pressure on housing, transport and temporary accommodation, and councils are rarely ahead of demand. The need for more mid-range accommodation — even facilities comparable to a Travelodge — was emphasised repeatedly.

On a practical note, as a member of the NSIP Working Group, I will be presenting a motion next week that I hope to bring to Full Council on your behalf. Many assume that the council always has the resources to respond effectively to NSIP applications, but

adequate representation requires funding. Somerset was candid in admitting they missed this detail, and their NSIP team suffered from severe understaffing as a result. It is vital that East Suffolk retains the capacity to represent you robustly during the transition to the new council model, especially because other parts of Suffolk do not fully understand the scale of impact being felt here.

Planning has continued to pose challenges. Slow and inconsistent responses to infill applications remain a problem, and I continue to press for clearer, more timely communication. The Call for Sites process has concluded, and decisions are now being made about which sites progress into the next Local Plan. We urgently need homes for young people, for families and for older residents looking to downsize — and if we fail to plan for these needs, our villages risk losing the generational balance that keeps them vibrant. Without a Neighbourhood Plan, any aspirations or protections for Kelsale — including hopes for Carlton Park — must be fed into the Local Plan now, projecting our needs a decade ahead.

To be absolutely clear: I am not against development. I am for the right development, in the right place, with proper scrutiny and genuine consideration of local impact. Digging up the grounds at Cockfield Hall to create two recreational lakes, moving vast quantities of clay and requiring millions of gallons of water simply does not make sense to me.

This connects directly to my decision to leave a political party and continue as an Independent. I am happy to answer questions about this later, but what I can say now is that last year I became increasingly concerned that certain planning applications were not being scrutinised rigorously enough. I raised concerns repeatedly, evidenced the gaps I saw, and yet approvals continued without the challenge our communities deserve. The proposed estate behind Main Road is a good example: its scale felt disproportionate, and it had already failed inspection once. The Parish concerns — and mine — were really not adequately addressed. This type of event evidenced why I needed to take a firmer position, because my responsibility is to the residents.

The village of Kelsale has also often faced challenges around water supplies. Many of you will recall last summer's water quality incident, when I discovered that Sizewell C had abstracted large volumes of water without permission, causing a drop in the water table and a spike in bacteria levels. Incidents like this underline how vigilant we must remain and how important the true facts are when residents are sick.

I want to touch on council tax. The district precept increased by 4.9%. Yet of the funds you pay, only 8% remains with East Suffolk; the rest goes to pay for services elsewhere in the county. My view is straightforward: you are the client, and the services you receive should reflect your contribution.

Our local businesses — including nearly all of our rural pubs — also deserve support. Many face business rates approaching £50,000 a year. It is hard to see how a rural pub can survive under that pressure. These pubs are community anchors, social hubs and

employers, and once they close, they rarely reopen. I will continue advocating for fairer conditions, and I encourage everyone to support our pubs, cafés and bars wherever possible.

On a more practical note: lets discuss the bins. From June 2026, the Better Recycling system will introduce weekly food waste collections, twin-stream recycling, and three-weekly general waste collections. New bins and caddies will arrive between February and May. I did ask the council to trial the system before investing heavily; I think the outcome now speaks for itself. Don't be surprised if you receive two of the same bin or feel they are the wrong size for you. For bin support, call the helpline or email me — I will help get the dilemma sorted.

Despite the pressures, there have been real achievements. East Suffolk Council secured £2.8 million in government funding — plus a further £2 million — to decarbonise leisure centres. The Nature at Work scheme now includes 116 wild space sites. A new community hall is underway in Aldringham-cum-Thorpe. And in Thorpeness, where erosion has destroyed homes, East Suffolk has worked with residents to cover demolition costs not met by central government.

I also want to highlight the work of our Community Partnership. Each cluster of wards has a dedicated Partnership Officer — ours is Sam Kenward that heads up a Community Partnership area. They support local groups, strengthens communication in the area and build stronger links between parishes and the district. The Partnership meets four times a year in different village halls, with every parish invited. These meetings foster meaningful connections and ensure local voices inform the decisions made. It is hoped that Kelsale might allocated a delegate to attend these meetings – they can come from the community not just the council. Again there is funding involved and recently Framlingham took a great grant home to support a community asset.

As we look ahead, I hope every village in our ward continues to see itself as part of one local team. When we work together — from Parish to Parliament — our voice becomes clearer, stronger and more coherent. That unity is how we protect what matters, shape what comes next and ensure our communities thrive long into the future.

Let me finish by stressing how important it is to be involved in your parish — whether by joining a committee, volunteering, helping behind the scenes or simply sharing your views. Strong communities are built by the people who turn up, speak up and step up. The pandemic reminded us how vital it is to know who needs help and what's happening on our own streets. Those lessons must stay with us. Development, in every sense, means taking ownership of our future, and now is the moment for our villages to shape what comes next. East Suffolk Council stands ready to support this through its *Our Direction* strategy which is here for every village.

Thank you for your trust, your determination and your community spirit. I will continue to serve you as the new councils and elected councillors unfold. Thank you.