

Suffolk County Council Report

Councillor Julia Ewart – Saxmundham and District Division

1 July 2026

First and foremost, I would like to thank everyone who chose to vote for me in the recent Suffolk County Council election. The count was concluded on the morning of Friday 8 May 2026, and I was delighted and honoured to be returned as your County Councillor for the newly created Saxmundham and District Division. This division covers a wide geographical area, stretching from Kelsale through to Orford, taking in villages along the way including Blaxhall, Tunstall and west of the A12 up to Rendham.

Although we have only been sitting for a short period, the first two months have been exceptionally busy. The programme of training, briefings, information gathering and learning how Suffolk County Council operates has been intense, but also productive, informative and thoroughly worthwhile.

I am particularly pleased to report that, as one of only two independent councillors on the authority, I have been appointed Chairman of the County Council Scrutiny Committee. This committee oversees the wider scrutiny function of the Council, including health, education and audit matters. It is a position of considerable trust and responsibility, and I am grateful colleagues across the Council have welcome my being appointed.

With the new administration led by Reform UK, this role provides an excellent opportunity, alongside ten other councillors from across the political spectrum, to examine policy proposals, review performance and make constructive recommendations for improvement. I believe this will be particularly important in relation to infrastructure projects, highways, rural education and transport provision across Suffolk.

In this report, I would like to outline some of the key areas of work that I am currently undertaking on behalf of residents.

Being Your Suffolk County Councillor

There are three very clear aspects to the role of a Suffolk County Councillor.

The first, and most immediate, is to serve residents and communities across the division and to offer as much support as possible within the framework of the services delivered by Suffolk County Council. Whether the issue relates to social care, education, school transport, highways, public rights of way or any of the

many other services provided by the authority, my role is to help residents navigate the system and ensure that concerns are directed to the appropriate officers and departments.

To support this work, all County Councillors undertake a comprehensive programme of training and induction as mentioned. This enables us to better understand the structure of the Council and the responsibilities of its various departments, allowing us to respond more effectively when residents seek assistance or raise concerns.

The second aspect of the role is committee work. Councillors are appointed to committees which oversee specific areas of the Council's responsibilities and governance. As an Independent Councillor, opportunities can sometimes be more limited due to the political makeup of local government, but as stated I will be working in the field of scrutiny.

The third aspect of being a County Councillor is serving within the wider democratic process by holding the administration to account. Effective opposition is not simply about criticism; it is about constructive challenge, presenting alternatives and helping to shape better outcomes for residents across Suffolk.

I am pleased to say that this approach was demonstrated at one of the first meetings of the new Council. During a debate on a motion brought forward by the Labour Group concerning an Ipswich Northern Bypass, I felt it was important to widen the discussion. Rather than limiting consideration solely to a northern bypass route, I brought forward my first amendment whilst making my first speech as a County Councillor.

In doing so, I reflected upon the concerns that many residents across eastern Suffolk have expressed over the years regarding congestion around Ipswich and the need for improved connectivity. I suggested that, alongside discussion of a northern bypass, serious consideration should also be given to the possibility of a second river crossing, potentially in the form of either a tunnel or a bridge.

Since then, I have been in discussion with a number of residents, all significant engineers, being interested parties regarding alternative engineering solutions, particularly tunnelling options which, in some circumstances, may prove more cost-effective and less environmentally intrusive than extensive overground infrastructure.

I was encouraged that my amendment was subsequently seconded by members of the administration. To me, this reflected exactly the kind of pragmatic and collaborative approach that local government should embrace. While political differences will always exist, the best outcomes for Suffolk are achieved when good ideas are considered on their merits and when councillors work together in the interests of the communities they serve.

This is the approach I intend to continue taking throughout my term as your County Councillor: practical, constructive and always focused on achieving the best possible outcomes for our residents and villages. I am open to any ideas as being independent my seat is your seat and we can make such a difference.

Serving Our Communities

In the past, the relationship between villages and their County Councillor has sometimes felt distant. I believe that our parish councils, clerks and volunteer councillors perform an invaluable role in local democracy and deserve the strongest possible support from their County Councillor.

For that reason, I intend to be as accessible and available as I possibly can. Whilst I will endeavour to attend as many parish council meetings as possible, the size of the division means that many meetings take place on the same evening, making it impossible to attend every one. I am therefore committed to maintaining regular contact with parish councils and residents in other ways.

Residents are always welcome to contact me I will always do my best to assist you or to get you to the correct department:

Telephone / WhatsApp: 07770 666604

Email: julia.ewart@suffolk.gov.uk

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you require assistance with matters relating to:

- Education and school transport
- Adult social care
- Services for older people
- Support for disabled residents
- Children's services
- Highways and transport issues
- Other Suffolk County Council services

Highways

Within days of becoming your County Councillor, I met with the highways officer responsible for our division. I am pleased to say that he has proved to be proactive and responsive and understands the need to address local highways concerns effectively. There's a little catching up to do!

I have proposed that my highways locality budget should be used to contribute towards the replacement or improvement of damaged or outdated road signage where appropriate. To make this process as effective as possible, I would encourage every parish council to undertake a simple review of its village signage and highways concerns and provide me with a list of priorities during 2026.

I would also strongly encourage residents to use Suffolk County Council's online highways reporting system. The more issues that are reported, the stronger the evidence base becomes for repairs and improvements.

I have already met with Councillor Christopher Hudson, the Cabinet Member responsible for Highways, to raise concerns regarding the increasing volume and size of traffic using villages such as Rendham, Kelsale, Blaxhall, Tunstall and Snape. The growth in traffic movements, particularly those associated with major infrastructure projects, is significantly greater than many anticipated.

I have therefore asked that speed limits in affected communities be reviewed and that opportunities to expand the 20 is Plenty programme are explored wherever local residents support such measures. I will also be seeking opportunities for Sizewell-related funding to assist with the delivery of appropriate traffic management initiatives.

More recently I learnt that there is funding attached to the Sizewell DCO for amendments to the traffic management programme and I really hope to gain assistance to have a review of many of the villages around Saxmundham.

South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood – Application

One of the most significant planning matters currently under consideration is the proposed South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood development.

The proposal for approximately 850 new homes has implications not only for Saxmundham itself but also for surrounding villages whose residents rely upon local medical and healthcare provision.

One of my principal concerns is the capacity of the existing GP surgery. Whilst

residents are being encouraged to engage with the Integrated Care Board (ICB), I believe there is already clear understanding that additional healthcare facilities will be required if development proceeds at this scale.

I am therefore working with senior healthcare representatives to help build the strongest possible case for improved medical facilities and, ultimately, a new surgery provision.

Residents may also wish to note concerns regarding proposals for employment and industrial development on the western side of the A12, which could have significant impacts upon the wider area.

The planning reference is: DC/26/1490/OUT

I have personally spent the last weeks since the application was announced researching it and I will not be supporting it being passed on many grounds.

The Importance of the East Suffolk Local Plan

Might I also draw your attention to an important matter that I recently discussed with East Suffolk Council's Portfolio Holder for Planning. East Suffolk Council is currently updating its Local Plan, the principal planning document that determines how our district develops up to 2046. The Local Plan is the main policy framework against which planning applications are assessed and influences where services are located, how infrastructure is shaped and how our communities and economy grow. The current scoping consultation runs until 29 July 2026 and forms the first stage of that process.

This presents the opportunity to help shape the future of our towns, parishes, community groups and individual residents to help shape the future of the village. The stronger and more detailed the local input the more likely it is that local priorities and aspirations will be reflected in the Local Plan.

I would encourage our town and parish councils, community groups and housing and business providers to engage by participating in this process not only delivering development but also the facilities and services that your community wishes to deliver over the coming years. If, for instance, your village requires improvements to village hall, sports and recreation facilities, or better transport links, then this is the opportunity to make the case for those infrastructure needs.

Experience shows that when projects are recognised within strategic planning

documents, it is often considerably easier to make the case for future funding and delivery. Therefore, if there is something that your community wishes to deliver in the years ahead, now is the time to ensure it becomes part of the conversation.

I have made a submission to support Saxmundham and some of the villages which I know require support. Please get in touch if you have any local plan content you would like to see.

Further information can be found here:

<https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy-and-local-plans/new-local-plan> (eastsuffolk.gov.uk in Bing)

The consultation portal can be accessed here:

<https://eastsuffolk.inconsult.uk/localplanscoping2026/consultationHome> (eastsuffolk.inconsult.uk in Bing)

I hope as many residents as possible will take this opportunity to contribute towards shaping the future of East Suffolk.

Education

Education remains one of my highest priorities. Over the coming months, I will be visiting schools across the division and working closely with Suffolk County Council's Education Service to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing our young people.

In particular, I am keen to examine performance data, understanding the experiences of schools operating within academy trusts and identifying where additional support may be beneficial.

It is already apparent through early discussions that some children are not achieving the outcomes that they should. To be successful, further education, training or employment, and therefore working with officers to explore how our communities can be better supported and given every opportunity to succeed.

I am also very mindful of the exciting development of the new school in Blaxhall and hope to meet with representatives over the coming weeks. Any support from the County Council to facilitate introductions and engagement would be greatly appreciated. Similarly, if you have any SEND issues due to poor provision do get in touch.

Final Thoughts

The past few months have been extremely busy, but they have also been both rewarding and encouraging. I remain an accessible and approachable County Councillor who works constructively on behalf of every resident across the Saxmundham and District Division.

Thank you once again for the trust you have placed in me. I look forward to working with parish councils, community groups and residents over the coming years to ensure that our villages continue to thrive.

Julia Ewart

County Councillor for Saxmundham and District