

**A report for Groton Parish Council meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2021**  
**From James Finch – County Councillor for the Stour Valley**  
Tel 01206 263649 Mobile 07545 423796 Email: [james.finch@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:james.finch@suffolk.gov.uk)

➤ **COVID 19 infection rates over February**

I am delighted to report the rapid increase at the beginning of January has been reversed and those newly infected in the 7 day period from 18<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> February was **ZERO IN OUR AREA**. This is the first time since last summer that we have recorded zero. However as those previously afflicted are still very much “close to home”, **we must continue to stick to the guidance rigidly NOT LEAST NOW to protect our accident and emergency teams in our hospitals**. I am also now pleased to say that there is good news in that Suffolk is now vaccinating the over 60’s.

➤ **More Coronavirus Rapid Testing Centres are opening in Suffolk**

There are now 28 **Lateral Flow Testing Centres** in Suffolk (LFT), with results delivered in under an hour have opened locally in South Suffolk for those showing no symptoms – ie asymptomatic. These tests are most useful at identifying people who are infectious on the day of the test *but not showing any symptoms*. **These centres are being arranged by Suffolk County Council (SCC) for anyone who is working but who cannot work from home**. The new sites local to the Stour Valley are located at:-

- *The Stevenson Centre, Stevenson Approach, Great Cornard, Sudbury. CO10 0WD - (in partnership with Commisceo – Shift Partner.)*
- *The Fire Station in Bear Street Nayland CO6 4LA*
- *The United Reform Church, Market Place, Hadleigh. IP7 5DL.*

Appointments can be booked online - <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/getting-a-test/covid-19-asymptomatic-testing/> or by telephone - 0333 772 6144

➤ **Suffolk County Council agrees 2021/2022 budget to support most vulnerable residents and county’s recovery from Covid-19 on 11<sup>th</sup> February.**

Planned spending in 2021/22 is £597.9million, + £41million (7.4%) more than 2020/21. As part of this, the council will be spending £15.3million to address its ongoing Covid-19 costs, arising from the continuing local response to the pandemic. *There are no proposed reductions in council services or personnel in 2021/22*. This year’s budget is based only on a 12-month financial settlement from government, rather than the 3 or 4 year agreement which is usually offered.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government has continued to support local authorities as they adapt to serve communities, redeploy staff into alternative specialist roles and *see income streams such as business rates and council tax reduce significantly*. Suffolk County Council has received around £82.2 million in financial support during 2020 to meet Covid-19 related costs and whilst the challenges of continuing to respond, and in time recover, from Covid-19 remain, significant financial pressures will continue.

The council’s income from council tax is going to be £7.9 million less than expected in 2021/22 and this shortfall will be met by using council reserves. Reserves can only be spent once and do not represent a viable long term financial solution. This effective use of reserves is made possible because Suffolk County Council has maintained a consistent approach to managing its finances effectively for a number of years, holding a proportionate level of reserves for this exact situation.

***In 2021/22, general Council Tax will rise by 1.99%, which represents an increase of £26.68 for a Band D property, from £1,224.70 in 2020, to £1,251.38. There is also a 2.00 % rise in the Social Care Precept for the forthcoming year as the council recognises the ongoing challenges with meeting the rising costs and rising demand for adult care services. This means a Band D property will see an overall rise of £53.55 this year for Suffolk County Council’s element of their Council Tax bill, from £1,343.61 in 2020-21 to £1,397.16 in 2021-22.***

It is fair to say that the pandemic this year has included redeploying staff into bespoke roles such as procuring personal protective equipment (PPE) to support Suffolk’s care sector and adapting working practices for frontline staff to maintain effective social distancing measures. As a result, the

council is expecting a shortfall of around £7.8 million in projected savings for 2021. Whilst this means that further work is needed to identify potential future programmes of work, many of the new ways of working adopted by the council during 2020 because of the pandemic may actually offer potential alternative transformation savings as the organisation continues to adapt and tailor the way it works to deliver services for Suffolk's communities.

➤ **Suffolk County Council Highways doubles drainage budget to £4m for 20221/2022**

On 17th February Suffolk County Council has received £27.2m capital funding allocation from central government to provide further repairs to the Suffolk roads and £3.5m to invest in Integrated Transport. As this was £6.2m more than that incorporated into the budget agreed at the full County Council meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> February, the following areas will be boosted by:-

- An additional £2m into drainage and drainage resources (now £4m in total) recognising the worsening problem related to drainage and flooding throughout Suffolk due to the winter heavy rainfall,
- An additional £3.4m into roads – enabling more pre-patching works from summer 2021 onwards to bolster surfacing programme in 2022/23
- An additional £800k into the rights of ways bridges to recognise the greater number now walking our footpaths for their health and welfare.

**Suffolk County Council's cabinet confirms its support for Freeport East**

On February 23, the cabinet of the county council confirmed its support for the creation of a new Freeport (Freeport East). The Freeport would cover both the ports of Felixstowe and Harwich as part of the Government's aim to create a number of Freeports across the country to drive job creation, investment and international trade post Brexit.

A Freeport includes secure customs zones and tax sites where business can be carried out inside a country's land border, but where different tax and customs rules apply. These rules mean Freeports can potentially reduce administrative burdens and tariff controls, provide relief from duties, import taxes, and ease tax and planning regulations.

Freeport East has several unique aspects which make its bid for Freeport status particularly strong. This includes global and regional connectivity, with 36% of all the UK's container traffic passing through the Port of Felixstowe, unrivalled international connections, particularly with Asia, strong connectivity to the Midlands and the North, thereby supporting the government's "levelling up agenda" in these areas. The bid also stands out as supporting other national objectives such as the development of new technology and the push for clean energy. *The Port of Felixstowe has recently won funding to trial a pilot 5G network and has strong research and development links with Cambridge and Essex Universities. There are also strong links with the energy sector and the emerging hydrogen economy.*

The final decision about Freeport designation rests with the UK central government.

➤ **Virtual Fostering and Adoption Sessions for the Stour Valley**

*Since the incidence of COVID 19 sadly the demand for this service has increased significantly. Therefore, those who would like to find out more refer to the website - <https://www.fosterandadopt.suffolk.gov.uk> or join one of the following events.*

*For Fostering only:- Wednesdays - 7<sup>th</sup> April - all 7:00pm in your home.*

*For Adoption only:- Thursdays 8<sup>th</sup> April - all at 7:00pm in your home.*

To book a place please email [Claire.Gwatkin@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:Claire.Gwatkin@suffolk.gov.uk). She will then send instructions on how to join the virtual meeting. As always, our team will be happy to answer any questions you have about fostering or adoption! They normally will have a foster carer or adoptive parent available to help you too at these events.

***Please continue to spread the word.***

➤ **My Priorities**

*Education - Supporting Vulnerable People - Jobs and Growth - Localism and the Stour Valley - Building on Suffolk's Strength all underpinned by strong financial management and low council tax.*