West Suffolk District Councillor Parish Council Report October 2026

(November report available shortly)



The following is an extract from Council leader Cliff Waterman's, statement to West Suffolk Council on October 13th 2026

Former RAF Barnham Camp

I, together with the Chair of Barnham Parish Council and West Suffolk Councillor Andrew Smith, visited the site for a tour of the current facilities. It reinforced that the site is not suitable for the community and those proposed to be housed there – further reflecting the view this council unanimously agreed. I and the council have been working closely with the Parish Council, Cllr Smith and partners to make sure ministers know why Barnham is not the right place for this facility. Our arguments are based on evidence, planning and the law. In addition, officers have attended Parish Council meetings to support them in engaging with the public in the technical aspects of making their voices heard when answering the expected forthcoming planning application. As I write this, we have not seen an application, but we are poised, with partners, to answer it and I will of course make sure you are all aware too.

Local Government Reorganisation

We are still awaiting more details and timescale following the Government's announcement that Local Government Reorganisation has been put on hold and decisions withdrawn while a review takes place. I have always said reorganising Local Government is vital for better outcomes for local communities and businesses. No one, given a blank sheet of paper, would design Local Government for the twenty first century in the way it is delivered now. The current system is costly, because it leads to duplication, is confusing, because no one knows which council does what, and it slows things down, because getting anything done requires that it is processed by two councils. A unitary council, for West Suffolk also answered the main concerns of our residents that decisions are made locally and as close to communities as possible by people who live in the area. I believe a new unified West Suffolk Unitary Council, bringing decisions nearer to home, cutting out the waste and driving better outcomes is vital. I'm continuing to fight for it. However, we will have to await to see what Government will decide and what the review will bring. I will of course keep you up to date with developments and I know we will all continue to champion the communities of West Suffolk.

Business Festival

As you read this the Business Festival will have launched in Newmarket. This is the first time the launch has taken place at the National Horse Racing Museum. A place supported by West Suffolk Council, and one that brings together heritage, tourism, business and education. It is just one part of what makes Newmarket special, and it is a great example of how the visitor economy, cultural assets and local businesses are all connected. A good choice to illustrate the Business Festival's theme of connecting growth. The Business Festival is the place to generate connections, bringing together the vibrant businesses, entrepreneurs, educators, investors, and public bodies that make our district such a dynamic place to live and work.

I want to thank the organisers, sponsors, participants and of course the businesses themselves that make this event so special.

Local Plan

Details of all 328 sites put forward by developers and landowners for consideration in the new West Suffolk Local Plan have been published. West Suffolk Council issued a call for sites earlier this year as part of the first steps toward the creation of a new local plan which will decide where new homes can be built, include land for employment growth to support the needs of new and growing businesses, and set policies such as affordable housing and protection of industries such as horseracing.

The council has to allocate land for the delivery of around 1,200 homes a year to meet the Government's local housing need assessment.Sites have been put forward by developers and landowners for consideration for housing, employment, various types of infrastructure, and green infrastructure such as parks, playing fields, allotments and woodland. The council has published these details including maps and a list of the sites on our website. I must stress no decisions have been made at this stage and although they have been published it does not mean they will go forward or be developed. The council will be consulting on all the sites submitted in spring 2027 as part of local plan process.

I would like to thank the Local Plan Working Group and those that attended the all member workshop.

Blooming great

I want to say a massive well done to all volunteers and groups that take part in the Britain In Bloom' competition. No matterwhere their areas are placed, they are winners in bringing civic pride and community spirit to their towns and villages. West Suffolk Council not only manages some of the award winning sites but our staff also support community groups across the district to take part in the competition. This month Brandon and Bury St Edmunds were both recognised for their outstanding floral displays and environmental work after receiving awards in the Anglia In Bloom competition. This forms part of the Royal Horticultural Society's Britain in Bloom campaign and brings together towns, cities and communities from across the six eastern counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. Brandon enjoyed a successful year in the competition, securing gold and being named the overall winner in the town category. St Peter's

Churchyard also received a gold award and was named the overall winner in the best churchyard category. The town was further recognised with the FIFA World Cup Special Category award, while Brandon Country Park was awarded gold in the public parks category.

There was further success for Bury St Edmunds, which was awarded gold and named the overall winner in the large towncategory, as well as being crowned Suffolk county overall champion. The Abbey Gardens also received gold in the historic parks and gardens category, while Nowton Park was awarded gold in the public parks category. The Quaker Burial Ground was presented with silver-gilt in the Best Cemetery category, and the Angel Hotel received silver in the hospitality services category.Helping those most in need

Working with charities Legend on the Bench and Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide, West Suffolk Council have installed a suicide prevention bench at Hardwick Heath, Bury St Edmunds. Hardwick Heath, owned by West Suffolk Council, is the first park in the area to install a suicide prevention bench as part of a national campaign. The initiative aims to create safe, visible spaces within local communities where people can pause, reflect and, importantly, access information about mental health and suicide prevention support. I would echo Cllr Ian Shipp's comments when the bench was unveiled - I too hope that any resident that is in crisis knows they are not alone and support is always available for them. This bench serves not only as a reminder that help is available, but also as a prompt to have important conversations about mental health.

Our parks and open spaces offer our residents and communities the opportunity to get outdoors in nature, which is proven to improve our health and wellbeing. The addition of the suicide prevention bench at Hardwick Heath offers another level of support and comfort. If you are in crisis call the Samaritans helpline on 116 123 for support.Helping residents, our finances and environment stay health Essential works have begun at West Suffolk House to replace redundant heating plant, hot water systems and other equipment dating back to the opening of the building. Part of our commitment to reduce energy costs, lower carbon emissions and improve energy efficiency at our sites. Switch Together Suffolk is a group-buying scheme that helps Suffolk residents install renewable energy options. Run by Sustainable Suffolk, a partnership of all Suffolk's public sector organisations – including West Suffolk Council. In 2025, 32 installations were completed in West Suffolk, including 378 solar panels and 31 batteries, resulting in a reduction of more than 24 tonnes of carbon emissions.We have introduced the Landlord Retrofit Hub - a new service from West Suffolk Council that helps landlords to improve their rental property's energy efficiency.

Landlords interested in learning more about upgrading their property in accordance with the new minimum energy efficiency standards for rented properties can contact environment@westsuffolk.gov.uk. New Bury and Whepstead Community Centres have installed solar panels and batteries after submitting an expression of interest through the council's own Decarbonisation Initiative Fund and Solar for Business scheme, resulting in financial savings and reduction in carbon emissions. Investing in our town centres We have reinvested almost £152,000 of car parks income in Haverhill for resurfacing and relining work to the bus station lane and neighbouring car parks. These are part of our car park investments as well as the wider scheme in Haverhill to support the town centre.Work has begun to redevelop the former Mildenhall Bus Station to provide

business opportunities while retaining public toilets and facilities for passengers. Converting the former bus station will enhance the viability of the building, support job creation and improve the attractiveness of the area.

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Thriving Communities

This year's deadline for the popular Thriving Communities Fund has now passed. This provides more than £265,000 in funding available to support projects in 2027-2028 directly benefiting the lives of residents. The fund is already supporting 38 projects during the current year. Thank you in advance to the Grant Working Party, chaired by Cllr Jon London, who will consider all the applications in detail and then make recommendations to Cabinet to consider in February. If the past is anything to go by, I know this will be a hard job with so many well deserving causes – showing West Suffolk has a tremendous amount of groups and individuals dedicated to helping their communities to thrive.

Getting our skates on

The council has met with skateboard, BMX and scooter enthusiasts in Brandon to gather user feedback on the proposed design for the new skate park and to identify any amendments that may be required.

This is exciting opportunity is part of the council's response to the Brandon Commission's findings for more facilities for young people. As part of the Brandon Action Plan West Suffolk Council have committed to investing £230,000 into the towns skate park and £70,000 toward the new play area at the Brandon Remembrance Playfield.

Newmarket Nexus

We have agreed to lease the well-loved Studlands Park Community Centre to local charity, Newmarket Nexus. The centre has been a vital part of the local area for many years, and Newmarket Nexus is fully committed to building on that rich legacy. I look forward to seeing this create valuable new opportunities for residents of all ages to get out, get involved, get together and enjoy activities in their community centre.

Museums recognised with national award

Our museums have been recognised by Arts Council England under its full accreditation scheme. It confirms excellence in how we run and operate museums at Moyse's Hall and West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village. It opens doors for more partnership work and the loaning of items for exhibitions. A great example of how this council is backing the arts, culture and heritage.

Community Transport Scheme

A community transport scheme that reduces isolation and loneliness is now offering an improved service thanks to support from West Suffolk Council, as an action directly arising from the Rural Bus Review. This Cabinet review was instigated by councillor-action through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. One of its approved actions was to offer more support to community transport schemes which fill in gaps between the main bus network.

The Voluntary Network operates a dozen Connecting Communities minibuses in West Suffolk helping people who would otherwise be isolated get out to meet friends, go shopping and get to medical appointments.But some of its vehicles are ageing

which means they are more prone to breaking down, leading to time off road in the garage undergoing costly repairs. Now the charity has been able to replace one of its older less reliable vehicles with a newer 16-seater bus, thanks to a £30,000 grant from the council, using funding from the Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund. This latest additional to its fleet is five seats larger than the older bus and is fully wheelchair accessible. As it was the next route due for a replacement bus, the vehicle is being used in and around Haverhill and helping to cater for increased demand for the service there. In turn, the 'retired' bus has become a reserve vehicle,

benefiting the service across all of West Suffolk.

Taking Action

Legal action is always a last resort but it is something we will do when necessary. I want to highlight two cases that have happened recently. We have prosecuted a Newmarket couple who faked medical letters in an attempt to boost their claim for affordable housing ahead of other households in greater need Thankfully this is rare, and the first case of its kind in West Suffolk. But our message to anyone looking to do similar is clear. We will not tolerate fraud,

and we will take action wherever it is detected. We recognise that there is a huge need for more affordable and social housing in West Suffolk and we are already taking action to remedy this through our planning policies, our direct engagement with housing associations and developers to collectively address local needs, as well as the start of work on a

new local plan.

As of 1 September, we had 2,454 households on our housing register including just over 870 in urgent or high-priority need. West Suffolk Council prioritises applications for affordable housing based on levels of need. The higher the urgency of need, the more likely someone is to be successful in getting affordable housing. Medical evidence such as letters from GPs and hospitals can play an important role in triggering the reassessment of a household's application into a higher category of need.

In a separate case a landlord was fined £7,500 after failing to carry out works within 28 days to address 21 electricity safety defects or to apply for a time extension for the works. The council became involved after visiting the home in response to a damp and mould complaint raised by the tenant.

Councillor Cliff Waterman

Leader of West Suffolk Council

Mike Chester

West Suffolk Council

District Councillor for the Chedburgh and Chevington Ward