

West Suffolk District
Councillor
Report for
Hargrave Parish Council
October-November
2025



The following statement formed part of the agenda at the meeting of West Suffolk Council on Tuesday October 14th. The views expressed are of the Council Leader and do not necessarily reflect mine.

Leader's statement

Barber's Chair

1. As I write this Councillor Wittam will have swapped his council Chair for the Barber's Chair and braved the shave to raise money for charities Suffolk Accident Rescue Service (SARS) and Gatehouse. Hopefully, he will give us a heads-up on the amount he raised after having all his hair shaved off. Thank you to the students of the Barbering Program arm of the Academy of Hair and Beauty Studies at West Suffolk College for helping with the head shave. I am sure you will all join me in applauding our Chair's efforts – especially as the weather is now getting colder.

2. If you missed it, you can see him on our social media channels at Facebook

3. If I have a theme for this leader's statement it is something we all hold dear and that is encouraging a thriving West Suffolk. In particular, our work to support those organisations, businesses and individuals who are delivering civic pride and community spirit, making a real difference for the people that live here. In addition, we are and will continue to deliver on the ground a range of initiatives from multi-million projects and investments to community focused support to meet the needs of our residents and businesses.

Public Sector Reform

4. Government is driving ahead with their missions and ambitions for Public Sector Reform and we will continue to be at the heart of this. For example, Government's Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation closed on the 15 August. We expect the final proposals alongside the Local Government Policy Statement in the autumn, with allocations being set out in the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement later in the year. When we have more details, we will of course keep councillors informed and continue to work closely with PASC and the valuable insight they bring to the budget process.

Three Councils for Suffolk

5. I wanted to confirm that the Three Councils for Suffolk Case for Change proposal has been sent to Government. I am not about to go over again the arguments for it here but wanted to take this opportunity to publicly thank everyone who took part in our last debate as well as previous meetings and workshops. I thought the debate was good natured with reasoned arguments and points on all sides. All wanting the best for our communities.

6. I welcome the support shown by Suffolk County Council's Cabinet into the creation of a new mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk. This will put decision making and millions of pounds of funding into the hands of local decision makers. Norfolk County Council is due to meet on 16 October to discuss the issue. West Suffolk Council, with other Suffolk borough and district authorities, continues to play its part in delivering this essential devolution work to ensure it benefits local communities.

Pride In Place

7. I want to update you all on the Government's publication of the new Pride in Place strategy to support and empower communities at the hyper local level. The investment is part of the expansion of the Government's flagship Pride in Place Programme, previously known as the Plan for Neighbourhoods.

8. As part of an expansion of this the Government has announced an additional 169 'neighbourhoods' across England, Scotland and Wales which will receive £2 million every year for a decade, while a further 95 places will get a one-off payment of £1.5 million.

9. Government has allocated Lakenheath to receive up to £20 million over a decade as part of this announcement. This is good news and we welcome the exciting opportunity this substantial funding could bring to the local communities of Lakenheath. This national policy is about delivering significant funding and putting local people in the driving seat to choose the changes that will make a real difference to their lives. It fits with our priorities of ensuring a thriving West Suffolk, encouraging civic pride and making sure communities are fully engaged in decision making. We look forward to playing our part and working with local communities. The council has only just received this announcement and will be working through the details including how and what this funding can be spent on. Thriving Communities

10. Our Thriving Communities Fund has just closed for applications and is an investment of £260,000 to support community groups, charities and voluntary organisations. This vital community grant scheme, which is in its second year, supports work to help the health and wellbeing of residents across West Suffolk. In this current year we have already invested £266,733 in supporting community and grass root organisations make a real difference.

11. I know the cross-party Grant Working Party will be meeting to look over the applications before making recommendations to the council's Cabinet to decide in February, with grants then paid in April 2026.

12. This year the process has been streamlined to also encourage smaller community organisations to apply, while also supporting larger bids as well with two levels of grants available.

13. This of course compliments the locality budget grants that West Suffolk Councillors can use in their areas.

14. Although the grants are closed now for applications you can find out more about them from our YouTube film https://youtu.be/Eto1ZTaNANA?si=-AKUa_TDh2GKEvW_

Go For It Grants

15. Small grants to help not-for-profit organisations deliver new ideas and activities for their communities, have also been made available by West Suffolk Council.

16. These back ideas that will bring residents together, inspire people to get more active, increase participation, support health and wellbeing or respond to local needs through innovation and activities.

17. Grants of up to £300 can be applied for to pay towards start-up costs such as equipment, venue hire, promotional materials, transport and more.

18. The scheme is backed using £10,000 of funds allocated to the council from Central Government from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).

19. More details including terms and conditions and how to apply, can be found at <https://orlo.uk/kHO5I>

Blooming good effort

20. I am pleased to see West Suffolk towns Brandon and Bury St Edmunds were amongst the winners of the Anglia in Bloom competition, celebrating the best floral and environmental displays as part of the Royal Horticultural Society's Britain in Bloom campaign.

21. Anglia in Bloom covers the six eastern counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. Brandon won the gold award in the town category and Bury St Edmunds earned the gold award in the large town category.

22. Our very own Abbey Gardens in Bury St Edmunds also won the gold award in the historic parks and gardens category. The wildflower Labyrinth, also within the Abbey Gardens, received the accolade of 'Best Gardening for Wildlife' award.

23. This is a great example of community groups, volunteers and organisations, including West Suffolk Council, coming together and taking pride in the community they live and work in. We do our bit with our grass cutting and landscaping work throughout the year as well as providing specific help to the various groups. This vital work is carried out by our own staff and an army of volunteers, supported by local councillors as well. Congratulations to all involved.

Business Festival

24. I was absolutely delighted to be back at the West Suffolk Business Festival which celebrated its fifteenth anniversary this year, and where Alex Till of MENTA and I cut the ribbon at the opening event.

25. Once again it was a chance to celebrate the vibrant businesses, entrepreneurs, educators, investors, and public bodies that make our district such a dynamic place to live and work. Fifteen years ago, this festival began

as an idea - a shared vision brought to life by a group of committed partners, who understood the power of connection, collaboration and community. From those early days, the West Suffolk Business Festival has grown into the highlight of our business calendar - a testament to what's possible when partners are dedicated and enthusiastic.

26. The festival has developed and evolved over the last 15 years, navigating challenges from Brexit to Covid-19, embracing opportunities from AI to the transition to Net Zero. Yet, through it all, the festival's core purpose has remained steadfast: to provide a platform to engage, learn, and collaborate.

27. At West Suffolk Council, we are passionate about these values. That is why we continue to invest in projects that not only respond to today's needs but anticipate tomorrow's opportunities.

28. The festival has welcomed many supporters and partners since its first year and I want to say thank you to each and every one of them. Some of our key partners have been with us every year since the start and a special thank you must go to: MENTA, West Suffolk College, the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce and the Bury Free Press. Also, thank you to all those who are involved and supporting the festival this year.

Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Centre

29. I am pleased to say that building work on West Suffolk Council's advanced manufacturing and engineering centre will begin this winter. Building contractor, Pentaco Construction, has been selected to construct the state-of-the-art AME centre – which has been a long-term ambition for this council.

30. Designed to support startup businesses, the AME Centre will deliver 17 flexible, self-contained workshop units, as well as shared meeting and conference spaces. By filling a critical market gap, this centre will boost

economic resilience, enable sustainable development, close skills shortages, and maintain Suffolk's competitive edge in the advanced manufacturing sector.

31. The centre will foster innovation and business start-ups, capitalising in our area's existing strengths in advanced manufacturing and supporting an active network of businesses. Funding for the centre is coming from West Suffolk Council and Enterprise Zone funding, endorsed by Suffolk County Council and the Suffolk Business Board.

Backing business by cracking down on illegal trading

32. Three shops in Newmarket found to be selling illegal tobacco and vapes despite warnings from police and trading standards, have been closed for three months.

33. A joint operation between West Suffolk Council, Suffolk Trading Standards and Suffolk Police has seen closure orders served on the Orange Shop in Crown Walk, Newmarket Express in Wellington Street and High Street New Market Ltd in the High Street.

34. It follows test purchases by Suffolk Trading Standards at all three businesses earlier in the year. At each shop they were able to buy illicit tobacco and noncompliant vaping products. Each of the businesses was given advice and a warning. But in a follow up inspection all three were again found to still be

selling the illegal products and at one of the shops a police sniffer dog discovered a secret hideaway in a wall in which further illegal tobacco was uncovered. In total 16,950 packets of illegal tobacco, 14kg of illegal hand

rolling tobacco and 4600 illegal vapes were seized from the three shops. These significant quantities demonstrated the continuing persistent sale and distribution of prohibited products.

35. As well as our partners I also want to thank all the local councillors that have played a part in this operation to ensure the safety of our communities and back local businesses that operate within the rules. I know a number of you had a part to play in this and is a good example of councillors championing their areas and backing business.

Markets

36. I'm pleased to say that our markets across the district are thriving like never before, with more market traders, more footfall and a real buzz around them. From pumpkins to pottery, I would urge you, residents and visitors to explore the regular and makers markets this October, with additional half term Halloween treats for the whole family! Several West Suffolk markets will have a haunted Halloween twist over the half term break.

Environmental savings

37. In a move towards sustainability and energy-efficiency, I am pleased to report all council-owned streetlights in West Suffolk have now been converted to light-emitting diode (LED) lanterns.

38. West Suffolk Council have worked alongside parish and town councils to convert approximately 1,600 streetlights using the council's one-million-pound Decarbonisation Initiatives Fund (DIF). The scheme's objective was to rapidly complete the environmental upgrades of streetlights owned by town and parish councils, bringing them in-line with those owned by West Suffolk Council and Suffolk County Council. The majority of these streetlight conversions were carried out by Suffolk County Council on behalf of the local councils.

39. This latest upgrade brings the total number of council-owned LED streetlights in the West Suffolk area to approximately 20,000. Taxpayers will see significant financial savings, with energy costs typically reduced by over 70 per cent. Based on current energy prices, the newly converted units alone are projected to save around £68,000 annually, adding to the total annual saving of approximately £680,000 that is already being achieved across previously converted Suffolk County Council and West Suffolk LED streetlights.

40. In addition, this is expected to increase carbon dioxide (CO₂) savings by around 50 tonnes per year, increasing annual savings in the West Suffolk area to 624 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually – the equivalent of removing about 138 cars from the road each year.

Councillor Cliff Waterman

Leader of West Suffolk Council

Mike Chester



West Suffolk
Council

District Councillor for the Chedburgh and Chevington Ward

