

CLLR SALLY MITTUCH

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT AUGUST 2026

Hoxne & Eye • August/September 2026

Green Party County Councillor

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August may have been quieter for formal council meetings, but there has been plenty happening across Hoxne & Eye.

I have continued working with parish and town councils on road safety, speeding, traffic, energy infrastructure and community projects, as well as visiting local organisations and supporting practical environmental initiatives.

This month's report also highlights support available to residents for energy efficiency and home improvements, alongside ways our communities can prepare for increasingly extreme weather.

DUNWICH HEATH WILDFIRE

A warning for Suffolk.

The devastating wildfire at Dunwich Heath has been a stark reminder of how vulnerable our countryside can become during prolonged periods of hot, dry weather.

Around 210 football pitches of heathland were affected. At the height of the incident, approximately 120 firefighters were involved, with Suffolk Fire & Rescue working alongside crews from across the country.

The response showed the extraordinary strength of our rural communities. Village halls opened their doors to provide shelter and support, while local farmers helped transport water by tractor to areas inaccessible to fire engines.

Our fire service needs the right resources. The Suffolk Fire Brigades Union has highlighted the need for greater investment in wildfire-fighting equipment, including better water systems, lighter protective clothing, suitable footwear for difficult terrain and more 4x4 vehicles. Suffolk is one of the driest parts of the country, yet our fire service receives below-average government funding.

As hot, dry summers become more common, we need to ensure our emergency services have the capacity and equipment to protect our communities.

Climate resilience isn't an abstract issue. It is about keeping people, homes, wildlife and our countryside safe.

BECCLES LEADS ON CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Last month I reported that the Reform administration at Suffolk County Council had withdrawn the Council's Climate Emergency declaration. In contrast, **Beccles Town Council has recently re-declared a Climate Emergency**, recognising the need for continued action on climate resilience, nature recovery and reducing emissions.

It is an important reminder that many local councils remain committed to addressing the challenges posed by climate change and extreme weather.

SCRUTINY AT COUNTY HALL

The new Reform UK administration has introduced a number of changes since taking control of Suffolk County Council.

One decision has been to spend approximately £18,000 remodelling the Leader's office at Endeavour House. The administration has said additional space was required.

Other policy changes have included a new Pets in the Workplace policy and changes to arrangements concerning parking for the Leader.

I will continue to scrutinise decisions made by the administration and ask whether public money is being directed towards the priorities that matter most to Suffolk residents.

Our priorities should include: social care • highways • fire & rescue • public transport • environmental protection • community services

Suffolk County Council finances

Suffolk County Council's unaudited 2025/26 accounts highlight continuing financial pressures, with the council ending the year around £15 million overspent and general reserves falling by £14.6 million to £47.4 million. The biggest pressure is SEND, with the High Needs budget overspent by more than £70 million and the accumulated Dedicated Schools Grant deficit reaching £163.8 million. Borrowing also increased by around £90 million, while more than £73 million of planned capital expenditure was not delivered during the year and has been carried forward. The accounts underline the importance of ensuring that essential services are protected and that planned investment is delivered and provides good value for residents.

Questions over Council Owned Businesses

The Suffolk Green Group reported on 6 August that the *Local Government Chronicle* had

reported on a leaked recording of a closed Reform UK meeting in which Suffolk Council Leader Michael Hadwen allegedly discussed selling wholly owned council companies before the new unitary councils come into existence. The Green Group says Suffolk County Council owns **Concertus, Vertas and Opus People Solutions**, operating under the Vertas Group, which can provide dividends to the council.

The main implication is that selling council-owned companies could provide a one-off cash receipt but could also mean losing future income and valuable public assets.

The timing is particularly important because three new unitary councils are due to replace the existing councils in April 2028. If assets are sold before then, the new councils could inherit fewer income-generating assets and potentially have less financial resilience.

SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES

Help with Energy Costs & Home Improvements

There are several opportunities for Suffolk residents who want to improve their homes, reduce energy bills and move away from ageing fossil-fuel heating systems.

HEAT PUMP SUPPORT

Through the Government's Boiler Upgrade Scheme, eligible homeowners in England may receive: £7,500 towards an air-source heat pump

£9,000 for eligible households replacing oil or LPG heating

The grant is applied for by the installer, so residents do not need to claim it back.

The scheme is not means-tested, although eligibility conditions apply.

SWITCH TOGETHER SUFFOLK

Suffolk councils and other public-sector organisations are working with Switch Together, a community group-buying scheme.

Residents register their interest and installers compete for the work, potentially securing better prices than individuals might obtain alone.

The group-buying saving is additional to the government grant.

Installations are carried out by MCS-accredited installers.

WARM HOMES SUFFOLK LOAN

Homeowners can apply for loans of: £2,000 – £15,000, 2.2% APR fixed rate, Up to 7 years to repay.

Potential improvements include:

- Solar PV
- Battery storage
- Solar thermal
- Air-source and ground-source heat pumps
- Double and triple glazing
- Loft, wall and floor insulation
- Ventilation alongside insulation

The scheme is designed to help homeowners spread the cost of improvements while making their homes warmer and more energy efficient.

Need help?

Warm Homes Suffolk

 0345 603 7686

The service can assess your circumstances and help identify appropriate support.

HIGH STREETS MATTER

Suffolk County Council has launched a new programme supporting 75 independent and hospitality businesses across the county.

Businesses can receive: One-to-one advice • Funding information • Peer networking • Business resilience support

Our independent businesses are an essential part of our market towns and rural communities. I encourage eligible businesses to investigate the programme.

HEALTHY CHILD SERVICE CONSULTATION

The consultation on proposed changes to Suffolk's Healthy Child Service has been extended. Proposals include:

Ending the Young Person Pathway

Ending the Family Nurse Partnership

Removing the Community Staff Nurse role from Health Visiting teams

Making School Nursing a term-time-only service



CONSULTATION CLOSES

18 OCTOBER 2026

A Cabinet decision is expected in November.

I encourage residents, parents, health professionals and community organisations to read the proposals and make their views known.

LOCAL ACTION IN HOXNE & EYE



Funding for Parish & Community Projects

I have access to County Councillor Locality and Highways budgets which can help kick-start projects led by parish councils and community groups.

I can also help identify other potential sources of funding.

HAVE YOU GOT AN IDEA?

Please get in touch. Even if I cannot fund your project directly from my budgets, I may be able to help identify another opportunity.

Parish councils and community groups: please don't be shy about coming forward.



EYE

Solar Farms & Our Electricity Grid

I have been working with Eye Town Council and local residents on mitigation measures relating to the large-scale solar developments around Eye.

I have also raised the pressing issue of electricity grid capacity with UK Power Networks.

Insufficient grid capacity can prevent households and businesses from installing solar panels, heat pumps and other low-carbon technologies — even when people are willing to invest.

I believe Suffolk should be looking much more seriously at community-owned renewable energy, alongside the grid improvements needed to enable local people and businesses to generate and export their own energy.



Traffic & Road Safety

I have been working closely with Eye Town Council to address the volume and type of traffic travelling through the town.

Meetings have involved Eye Town Council, Suffolk County Council's NSIP officers and Suffolk Highways.

Our priorities are simple:

- IMPROVE SAFETY
- REDUCE UNSUITABLE TRAFFIC
- PROTECT OUR TOWN AND PEOPLE

I will continue working with the Town Council and highways officers to identify practical solutions.



PARISH WALKABOUTS

I recently walked around **Laxfield** with the Parish Clerk and councillors, meeting residents along the way.

It was a valuable opportunity to see local issues first-hand, identify problems and develop new ideas.

I will be returning to Laxfield for a walk with the local Green Group.

Weybread

I also walked around Weybread with a parish councillor to look specifically at road safety and speeding on the B1116.

Residents have reported speeding traffic from as early as 4am. I have to admit, I didn't do my survey then!

I have submitted a report to Suffolk Highways requesting repairs, improvements and further advice on reducing speeding.

I am also raising the issue of speed enforcement with the police and intend to contact the Police and Crime Commissioner.



Could I visit your parish?

Please invite me for a walk with councillors and residents. It is difficult to pick up the needs of a parish during a parish council meeting, especially if I have more than one meeting during the evening and my time gets cut short.

I want to develop a programme of parish walkabouts across the parishes of the Hoxne & Eye Division so that I can see local issues for myself and work with communities on practical solutions.

FRESSINGFIELD SCOUTS

I recently visited the Fressingfield Scouts HQ to learn about a project aimed at improving the efficiency and convenience of their solar-heating system.

I have submitted a funding application to help support this community project.

Local community organisations with ideas for practical improvements are encouraged to get in touch.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

The People's Emergency Briefing

In August, The **People's Emergency Briefing** was shown at **Metfield** Village Hall.

The film explores the impacts of climate change in the UK and looks at how communities can prepare, adapt and respond.

Following the screening, I spoke about **Nature's Rights** and the potential role of beaver reintroduction in restoring Suffolk's rivers and becks.

There was strong interest in future nature recovery, sustainability and preparedness events.

COMING UP

STRADBROKE – People's Emergency Briefing Free Film Showing

24 September 2026

 Stradbroke Community Centre, IP21 5JN

Arrive 6:45pm for 7:00pm

50-minute screening followed by approximately 45-60 minutes of discussion.

Organised by Stradbroke Parish Council.

LAXFIELD – People's Emergency Briefing Free Film Showing

9 October 2026

 Laxfield Village Hall, IP13 8DY

6:30pm

Organised by Laxfield Parish Council.

PREPARING FOR MORE EXTREME WEATHER

A CALL TO EVERY PARISH COUNCIL

Do you have a Community Emergency Plan? Do residents know about it?

Recent events have demonstrated why community resilience matters.

Please check that your parish's emergency arrangements are up to date and that residents know where to find information.

Your plan should consider risks such as:

 Wildfire

 Flooding

 Severe weather

 Power cuts

 Water shortages

 Extreme heat

Please share key information through your parish website, newsletter, noticeboards and community networks. The best time to prepare for an emergency is before it happens.

Do you feel you need more structure or guidance? If so do get in touch.

KEEP IN TOUCH

I am keen to hear from residents and parish councils about the issues affecting our communities. It doesn't matter if you voted Green or not – I am here to help residents and parish councils across the whole division.

Whether you have concerns about speeding, highways, flooding, public transport, planning, energy, national infrastructure projects, solar farms, reservoirs, environmental concerns or community projects, please get in touch.

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