



Liberal Democrats Plan for Suffolk

Getting Suffolk Back on its Feet

**RECONNECTING, REVIVING &
REGENERATING COMMUNITIES**

Suffolk Liberal Democrats - March 2021

Getting Suffolk Back on Its Feet

As we emerge from the pandemic, massively mishandled by the Government, we have to look at rebuilding our society with a radical new approach from local authorities. “Business as usual” just will not do.

Businesses have been damaged, some never to recover and jobs have been lost. Many families, have suffered from a reduction in income, forced to eat into their savings or seek help with benefits and sometimes from foodbanks.

Long periods of enforced isolation have impacted upon the physical and mental health and well-being of many with the long-term effects of the pandemic still to be fully assessed.

For some, the pandemic has suddenly and tragically deprived them of a family member and the loss of a dependent and the emotional support of a love one. Resources for social care are woefully inadequate to meet the rising demand.

The educational divide has widened. Our young people’s education has been seriously disrupted with many unable to benefit from on-line learning through inadequate internet connection and lack of access to tablets and other devices.

Meanwhile the climate crisis hasn’t gone away. We need to cut our carbon footprint, which means reassessing our priorities and modifying our lifestyles.

National, regional and local economies have been weakened, with our service sector taking a major hit, connectivity including transport still lagging behind and in need of resourcing. Our ageing infrastructure needs to be rebuilt if we are to create new jobs and opportunities for young and unemployed people.

Local Government deserves a better funding settlement with more devolved powers, but within existing resources we must prioritise what matters for Suffolk; a greener economy, a caring county, and a safer more connected county – we believe that local government should be “building back better.”

Suffolk Needs Change, “Business as usual” just will not do - it is now time to stop the rot and invest in our future.

The Liberal Democrats have a plan for Suffolk – we believe that it deserves your support.

Sustainable Suffolk - a place to learn, work and do business

A greater greener economy by encouraging sustainable enterprises

We have all learnt how to spend less time travelling, to be more self-sufficient and use fewer resources but we have to keep doing this and avoid going back to an unsustainable way of living. Living and working locally also means spending locally so small shops and services benefit the wider local economy - ensuring more businesses will start up.

Creating a greener Suffolk requires a re-evaluation of the quality of Suffolk's economy and business sector. With the climate emergency at its heart, our plan will:

- Support sustainable businesses to create fulfilling local jobs that lead to happier lives
- Encourage and grow our business and SME sector making Suffolk and especially rural Suffolk a hotbed of forward thinking, innovative businesses.
- Improve rural broadband and phone communications enabling businesses to grow and for more extended online education to be developed.
- Influence planning authorities to prioritise Town Centre Regeneration, including multi-use of empty retail for affordable housing.
- Establish a COVID-19 grant scheme for Suffolk charities and arts & culture venues

A better connected Suffolk

Integral to our plan is providing a safe, carbon efficient, and high-quality transport system, and attending to our neglected roads, cycle routes and public transport.

Our transport plans include:

- Introduce county-wide electric vehicle charge scheme by 2023, and no new home should be built without one.
- All council vehicles to be zero emission by 2029 by securing a pool of electric cars for staff business use.
- Support for rural public transport with a council owned bus company motivated by service, not profit, with buses to be ultra-low emission by 2025. We will start with a demand-scoping exercise on where priority demand is for bus routes.
- Re-enable the use of concessionary bus passes on community transport.
- Encourage cycling with electric bike grants and more cycle lanes, improve cycling infrastructure and maintain existing routes.
- Implement more 20mph areas where they are supported by residents and couple these to the Quiet Lanes project.
- Lobby for more direct rail freight network investment to our port.
- Investigate alternative options to relieve the northern traffic inflow into Ipswich, such as more park and rides into town, improvements for cyclists, better traffic management, and possibly a second Orwell crossing, rather than the expensive and environmentally ruinous Northern Bypass.

Safeguarding our natural environment and make Suffolk carbon neutral

Our natural and historic environment from coast to country is a unique asset; we will protect our open spaces, support Suffolk's farmers to improve biodiversity, and work with planning authorities to ensure development is environmentally sensitive.

Our plan for a greener Suffolk includes:

- Planting 120,000 new trees now and replace two for every one lost.
- Introducing a solar energy scheme for Suffolk businesses.
- A new purchasing policy to make low carbon purchases the norm.
- Undertaking an environmental audit for all schools and making schools energy efficient by 2028.
- Council's own energy use to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- Implementing a flood prevention strategy that ensures effective drainage and proper co-ordination with planning authorities and claims available funding from central government for flood defence and mitigation.

We will also oppose consent being granted for the development of Sizewell C Nuclear power station; the Liberal Democrat view is that we need to be investing in renewables and green energy instead. We also note that building Sizewell C will have permanent devastating effects on our areas of Special Scientific interest and the beauty of the county, which in turn will affect tourism adversely.

Life-long excellent education for all

Education is the key to unlocking potential, we must support all schools to become outstanding, and work with sixth form colleges to ensure young people are ready both for work and higher education. Yet more than 5,600 Suffolk youngsters are being taught in 'inadequate' schools, according to the Council's own data.

The Liberal Democrat Plan will:

- Deliver an action plan with schools and teachers to improve education attainment and schools' performance, replacing the Council's failed and underfunded 'raising the bar' scheme.
- Boost apprenticeships and vocational training opportunities for young people
- Introduce countywide "catch up" education programmes and improve access to on-line learning.
- Provide more school places for children with special needs within the County.
- Make provision for life-long education for a world that changes rapidly. Skills acquired at 18 are almost certainly to be outdated before long and re-education will be needed.

Whilst the Council cannot reverse the shift from local authority control to academy trusts, it should set up a consortium of education providers with a shared agenda to drive improvement.

Liberal Democrats believe that education is for life; we must invest in Libraries helping them to provide a wider range of services for local people, e.g. including life-long learning opportunities, and as digital hubs.

Suffolk - a caring and wellbeing County

We have a care crisis in Suffolk, our care homes have had high Covid infection rates, and the council has cut support for 571 working-age adults and 1,779 older people, and some Suffolk Day Care Centres and other local services have disappeared following the closure of Age UK Suffolk.

Many more carers need practical support; carers have increasingly frail support networks, particularly vulnerable to breakdown at this time. Many are living lives of loneliness, poverty and quiet desperation.

Our plan for Suffolk's care needs and carers will:-

- Identify Suffolk's hidden carers

The numbers of unpaid carers have risen dramatically during the pandemic, we estimate to over 100,000 of the population in Suffolk. We know some belong to *Suffolk Family Carers*, some register with their GP, and some claim Carers Allowance. Shockingly, most are not officially identified although the County relies on them to provide the bulk of social care unpaid.

- Create a single confidential unified list of family carers in Suffolk*

Working from the grassroots with parish councils and other Suffolk organisations and groups create a single register that will ensure help and support, vaccination and other initiatives can be efficiently targeted at these most invaluable and overworked members of our community

Liberal Democrats will also stand up for Carers by calling on the government to raise Carer's Allowance by £1,000 a year and..

*A Motion presented to Suffolk County Council by Woodbridge Liberal Democrat Councillor Caroline Page requesting that they support the establishment of a voluntary confidential data base of carers. The Motion was passed by members on March 17th 2021.

Supporting older people

Suffolk has around 5% more older people than the national average, and there is lots of evidence of loneliness and isolation in Suffolk's older population. The Liberal Democrat plan includes:

- Funding social care properly
We desperately need a better funding deal for social care, properly integrated with the NHS and personalised to individual needs.
- Authorise the use of the full 3% social care precept, unlocking the maximum available funding
- Continue to campaign for a better model for funding social care
- Support older people by paying attention to their needs and not "parking them"
- In response to the closure of Age UK Suffolk, and resulting loss of services, we would work with national Age UK and other older people's charities to establish a new structure for supporting older people across the county
- Ensuring all sheltered accommodation schemes have on-site warden support
- Support for schemes to help older people connect digitally, eg "Grandpads"

Supporting children, young people and vulnerable adults

Children's and families, emotional health and mental wellbeing have been impacted by Covid, especially amongst families who have seen a loss of income. Yet despite the growing seriousness of child poverty and mental health issues, shockingly, the Council are reducing the number of Children's Centres in Suffolk from 38 to 17 full-time & 11 part-time Family Hubs. The Council are letting our young people down.

Liberal Democrats strategy for children and vulnerable adults will:

- Extend free school meals during holidays and support for vulnerable families
- End 'out of county' placements of young people and those with mental health needs
- Ensure all schools in Suffolk have an accredited mental health worker
- Supporting our voluntary organisations and local resilience groups
- Deliver closer integration in both funding and support between children's and adult social services and NHS mental health

Cuts to youth clubs and services have left only a handful of community-led youth groups throughout the county, whilst it may be difficult to replace what has been lost, the Council should look at options to co-commission services with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Suffolk - a safer County

This year's council elections take place at the same time as the Police and Crime Commissioner. To make Suffolk a safer county, it is essential that the Council works hand in hand with the PCC to ensure the Police and Crime Plan reflects the needs of all of Suffolk's communities, prioritizing frontline community policing. Years of Tory police cuts have put community safety at risk with the reduction in police numbers, PCSO cover and front-counter police station services across Suffolk.

The wider justice system has also suffered in Suffolk; the closure of the Magistrates' Courts in Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds has left the county with only one courthouse in Ipswich, and Suffolk has become a legal aid advice desert.

A Liberal Democrat Police and Justice plan for Suffolk will:

- Redirect significant resources towards community policing and the visibility of police within communities; a third of all new officer posts should be PCSOs.
- Fight for fairer funding from the Home Office for Suffolk's police force; this needs to be delivered before further precept rises are agreed
- Encourage local restorative justice schemes, working with the police and mental health services on diversion from court, and pilot multi-agency initiatives that can work with Town Councils to use their premises and community networks for establishing local restorative justice panels. The PCC's restorative justice strategy will have victims' rights at its heart.
- Deliver an integrated plan with Suffolk Highways for tackling road safety and speeding issues and working with Councils across Suffolk to review how well new parking enforcement arrangements are working.
- Work with the County Council to establish a Community Justice Partnership of local justice agencies, including Magistrates Courts, legal aid and advice providers like Citizens Advice, victims support and domestic violence help organisations to a develop long-term vision and strategy for the improvement of the justice system in Suffolk.

END

Getting Suffolk Back on its Feet - Reconnecting, Reviving & Regenerating Communities is the official Manifesto of the Suffolk Liberal Democrats for the Suffolk County Council and Police & Crime Commissioner elections on May 6th 2021 and published by the Liberal Democrats County Co-ordinating Committee for Suffolk.
A shortened summary is also available.

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