West Suffolk District Councillor Report for Dalham Parish Council July 2026



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

Leader's statement

1. I want to start my statement with a thank you.

2. I am writing this on the day after our extraordinary council meeting was held to discuss RAF Barnham's future. I was asked by reporters afterwards how I felt about what the council had done and my answer was that I felt proud. Not only was I thankful for people giving their time at such short notice but also the way the debate was conducted and the way we gave a unified message to our communities and government. I know that this will not always be the case and that democracy, by its very nature, will require us to agree to disagree on many topics but I truly believe our council is a model for others to follow in working together on this issue to achieve the best outcomes. This is just the start of a long process. But it is a strong beginning for us, as a council, to back our residents and provide a well-argued and evidence-based case to the Home Office to explain why RAF Barnham is not the right place.

Better Recycling

3. I want to thank all our hardworking staff across West Suffolk Council who have been working on the introduction of the national Better Recycling scheme.

4. This has been a highly complex operation involving 185 new collection rounds and approximately 240,000 bins and food waste caddies delivered across West Suffolk. We expected something of this nature to take time to bed in and for the public to understand and get used to this massive change to what and how bins are collected. With something like this we also expected teething problems, and I know there have been some issues and frustrations that the teams have been addressing and we have apologised for. The bulk of these have been resolved, and the team are working assiduously on resolving the few remaining. However, we must recognise that even a 0.1 per cent failure is a 100 per cent failure for the person affected and not be complacent about getting it fixed.

5. As I write this, we have currently collected around 515 tonnes of food waste, something this authority has never done before. I am also sure that once we have the data, we will also see huge increases in the recycling of other materials that I will share with you.

6. Introducing brand new services that we and other neighbouring councils have never had to do before is difficult and like any complex mechanism, has many moving parts – especially in a heatwave. But we are seeing the majority of people now getting to grips with the change of days and bins as well as additional materials they can now recycle.

7. I also want to thank members of the public who in the heatwave have been getting their bins out early and even providing our crews with cold drinks and iced lollies.

8. I want to thank all those involved, including Councillor Dave Taylor and you as councillors for passing on information, and for the continued success and bedding in of this new system so it becomes business as usual.

Award winning

9. I am pleased to report the council has been shortlisted as a regional finalist for Planning Authority of the Year – East of England, in the Royal Town Planning Institute's Awards for Planning Excellence 2026. This has been another successful year for the council, having delivered the first ever West Suffolk Local Plan three months ahead of schedule. We also explored different ways of

engaging with our communities, putting residents at the heart of shaping the first local plan, and were one of the first councils in the country to introduce increased requirements for affordable housing.

10. We have also been named runner up in the Best Migrated Local Authority category of the 2026 Land Data Awards for Excellence, thanks to the work of the Planning Technical Support Team. This was the same recognition we had in 2024, meaning the council has been independently identified as demonstrating a consistently high level of service. A huge well done to everyone involved in these achievements.

Benefitting from the sunny weather

11. Solar panels and a battery-operated storage system have been installed at Honington and Sapiston Village Hall, with support through this council's £1 million Decarbonisation Initiatives Fund (DIF). It is projected to generate 22,000 kWh of renewable energy annually, reducing carbon emissions and saving the venue money.

12. Construction has also started on the Mildenhall Hub solar canopies project. Once completed, the canopies are expected to generate over £130,000 of electricity and save over 124 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. More than 50 trees are set to be planted alongside the project, as well as new bird and bat boxes, log heaps and compost piles.

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol

13. During the recent heatwave we initiated our heat related Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP). This is a locally agreed procedure designed to minimise harm or death to individuals experiencing homelessness during severe weather conditions. While SWEP is often associated with cold weather, it also applies to extreme heat, recognising that people without shelter are at heightened risk of heat-related illnesses due to limited access to shade, water, and cooling facilities. During this period, we coordinated outreach services and community partners to ensure that people sleeping rough had access to safe spaces, hydration, and cooling measures during heatwaves. It included conducting welfare checks, issuing water, sunscreen and access to cold drinks locally.

Helping our town centres and high streets

14. I am pleased to say that the free parking trial which was agreed by council has started in specified car parks in

Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Newmarket. This offers the first hour free in Haverhill and Newmarket, and free

between 8am and 10am on Mondays in the arc, Bury St Edmunds. We will obviously

keep this under review as part of a larger package of measures to support our high streets and town centres.

15. Cabinet went to see for themselves the shopping precinct in the centre of Mildenhall. The buildingsand maintenance are the responsibility of a company that leases the land from West Suffolk Council. The visit was part of our drive to help our town centres thrive and we, as a Cabinet, came away determined to find ways to improve this area, working with our tenant. With some vacant units and a tired exterior, it is clear this part of Mildenhall needs some help but, as ever, this requires many partners working together and there will be no quick solutions.

16. In addition to our regular markets, makers' markets are being held across the district in July and August. These are very popular and I would urge you to visit them and our regular markets. And encourage your residents to do so too!

17. We are also doing our bit to support local businesses. The Apex Coffee House, which has received a five-star food hygiene rating, is expanding its list of local suppliers, following the move to bring its catering back in house. Not only does it keep food local and fresh but also supports local businesses.

18. The EpiCentre, in Haverhill, has announced a major enhancement to its laboratory offering with the introduction of two advanced pieces of scientific equipment: a fluorescent microscope and a quantitative polymerase chain reaction (qPCR) machine. I won't try to explain what they do but Councillor

Indy Wijenayaka visited the site to hear about the difference this investment makes. The funding has been made possible through one of many grants the Council has made via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The addition marks a significant milestone in The EpiCentre's ongoing mission to provide science-led businesses with the infrastructure, environment and support they need to grow and succeed.

Thriving Communities

19. Well done to everyone, including partners who have put on another highly successful Crucial Crew two week event. It has been a record year with more than 1,200 children from over 40 schools attending – the biggest event the council has put on and, again, during the recent heatwave. We also have new scenarios this year including CPR – East Anglian Air Ambulance, Elevated Education – Mental Health and Wellbeing, Oral Health – Public Health and Better Recycling. I know Councillor Donna Higgins saw for herself the benefits the young people was getting from this hugely enjoyable event which also helps teach crucial life skills: hence the name.

20. As part of the Keep the Heat scheme, between January and March, thermal imaging cameras at the council supported 84 households to locate areas in their home where heat is lost and subsequently discussing available government initiatives and grants with a Healthy Homes Advisor.

21. In Haverhill the Dementia Hub has expanded and secured a new five-year commitment at Haverhill Leisure Centre, following support from partners and charity fundraising as well as locality budget funding from Councillors Pat Hanlon, Margaret Marks, Joe Mason, David Smith and Liz Smith.

22. Across the district six play areas are set to be or have been refurbished before the school holidays, to make them more engaging and accessible for users. This follows engagement with pupils from local schools. The six play areas being revamped are at Broomley Green Lane in Bury St Edmunds, Alderton Close, Bramley Road, Cloverfield, and Hales Barn Road, in Haverhill, and Heathland Way in Mildenhall. This is part of the council's rolling programme of investment and improvement of play facilities across the district.

Lots to entertain this summer

23. The Government's Great British Summer Savings Scheme reduces VAT to five per cent on qualifying family-focused entertainment facilities including museums, and this is good news for our own venues. The cost reduction applies to tickets for Moyse's Hall and children's tickets for our programme of theatre in the park events. Please check out What's On West Suffolk for the full programme of events.

24. Once again, Dragon Fest was a roaring success this summer and saw more than 2,500 families attend West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village, generating £30,000 of income.

25. While I'm highlighting local entertainment this summer, I would also suggest a visit to the Home of Horseracing at Newmarket and Palace House. I believe Councillor Ian Shipp has seen for himself the external renovation of Palace House, which we supported through a £30,000 grant from the Rural England

Prosperity Fund - given the importance of this facility to the visitor economy and community infrastructure. This is part of a major three-year transformation project to re-launch the building as a Royal Palace. The planned changes will enhance the visitor experience and attract new audiences by portraying the Royal story and racing heritage through interactive, digitally recreated historical figures and data-driven storytelling.

Local Plan

26. The first stage of consultation has started on the new West Suffolk Local Plan, which will plan where new homes and employment can be built to meet local needs to the year 2045. Since our current local plan was adopted, the government has revised housing need figures – for West Suffolk this means that, rather than planning for the delivery of 765 homes a year, it needs to cater for closer to 1,200. Ably chaired by Councillor Frank Stennett, the Local Plan Working Group has already met once, and each member on the group will be making sure that all local members and the local community are aware of what's being considered.

Councillor Cliff Waterman

Leader of West Suffolk Council

Mike Chester

District Councillor for the Chedburgh and Chevington Ward