

West Suffolk Councillor Sarah Pugh's Report for 11th September 2024

1. The Local Plan

Members will recall that previously colleagues from West Suffolk Council have spoken about the Local Plan and many residents across West Suffolk have given feedback at various points in the process. The Local Plan was sent to the Inspector for approval or rejection earlier this summer and since it was submitted, we have had a change of Government, with a change to planning rules. West Suffolk Council has been advised that because the Local Plan had been submitted and was already at the Inspection stage, it would be judged against the rules and criteria that were in place when it was written. Subsequent Local Plans will need to take into account the new rules from the new Government.

The main changes to the ways the Local Plan must be written include a 50% increase in the number of new homes that have to be built each year. Currently we are required to build 809 homes per year. We will have to build 1200 when we write the next plan. The Government is prioritising building in sustainable villages but if you are not on a bus network, you are not sustainable. If we don't hit the requirement to build, we will be penalised by a 20% increase in the number of houses to be built.

Going forward, it is mandatory to have a 5 year land supply. There is a requirement to build for social rent in each project, with up to 50% of this type of housing in grey belt areas. The Right to Buy your home is under review as well.

In West Suffolk we do not have any Green Belt land so we have no Grey Belt but this will be a problem in many other areas.

2. Thriving Communities Fund

Jon Eaton is leading on this initiative. As you know, West Suffolk Council's strategic priority for thriving communities includes ensuring that residents can access services, benefits, and support, as well as enabling them to improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing through a wide range of community activities. Much of this is through the council's support for projects and initiatives delivered by community groups, charities and voluntary organisations across West Suffolk.

The application process for the Thriving Communities Fund has been streamlined to encourage smaller community organisations to apply, while two levels of grants are now available:

Community grants of between £2,000 and £8,000 are available for one-off projects by community groups, that will support residents in a small part of the district such as an estate or village.

Larger grants of between £8,001 and £20,000 will fund work to support residents across the whole of West Suffolk or big parts of the district such as a town. Although organisations can apply for this level of funding, the council retains its discretion to take each application on its merits and may grant a smaller amount.

3. **West Suffolk Business Festival**

This is now in its 14th year and will run from 30th September-11th October in venues across the district. On 2nd October there will be a Jobs and Skills Fair at Haverhill Arts Centre and again, on 9th October, it will run at The Apex in Bury St Edmunds. For more information on the range of events on offer visit www.businessfestival.org

4. **Meet the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable.**

Public meetings with the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable are being held during September. The meeting for West Suffolk is taking place on **Thursday 19th September at Haverhill Arts Centre, CB9 8AR**, 6pm for 6.30pm start. If you cannot get to Haverhill but want to ask some questions, a Teams meeting will be held on 6th November at 6pm. To register for the event please email spcc@suffolk.police.uk

5. **The Electoral Roll**

The process of updating the Electoral Roll will begin shortly. If you need help with the process please let me know and I will find an officer who can help.

6. **Changes to Recycling and Waste Collection**

From 1st April 2026 the law regarding the collection of waste materials in England will change and the Council is currently considering the many and varied options. Producers of packaging materials will be required to make very clear whether an item can be recycled or not as this has been identified as a problem area. Recycling rates have stalled and a lot is down to unclear instructions. The Council has not yet finalised what the changes will look like but be aware that they will be coming in the not too distant future.

Sarah Pugh

West Suffolk District Councillor for Whepstead and Wickhambrook