

Annual Report for Kelsale & Yoxford Ward

From Cllr Julia Ewart, East Suffolk Council

Introduction

I have prepared this report for the parishes of the Kelsale & Yoxford ward to provide a detailed reflection on the past year, outlining the challenges, developments and achievements that have shaped our communities.

It has been a complex and demanding year. From large-scale infrastructure projects to significant changes within local government, many of you have experienced disruption and uncertainty. At times, progress has felt slow and, understandably, frustrating—particularly where there have been gaps in coordination or clarity between authorities. However, alongside these challenges, I have also seen countless examples of resilience, cooperation and determination within our villages. These qualities continue to define our communities and give me confidence for the future.

Local Government Reorganisation

One of the most significant developments this year has been the proposed reorganisation of local government across Suffolk. Plans are progressing to replace the current system with three new unitary authorities. These changes are projected to deliver approximately £34 million in annual savings, with around £20 million reinvested into frontline services.

Under these proposals, East Suffolk will join with Mid Suffolk. While this represents a major structural shift, I want to reassure you that statutory services such as education and adult social care will continue to operate under robust arrangements to ensure continuity.

As part of this process, boundary changes are being introduced. Yoxford will move into the Blyth Estuary Division, while Kelsale will become part of the Saxmundham & District Division, extending down towards Orford. In my view, these changes reflect two natural community “orbits”: one connecting Orford with Woodbridge, and the other linking Kelsale with Saxmundham. Throughout this transition, I remain committed to ensuring strong, consistent representation on your behalf.

Community Strength and Local Investment

Despite wider pressures, one of the most encouraging aspects of the year has been the continued strength of community life across our ward. Events such as summer fetes, dog shows and village gatherings have remained vibrant and well supported, reinforcing the importance of connection and shared identity.

Through East Suffolk Council, I have supported initiatives such as the **HERE For You programme**, which has visited towns including Saxmundham, Lowestoft, Kesgrave, Beccles, Felixstowe and Southwold. These events have provided valuable opportunities for residents to speak directly with councillors and officers, ensuring that local voices are heard.

The **Village Hall and Community Buildings Fund** has also provided grants of up to £15,000. In Kelsale, the Village Hall continues to be a key priority for me. It is the heart of the village, and its modernisation is essential if it is to remain fit for purpose for future generations. I want to recognise the tireless dedication of volunteers and trustees working to make this happen—I will continue to support them wherever I can.

Looking ahead, the **£1.5 million Thriving Places Fund**, launching in April 2026, represents a significant opportunity for our smaller communities to protect important buildings, improve public spaces and strengthen long-term resilience.

Infrastructure and Major Projects

A large part of the past year has been dominated by major infrastructure projects, including Sizewell C, Sea Link and LionLink. These have caused considerable disruption across our villages, with road diversions, delays along the A12, and increased traffic through Kelsale, Yoxford and Peasenhall.

One of my key concerns has been the lack of coordination between developers. Too often, projects overlap or consultations repeat without clear progress, placing a cumulative burden on residents. I am acutely aware of the strain this has placed not only on daily life but also on wellbeing. I have raised the mental health impact of these disruptions directly at Suffolk County Council level.

From what I have seen and learned, while disruption may lessen once major roadworks are complete, the long-term pressures on housing, transport and services do not disappear. It is vital that these impacts are properly planned for and managed.

Support for Parish Councils and NSIPs

The increasing complexity of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) has made it clear that parish councils need greater support. I welcome the fact that the Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) has secured funding for a coordinator to assist parish clerks with these demands.

Clerks carry a significant responsibility in drafting formal responses, yet they are not always included in key discussions. I strongly believe they should be part of those conversations, as their role is critical in ensuring that parish voices are clearly and accurately represented.

Highways and Transport Challenges

Highways continue to be one of the most common concerns raised with me. As many of you know, highways are the responsibility of Suffolk County Council, not East Suffolk Council. This separation can lead to delays, confusion and, at times, unsatisfactory outcomes.

We are currently facing long-term traffic management measures relating to the Sizewell Link Road, which are expected to continue until December 2026. I recognise how disruptive this is.

There has also been significant concern around Carlton Meres Caravan Park, particularly along Rendham Road. Increased traffic, directional changes and issues with infrastructure installations have rightly caused frustration. Situations like this underline the limitations of the current system, and why the move towards a unified authority—bringing planning and highways together—could lead to improved accountability in future.

Road Safety

Safety outside Kelsale Primary School continues to be a concern, particularly during drop-off and pick-up times. While this sits with the County Council, I will continue to press for improvements.

I want to recognise the proactive work of parents, the school and wider community in raising this issue. Ultimately, road safety should not depend on repeated campaigning—it should be a basic standard we can all expect.

Planning and Development

Planning remains a challenging area. I continue to encounter delays, inconsistencies and concerns around the level of scrutiny applied to some applications. Communication with residents has not always been as clear or timely as it should be.

The **Call for Sites process** has now concluded, and decisions are being made that will shape the next Local Plan. It is essential that we plan properly for the future. We need homes for young people, families and older residents looking to downsize. Without this, we risk losing the balance that keeps our villages vibrant and sustainable.

At the same time, I remain clear that development must be appropriate—both in scale and in location—and must properly consider environmental and community impact. Where proposals appear disproportionate or lacking in justification, they must be challenged.

The next cycle of the neighbourhood plan process is also beginning, providing further opportunity for communities to shape their future.

Water and Environmental Concerns

Water supply issues have remained a concern within Kelsale. Last summer, an incident involving unauthorised water abstraction linked to Sizewell C led to a drop in the water table and increased bacterial levels. This was deeply concerning and highlights how vulnerable our local resources can be.

Further pressure is likely through the proposed Essex and Suffolk Water NSIP, which is primarily designed to supply significant volumes of water to Sizewell C. This could have a substantial impact on our communities, and consultations are ongoing. I strongly encourage continued engagement so that local concerns are properly heard.

Council Tax and Funding

The district precept increased by 4.9% this year. However, only around 8% of the total council tax paid is retained by East Suffolk Council, with the majority going elsewhere within the county.

I believe it is important for residents to understand where their money goes, and I continue to advocate for a system where the services you receive better reflect the contributions you make.

Local Businesses and Rural Economy

Our local businesses, particularly rural pubs, are under significant pressure. With business rates often approaching £50,000 per year, it is increasingly difficult for them to remain viable.

These businesses are not just commercial enterprises—they are vital community hubs, employers and places of social connection. Once they close, they are rarely replaced. Supporting them, both individually and collectively, remains essential.

Waste and Recycling Changes

Changes to waste collection will begin in June 2026. These will include weekly food waste collections, twin-stream recycling and three-weekly general waste collections.

New bins and caddies are being distributed between February and May. I am aware that there may be some inconsistencies at first, but support is available, and I will assist residents where needed to ensure any issues are resolved.

Achievements and Progress

Despite the challenges of the past year, there have been some very positive outcomes across the district. East Suffolk Council has secured £2.8 million in government funding, along with a further £2 million, to decarbonise leisure centres. The **Nature at Work scheme** has expanded to 116 wild space sites, supporting biodiversity across the area.

A new community hall is being developed in Aldringham cum Thorpe, and in Thorpeness, support has been provided to residents affected by coastal erosion, including funding for demolition costs not covered by central government.

These achievements demonstrate that, even in difficult circumstances, meaningful progress continues to be made.

Community Partnerships

The Community Partnership model continues to play an important role in strengthening links between parishes and the district council. Each area benefits from a dedicated officer—ours being Sam Kenward—who has been invaluable in supporting grant applications, providing guidance and sharing local knowledge.

Partnership meetings take place regularly across different villages and are open to community representatives. They provide a valuable opportunity to share information, access funding and ensure local priorities are reflected in wider decisions. I strongly encourage participation from across our parishes.

Looking Ahead

The coming years will bring continued change, particularly as we move towards the new council structure. It will be more important than ever for all levels of local government—and our parish councils—to work closely together.

The role of parish councillors, clerks and volunteers will be increasingly important in ensuring that local voices are heard and that communities remain strong and connected. I encourage residents to stay involved, whether through volunteering, committees or simply sharing their views.

Conclusion

This past year has tested our communities in many ways, but it has also demonstrated just how strong, resilient and committed they are. While challenges remain, there are clear opportunities ahead if we continue to work together.

As your District Councillor for East Suffolk Council—and now also holding a County Council seat which includes Kelsale—I remain fully committed to representing and supporting the parishes of the Kelsale & Yoxford ward. My focus remains firmly on ensuring your voices are heard and that our communities continue to thrive through the changes ahead.