



# Thedwestre North March 2021



Visit [suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus) for health advice, service changes, business support and schools' guidance.

I have previously reported on the Covid-19 rates for the county, and more specifically, Mid Suffolk. These are still going in the right direction but the danger is complacency – and so the advice is still hands, face and space. The vaccination will not be an invisible shield – it means that those getting the infection will not get it as badly, and will be less of a strain on the NHS resources .

The government has set out a very clear roadmap, based on getting the various stages right before moving on to the next stage.

Step 1 starts on 8<sup>th</sup> March – for most people this is when the children go back to school. For the political agenda it is when campaign leaflets can be delivered and door-to-door deliveries, obviously in a Covid-secure way, can start. The Cabinet Office has issued clear guidelines on what can be done, and when. They are available here:-

[COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/coronavirus-covid-19-response-spring-2021)

[The Government's approach to elections and referendums during COVID-19 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/coronavirus-covid-19-response-spring-2021/elections-referendums)

If in doubt – the gov.uk website has a search facility – 'roadmap' and 'May 2021 polls delivery plan' works.

There is a new **Covid-19 rapid testing centre** based at the Blackbourne in Elmswell. This is available for anyone living or working in the surrounding area who is unable to work from home.

Lateral flow testing involves taking a swab from the throat and nose to see whether coronavirus is present in the body. The person tested will then receive a text message giving the result within an hour. Anyone giving a positive test will be told to self-isolate and advised on what to do next. People are being asked to get tested twice a week, three to four days apart, as part of their weekly routine.

Anyone receiving a negative result needs to continue to follow the social distancing guidance as they may only be at the early stages of developing the virus. This is in case levels of the virus in a person at the earlier test were too low to be detected at that time.

## **Highways Flooding**

On 2<sup>nd</sup> March there is a meeting of the Suffolk Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Sub Committee. Agenda papers are available to view online and the evidence papers include some useful information. I will be 'attending' although not a member of the committee. I know that there have been issues in several villages over the last few months and I have met Highways officers on site at a couple of those locations. Two sites have had ditches dug out by Highways contractors to facilitate the water flow.

There is a Riparian duty on many landowners to dig out ditches. Information on the duties and responsibilities are listed on the Suffolk.gov.uk website on the section entitled 'Maintenance of ditches and other watercourses'...

## **Highways doubles drainage budget following £27.2m announcement**

Drainage and flooding, Rights of Way bridges and resurfacing of roads in Suffolk have been allocated extra funds for the 2021/22 financial year following Department for Transport's funding announcement.

Keen to progress more drainage schemes across Suffolk to support the fight against flooding, Suffolk Highways has allocated an extra £2m – double its current budget allocation – in order to help tackle the worsening flood problems being experienced across the county. Suffolk Highways also looks set to bolster its resource to support in the repairing or replacement of seven Rights of Way bridges across the county with an additional £800k, whilst committing a further £3.4m to the county's surface dressing programme.

Although the budget is less than the 2020/21 allocation, Suffolk Highways prudently prepared for a decrease and allocated a tentative £21m for the 2021/22 financial year.

## **Council Budget 2021/2022**

It is fair to say that the pandemic this year has also significantly impacted on the council – not only has there been an expected £7.9m shortfall in the income from council tax, but progress of the council's transformation programmes, has had to be redirected to focus instead on community resilience. This has included redeploying

staff into bespoke roles such as procuring personal protective equipment (PPE) to support Suffolk's care sector and adapting working practices for frontline staff to maintain effective social distancing measures. Many of the new ways of working adopted by the council during 2020 because of the pandemic may actually offer potential alternative transformation savings as the organisation continues to adapt and tailor the way it works to deliver services for Suffolk's communities.

In 2021/22, general Council Tax will rise by 1.99 per cent, which represents an increase of £26.68 for a Band D property, from £1,224.70 in 2020, to £1,251.38. There is also a two per cent rise in the Social Care Precept for the forthcoming year as the council recognises the ongoing challenges with meeting the rising costs and rising demand for adult care services. This means a Band D property will see an overall rise of £53.55 this year for Suffolk County Council's element of their Council Tax bill, from £1,343.61 in 2020-21 to £1,397.16 in 2021-22.

## Scrutiny Committee meeting

On 10<sup>th</sup> February the council's scrutiny committee considered evidence from a number of 'witnesses' on the subject of developing local emergency plans. Several local villages have emergency plans and I gave 'evidence' on the Woolpit Emergency Plan. Some of the speakers came from the larger urban areas, some from villages where the Emergency Plan had morphed into a Good Neighbour scheme but it made for an interesting session.

The Scrutiny committee had an extensive list of recommendations and these were presented to the Councils Cabinet committee at the end of February. The main points that I picked up were that some areas had better communication with the County Council – both the Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU) and the Social Care system. Better communication top-down and then bottom-up was certainly something that Woolpit picked up. If any other village is interested in an Emergency Plan then there is a lot of information on the Suffolk County Council website and local village websites.

## Elections 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021

On 6<sup>th</sup> May there are elections to Suffolk County Council and also for Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner. Nominations must be in by 8<sup>th</sup> April. A timeline is available on the Mid Suffolk Council website. The election moratorium starts on 25<sup>th</sup> March. <https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/elections/current-elections/>

## Census Day 21<sup>st</sup> March 2021

'The census is coming' cards have recently been delivered with the post. There have also been adverts on the television.

Jane Storey

1<sup>st</sup> March 2021