

**Report of the Leader of East Suffolk Council, Cllr Steve Gallant
To Lowestoft Town Council
February 2023**

It has been another busy and productive year for East Suffolk Council with a huge focus on improvements to Lowestoft which are now beginning to take shape.

A year ago, we told you that we have ambitious plan to deliver over £350m of regeneration projects over the next 10 years, which will attract jobs, business and new homes. These are being developed in partnership through the Lowestoft Place Board (private, voluntary and public sector representation) and, with the £24.9m Town Deal in place, the Place Board agreed five priority projects. Progress on these is as follows:

Cultural Quarter

The largest of the Towns Deal projects is the £24.4m Cultural Quarter that is expected to create 120 jobs in the town and bring new businesses to the town. The project includes the redevelopment of the former Battery Green Road car park complex to provide a new culture and leisure facility in the heart of the town centre.

The project will also provide grant funding to the Marina Theatre to improve the facilities that enable the theatre to attract new audiences and be more inclusive.

The Battery Green Element of the project has been contracted to Chaplain and Farrant who are currently progressing final concepts which include enhancements and new public realm in the development.

Seafront Vision

Investment to date of £3.8m for the seafront Vision has included the redevelopment of the East Point Pavilion, delivery of the Eastern Edge Beach Chalets and the seafront Boardwalk which provide access onto the sand for those with disabilities.

The investment to date has been funded by East Suffolk Council and through the DLUCH Towns Deal Accelerator Fund.

The next stage of the project is to improve the public realm around Royal Plain and Royal Green and included the redevelopment of the Royal Plain Fountains. The £1.5m project funded through the Town Deal is currently at concept design with construction due to begin in the winter of 2023.

Port Gateway Project

The Port Gateway project supports over £19m of private sector Investment and is being delivered by Associated British Ports with the Towns Deal supporting the development. The

projects provide new portside facilities to support the clean energy sector and is expected to attract over 250 skilled jobs to the town.

Station Quarter

The Station Quarter is a £7m investment that will create new jobs and drive footfall to the town centre includes the conservation /refurbishment of two vacant and derelict historic buildings within the town Centre.

The former Post office and sorting office will be transformed into a gallery and exhibition space. Operated by Messums East, who are recognised for revitalising old buildings and embedding them within communities through artistic enterprise - and sculptor Laurence Edwards, who began his art education in Lowestoft and subsequently developed an international reputation for large scale public works from his base in East Suffolk.

Messums East, will provide a working studio for Laurence, in addition to spaces for a revolving residency of international, national and regional artists, plus exhibition spaces, a screening room and a café/ restaurant. Laurence will also be working to create a large-scale bronze landmark sculpture for Lowestoft.

The Restoration works to the external elements of the building have now been completed and funded through Historic England and the Towns Deal. The next stage of the project is to submit plans for planning permission.

The second element of the station building which has recently attracted £200,00 from the railway heritage fund. The project will see the front of the building which has been vacant for over 40 years transformed into a new food and beverage offer.

Historic Quarter

The final project within the Towns Deal is the Historic Quarter, the main element of the project will see the restoration of the Town Hall which will be delivered by Lowestoft Town Council and supported by the Towns Deal, East Suffolk Council are also working with Lowestoft Town Council to attract further funding for the project through the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Elsewhere, the Lowestoft Flood Risk Management programme continues to provide resilience to the town against future flooding. Tidal walls have been completed around the outer harbour with ongoing works to the seafront. The project has seen £4.3m spend with local SME's to ensure that there is wider benefits to the town.

Additional benefits have been delivered by the delivery partner Balfour Beatty, including 17 local people directly employed and 7 apprenticeships.

East Suffolk Council has committed £500,000 over three years to support the hugely successful and popular First Light Festival, in combination with a recent Arts Council award of £660k this secures the festival in the medium-term. Finally, work continues on the delivery of the Lowestoft full fibre project which will provide Ultra-fast broadband to 1,460 businesses and 41,609 homes within the town and is due to complete this summer

Ease The Squeeze

East Suffolk Council is not only committed to improvements for Lowestoft but also to protecting and supporting our communities going through difficult times as the cost of living crisis bites.

With this in mind, more than 70 projects were identified to support residents, through four workshops against four priority themes:

- Money
- Food and Essentials
- Energy and Fuel
- Housing

12 priority projects were identified through a voting process and progressed and more than £800,000 of funding was secured, including UKSP Fund allocation of £228,000 and SCC funding for a Cost of Living Community Grants programme.

Project	Cost	Progress
1. Network of Warm Rooms	£77,780 + (1 year)	32 Warm Rooms funded
2. Food Network Coordinator	£100,500 (2 years)	Tender now closed
3. Community Pantries	£45,000 (2.5 years)	Now taking applications
4. Handyperson Project	£94,560 (18 month)	Now taking referrals
5. Cooking on a Budget Classes	£42,000 (2.5 years)	Programme underway
6. Cooking Equipment	£12,942	Stock of items available
7. Comfort Food	£32,200 (1 year)	13 agreed, Phase 2 launched
8. ID Document Fund	£2,000	Funding being allocated
9. Field to Fork – Kits / Growing Spaces	£77,380 (2.5 years)	7 Growing Spaces funded Growing Kits to be allocated Feb/March
10. Winter Warmth Packs	£11,500 (1 year)	Now taking referrals for packs
11. Digital Projects	£5,400 (1 year)	10 Laptops in Warm Rooms
12. School Uniform Banks	£24,000	To launch February 2023

Lowestoft and Northern Parishes Community Partnership

The Community Partnership's three priorities are:

- To improve healthy eating in children by engaging with preschool/nursery staff, children, and parents through communication and education
- Social Isolation and Loneliness
- Mental Health and Wellbeing

The majority of the 2022/23 budget (£16,000) focussed on supplementing the district-wide Ease the Squeeze Cost of Living programme with Specific projects funded by the CP:

- Additional Warm Rooms (10 in total across the town – 6 funded by ESC and 4 via the CP)
- Activity kits for Warm Rooms e.g. games, jigsaws and books
- Additional Field to Fork growing kits targeting the most deprived parts of the District
- 100 bespoke Winter Warmth packs, including heated items

In addition, our Community Intervention Team outreach at Sam's Café, Bridge View (homeless population), Food Bank and other locations in the town to support vulnerable and seldom heard individuals. The team also take referrals for help with cost of living from the Ease the Squeeze programme and provide practical support for complex individuals.

Although the Town Council has chosen not to fund Lowestoft Rising in 2022/23, we welcome the £10,000 contributed towards food support projects including FISH (Food in School Holidays).

ESC now has 2.1 FTE Financial Inclusion Officers who take referrals through the Cost of Living referral form/calls and work with residents who need advice about debt, benefits, budgeting and credit – more than 50% of the 560 people supported to date are from Lowestoft.

The Holiday Activity and Food programme provides a significant offer during Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays across the town for children from low income families.

Through our Well Minds East Suffolk programme, the Community Partnership Board sponsored Emotional Wellbeing in the Classroom, Emotional Wellbeing in Youth Settings training and The Essentials Suffolk Mind training for VCSE groups, all of which were well attended by individuals, groups and schools in the town.

Revitalising our towns

The East Suffolk Towns Revitalisation programme wants to ensure that all our towns, including Lowestoft, are economically vibrant and can achieve long term sustainability both for the local community, businesses and visitors.

An initial phase saw the Council's Economic Development Team deliver a wide range of projects in response to impacts caused by the Covid pandemic. With towns and communities impacted by the cost-of-living crisis, phase two builds on what we learned from our Covid response work and will empower our towns and local business groups to become resilient and grow stronger during another challenging time for the economy.

Having such an established programme has also meant that we have been able to fully integrate the programme into the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and bring more investments into our town centres.

Activities and funding programmes have included:

- 'Reopening High Streets Safely' and Welcome Back funds – totalling nearly £500,000.
- East Suffolk Towns Initiative grants - with over £98,000 allocated to projects related to the themes of place marketing, town signage, business coordination, wayfinding and digital marketing assets.
- Building on the learning from this, £267,749 has now been allocated to deliver the High Street grant improvement programme. Meanwhile £117,896 has also been allocated to an Events, Arts and Culture Fund.

Looking forward

In the 5 years up to and including 2026/27, East Suffolk Council will spend £410m on major projects and an additional £83m on housing schemes. Over £288m has been raised from external grants and contributions towards the cost of our project programme.

When considering individual projects to be included in the programme, priority is given to schemes yielding savings and/ or generating income to be reinvested in services. Examples of completed projects which are contributing to the income of the Council are the Moor Park light industrial units; the Business hubs in Lowestoft and Leiston; and investment in Beach Hut projects in Felixstowe and Lowestoft.

In 2023/24, the creation of East Suffolk Services Ltd to manage waste collection and other operations currently undertaken by Norse will significantly benefit the Council and

residents.

It is also likely that in 2024/25 the district will see valuable increases in council tax income from the introduction of a 100% council tax premium for second homes and a shorter time period for which homes can be left empty without paying a 100% premium.

Cllr Steve Gallant
Leader
East Suffolk Council