

Dr Thérèse Coffey MP

Newsletter – May 2024



Please find below my last newsletter of this Parliament, covering issues with which I have been dealing and meetings and events I have attended in May. Parliament will be dissolved tomorrow ahead of the General Election on the 4th of July and there will be no members of Parliament at all. Parliament is expected to reconvene with the newly elected and re-elected MPs on the 8th of July.

I want to thank my team who have handled tens of thousands of cases and policy queries during this Parliament. My Parliamentary team will continue to handle urgent casework during the dissolution of Parliament. They will not be able to answer any policy queries.

To discuss any policy queries, you can email me via my website www.theresecoffey.co.uk and I will be updating [Facebook](#) regularly.

NEXT SURGERY

If I am re-elected, this will be held on July 12th.

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

River Deben Action Plan: The East Suffolk Catchment Partnership launched the River Deben Action Plan following the roundtable I convened in Woodbridge last summer. The plan sets out how it will work with farmers to improve livestock management and reduce nutrient pollution, as well as enhancing wildlife habitat quality and river resilience. I look forward to seeing the water quality of the River Deben vastly improve as it is implemented. You can read the full plan [here](#).

I also met the Water Minister Robbie Moore and the Chief Scientist of the Environment Agency to discuss the use of perfluoric acid to help with disinfection of treated sewage water. I highlighted this in the last newsletter. I referred to polyfluoride chemicals. I do not want to mislead. Those are considered forever chemicals. It is my understanding that perfluoric acid is not given this status. The Chief Scientist suggested that he would likely visit our area to understand how it was working in practice.



Bathing Sites: One of the bathing sites designated last year was on the River Deben at Waldringfield. The site received a poor status overall last year due to just one significantly poor reading on the 2nd of September, coinciding with an astronomical high tide. However, I hope the action plan will now help. You can read the river quality testing data online [here](#).

It is still a huge regret that East Suffolk District Council would not support the application for the Woodbridge Steps bathing site this year. Nevertheless, I will keep pressing for improvements on improving water quality locally.

Energy Infrastructure: I spoke in several debates in Parliament, repeating my request for a moratorium on energy connections on the Suffolk Coast. Pressing all the way up to the dissolution of Parliament that the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan must be completed before any further connections are offered. In his response to the debate, the Minister of State for Energy praised the OffSET (Offshore Electricity-Grid Taskforce) Group of East Anglian MPs and committed to an urgent review of National Grid ESO's assumptions. You can watch my speeches [here](#) and [here](#).

HEALTH & CARE

Norfolk & Waveney NHS MP Briefing: I attended the briefing for the area, which includes part of the constituency.

Dentistry: I have been using Parliamentary Questions to analyse what is happening with the NHS dentistry provision in Suffolk, in terms of fees paid to dentists and work done against contract. This is proving quite challenging but I was encouraged that Suffolk is one of the counties that will receive a boost for attraction payments for new dentists. The NHS has updated the dental recovery [plan](#) and the government launched a [consultation](#) to tie-in graduate dentists to NHS provision if the taxpayer has paid towards their training (estimated to be £200,000 per dentist).

Air Ambulance: I met the Chief Executive and the Head of Marketing of the East Anglian Air Ambulance, Matthew Jones and Nicki Blake in Parliament. It was a great opportunity to get an in-depth insight into their work and to thank them, the pilots, doctors, paramedics and, of course, everyone who generously supports the air ambulance for their incredible efforts in saving lives.



BUSINESS AND FARMING

Bluetongue Virus: The government briefed MPs on the recent outbreak of the Bluetongue Virus, a disease spread by midges that affects cattle and sheep. The outbreak has been identified in 73 farms across England – with Kent, Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk being most at risk. There is a vaccine due to be used in the Netherlands but at this point, DEFRA is not going to authorise the vaccine in the UK as it has not been tested. I asked if an emergency authorisation would be possible, though I understand that the NFU would prefer a provisional market authorisation which they know will take several months to secure, rather than an emergency authorisation to avoid any trade issues that could arise. I want to reassure readers that Bluetongue does not affect humans and there is no risk of the disease being contracted or spread through meat or milk.

Farming: The government has extended the Sustainable Farming Initiative with many more schemes. I participated in a short debate and encouraged the government to do more detailed analysis of the transition and profitability of farms on a much more localised level. I have tabled questions regarding take up of the SFI and I understand Suffolk Coastal is above the national average. For more information see [here](#).

Suffolk Show: I enjoyed being at Day 1 of the Suffolk Show (it is sited within the constituency) and look forward to Day 2. I caught up with the Deputy Presidents of the NFU and the CLA (Countryside and Landowners' Association) as well as some local farmers.



EDUCATION

RAAC funding: After visiting Farlingaye School, I had been pressing the Department for Education on the rebuilding/refurbishment of the school. I am delighted to say that the Regional Schools Commissioner has responded to say that funding has now been granted and that the work on the school should be completed before the end of 2024. Great news for the students and the staff.

SEND Schools: Work started on a 54 place special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) school on the site of the former Maidstone Primary School in Felixstowe. The same trust (Unity Trust) is due to open the new SEND school with the preferred site being the former Free School in Saxmundham. I caught up with Unity CEO Tim Coulson to discuss both projects. Both are expected to open in 2025.

Felixstowe School visit: I visited Felixstowe School, just as exams were starting. I wanted to understand how the school was responding to its Ofsted assessment. The new executive headteacher and the trust CEO seemed confident that they would achieved a Good rating at their next assessment. I really hope so.

School Visits to Parliament: I met sixth form students from Woodbridge School, catching up with them in the education centre after their tour for a chat and a Q&A. I also welcomed pupils from Alde Valley School and representatives from Sizewell B for an Engineering All Party Parliamentary Group visit to Westminster.



TRANSPORT

Active Travel Woodbridge: I met councillors and officers for an informal update on the consultation (as has the local county councillor). This has been one of the largest responses to a consultation. I have encouraged them to drop the bollard scheme, put in more pedestrian crossings especially near schools and to prioritise potholes and pavements. I have also encouraged them to consider their next proposals carefully, rather than definitively state their intentions to go ahead with any of the first phase proposals. The very centre of Woodbridge is where most residents and businesses had expected to see a plan for the future. That still has not yet been shared.

Potholes: I have continued to log and chase council officers to regularly monitor the contractors' work. I can see some improvements but some other shockers too which need addressing. I know that the Council is rolling out a comprehensive programme of resurfacing in addition to patching up potholes.

OTHER LOCAL MATTERS

TSB Closure: I'm deeply disappointed by the decision by TSB to close its Felixstowe branch. I met the Director of Branch Banking but it was a pretty unsatisfactory meeting to say the least, with no commitment to review the decision. We won't be able to get a Hub in Felixstowe because of the other bank branches that still operate. However, they are looking at a LINK-sponsored cash deposit system to help local businesses. I'll continue to press on this.

Nationwide: In better news, I visited Nationwide's Felixstowe branch to thank them for their commitment to retain a high street presence and meet the dedicated staff working hard to support customers. They've already had quite a few customers transfer their accounts from TSB and I expect many more will follow. We discussed Nationwide's branch strategy, the importance of retaining face-to-face services and how they are supporting their members.



Mobile Phone and Broadband Survey: I launched a mobile phone signal and broadband survey to identify any remaining not spots in Suffolk Coastal. Feedback from residents will enable me to work with the government and providers to make poor signal in Suffolk a thing of the past. The independent regulator Ofcom says we have full coverage of mobile signal but that is not my experience, nor those living in Sutton and Shottisham to name just two villages. As I set out in a recent speech in Parliament, we need to keep analogue lines while we have this problem. I am pleased that BT has listened and paused further changes to digital-only, recognising the challenges. Please fill in my survey and tell me about your experience [here](#).

Felixstowe North: Residents on the Citizen Panel have contacted me with concerns about the updated vision for North Felixstowe that sees more homes and less green space put forward by the consultants appointed by the Green and Liberal Democrat Cabinet of East Suffolk Council. This is completely contrary to the existing plan (which specifically protects Eastward Ho). There are now new laws and national planning policy framework in place that requires improvements in nature for new homes. We should be looking to create the Felixstowe Country Park and create super-corridors for nature and habitat while preserving the woodlands. The Council can certainly halt this process for North Felixstowe and start again. If there is wider concern about the number of new homes, again, the council can take advantage of changes to the National Planning Policy Framework brought in by the government. It is in their hands and should not be blaming others. I have written to the Leader of the Council asking her to halt their proposals.

Local Policing: I met Home Secretary James Cleverly. We discussed local policing, rural crime and how we now have the highest ever number of police officers in Suffolk - helped by significant government funding.



Leiston Banking Hub: I met Cash Access UK. They suggested that they had a standard process on identifying a suitable building and it could be 12 months before the hub was open. I gave my view that the current building would be perfect and avoid a lot of unnecessary research. In any event, Barclays will be staying open till the new hub opens.

PARLIAMENT

My Private Members Bill to give police more powers to combat livestock worrying was successfully passed by the House of Commons. Sadly, due to the dissolution of Parliament it will not now become law. If re-elected, I will seek to re-introduce it.

I spoke in various debates, including on energy, agriculture and pensions. For more about my contributions in Parliament, visit www.theresecoffey.co.uk/parliament.

I also joined the Energy Security and Net Zero Select Committee so I can hold the government to account on key issues affecting Suffolk. I continued my activities on the Treasury committee. We had been holding sessions on the cost of insurance and the effectiveness of sanctions against Russia.

OTHER VISITS/MEETINGS

I loathe litter so it was good to join people in Leiston for the annual litter pick.

I enjoyed a fundraising cream tea with Felixstowe Community Hospital League of Friends at St Felix Church Hall.

I attended the Friston garden event for St Elizabeth Hospice.

I attended the Aldeburgh Mayor's Parade & Service.

I met Flagship Housing to discuss anti-social behaviour issues.

I attended the Ofcom online safety drop-in to discuss its proposed new code of practice to protect children online.

I attended a meeting in Parliament on Freeport East discussing how it can evolve to a Green Transport Hub.

I attended the Digital Inclusion APPG's roundtable on Improving Digital Inclusion

Pathways.

I chaired a meeting on biodiversity in the UK's Overseas Territories. Did you know that 30% of the world's penguins are in a UK OT? And we have just agreed much more protection for them and their waters.

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