

Dr Thérèse Coffey MP

Newsletter



Please find below my latest newsletter for last month covering issues with which I have been dealing and meetings and events I have attended. I also update my website www.theresecoffey.co.uk and [Facebook](#) regularly.

If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, there is a link to unsubscribe below.

I am no longer a government minister so am speaking a lot more in Parliament. You can catch up at: www.theresecoffey.co.uk/parliament.

NEXT SURGERY

Please note casework can be handled without the need for a surgery appointment. Surgery this month has already been held on 9th February. Future surgeries will be held on 15th March and 19th April. Please contact the office for an appointment on 01394 248980.

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT:

Energy Infrastructure:

PMQS: I [pressed the Prime Minister](#) on National Grid refusing to publish their study of Bradwell as a potential landfall site for cables and interconnectors instead of burdening the Suffolk coast with yet more energy infrastructure. I expect to press this further with the PM at a separate meeting.

National Grid: I attended meetings with National Grid ESO in both Friston and Westminster to press them on the scope of their new study. This study is happening primarily due to my petition that people signed – asking for the comparative study to be undertaken.

Sealink: I was surprised to learn East Suffolk's Green/Lib Dem Cabinet have delegated all authority on this project to council officers, rather than directly deciding and representing residents' views on Sea Link. The excuse is founded on process and the 'short timeframes' for responding to consultations. I hope they will reconsider, put the decision-making back into the responsibility of the Cabinet Member and arrange special meetings if needed.

For my part, I continue to urge National Grid Electricity Transmissions to look for alternative landfall sites away from the Suffolk coast. There is absolutely no need to deviate power generated offshore into Suffolk if its final destination is the South East. The recent National Grid commitment to look at offshore alternatives to pylons across East Anglia reinforces the point that power needs to come ashore closer to the population it is intended to serve.

Sizewell C: I welcomed Nuclear & Networks Minister, Andrew Bowie to the Suffolk coast as work officially began on the construction of Sizewell C. Given the mitigations put in place after advice from Natural England and the Environment Agency, it is good to see this project underway bringing long-term energy security to the country and long-term economic security to Leiston and East Suffolk.



BBC Radio 4 Interview: On 19th January, the PM programme was broadcast from Reydon. I was approached to give an interview on the energy projects and rural communities. As I would be travelling at the time of the interview, I did a pre-record. I was asked about other topics too - which is common practice. However, when the programme was broadcast, the BBC chose to completely exclude the main purpose of the interview. I was very disappointed and have made a complaint. Broadcasters complain when politicians will not do interviews. It is this sort of experience that puts backbenchers off, never mind government ministers.

HEALTH & CARE

Pharmacy First: I spoke in response to a Ministerial Statement backing the Government's Pharmacy First initiative. This was one of the key things in our Plan for Patients I announced as Health Secretary and I am delighted it is now happening. Patient care will improve as pharmacists will now be allowed to treat seven common health conditions without you needing to see the doctor first. I know from my own experience that swift deployment of antibiotics can fight infection fast and avoid going to hospital before your condition worsens. Some untreated infections can end up with sepsis. The seven conditions are set out on the link [here](#).

Dentistry: I attended a drop-in of dentists to discuss barriers to local provision. This is particularly challenging in Suffolk, though not in all parts of the country. In particular, the General Dental Council is not making full use of its powers that I had initiated and there are over 2,000 dentists awaiting clearance to start working in this country. Given dentists are moving away from Suffolk, being able to replace them is really important.



In February, the government set out its dentistry plan. News of this is on my website and I will update further in the February newsletter.

EDUCATION

Suffolk New College and Agricultural T-Levels: After visiting Suffolk New College last year and receiving representation from the Principal, Alan Pease, I raised the issue of T-level options and assessments for agriculture with Skills Minister Rob Halfon MP – specifically, the omission of pigs from the list of animal husbandry options and the challenges of the dairy assessment being mandatory. Alan and I subsequently met Apprenticeships and Higher Education Minister, Robert Halfon to press the case - and in a letter sent to me recently, the Minister has confirmed that the requirement will change from September this year. It is important that the new T levels provide options that are relevant to jobs and careers in different parts of the country. For Suffolk, that means pigs must be on the menu of choices for students.



BUSINESS AND FARMING

Farming Seminar: I hosted a meeting of farmers from across Suffolk Coastal who received presentations from the Rural Payments Agency, Defra and Natural England on the Environmental Land Management Scheme and other grants available to help farmers to be sustainable and productive, for themselves and for the planet. I encourage farmers who are having difficulties with grants or need support to contact my office at therese.coffey.mp@parliament.uk



Protection of Livestock Bill: Worrying of livestock animals is already a crime. However, police have asked for more powers to make it more straightforward to gather evidence and prosecute irresponsible dog owners. I introduced legislation to Parliament. This month, I met the NFU and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare to discuss further.

Rural Oscars: I wrote to congratulate two local businesses who have been shortlisted as finalists in this year's Countryside Alliance awards, known as the Rural Oscars. The Wild Meat Company based in Woodbridge and Maximus Sustainable Fishing from Farnham will be doing battle in the Local Food and Drink category of the Countryside Alliances' annual awards after successfully securing their place on the East of England shortlist. The Wild Meat Company was Highly Commended in last year's awards. I am delighted both of these innovative and sustainable businesses are getting the national recognition they deserve.

Port of Felixstowe - Freeport: I had a catch-up with the team at the Port regarding investment. The logistics park near Stowmarket is progressing well. Some international firms are looking at the port for potential new development. I encouraged the port to keep up the momentum and take advantage of the economic benefits of Freeport status.

TRANSPORT

Orwell Bridge: Closing the Orwell Bridge brings a lot of disruption to residents and businesses. This was the case once again recently and has led me to question whether the protocol being used by National Highways to determine closures is being followed properly. When the closure happened again, I visited to ascertain exactly what was happening. While strong wind were forecast, it was not clear that it would be in excess of the protocol and during the evening, it was self-evident that it would be re-opened at the earliest formal opportunity the following day. This indeed did happen. It is good that we have a protocol established with lower speed limits an option, however, given the disruption this brings, I will be scrutinising its deployment. One element of this is transparency and I will be pressing the Met Office to publish the windspeed data on its app.

Rail - Ely & Haughley Junctions: I spoke in a Westminster Hall debate on the rail

network to press home to the Minister the importance of getting on with the work to build capacity at the Haughley railway junctions. This is important for freight from the Port of Felixstowe but also for resilience in the passenger service. These projects have now been given the go-ahead following the cancellation of the second phase of HS2. Working with other MPs, I have lobbied the Chancellor to quickly release funding for the Haughley Junction works. I know Ely will take quite a bit longer to enact.

Roads – Flooding and Potholes: During a meeting with the Leader of Suffolk County Council, Cllr Matthew Hicks, I raised the issue of potholes and flooding.

On flooding, the County Council is undertaking a number of inquiries (known as section 19 inquiries) after Storm Babet. This will take some time as it's the highest ever number Suffolk has had to deal with in a year. I raised various points along the A12 and the B1119 from Leiston to Saxmundham. The county council has maintained its usual drain clearance programme. Early analysis suggests one factor, in addition to the unusually high amounts of rain, was lots of silt coming off fields. I was pleased to see that ditches have now been cleared alongside the B1119, which should help with that road being clear.

On potholes, the council had employed a new contractor to undertake road maintenance. The leader had called in the contractor due to concerns on initial performance. The contract is supposed to have changed so that more holes near a deep hole (within the criteria for fixing) should also be fixed, recognising that those holes are likely to get more damaged.

I had particularly followed up on the Thoroughfare in Woodbridge, near the old council building. When I returned, the contractor had not undertaken the extra repairs, so I have followed up again.

The government gave the council extra money to help with potholes. I have started reporting potholes myself. It is better to include photographs but that is not possible in all circumstances – like the junction at the A12 with the Seven Hills roundabout. You can report a pothole [here](#). Do let me know if reported potholes are not getting fixed in a timely fashion.

If your car is significantly damaged, you can also consider seeking compensation from the Council [here](#).

Potters Bridge/B1127: I met the County Council Cabinet member for highways, Cllr Paul West, to discuss this matter, after council officers and the Environment Agency had met earlier that week. I was reassured that both bodies are working jointly on options to help alleviate flooding on this section of the B1127 by clearing and jetting highway drainage and cutting channels into the verge to help water drain away when there is heavy rain or a tidal surge. This builds on the Environment Agency's ongoing efforts to keep the channel clear at the beach following my request that they use the powers available to them under the Water Resources Act. I was informed that coastal erosion is an important factor. The Shoreline Management Plan is decided by East Suffolk Council. Once some further assessments have been done, I have encouraged the County Council to work with the District. Since that meeting, I have spoken again to the Environment Agency. Landowners have sought a permit to undertake appropriate work. While the warrant has expired, the new director told me that they would re-apply immediately if there were any future problems. I know how important this road is to the local communities and will keep pressing.

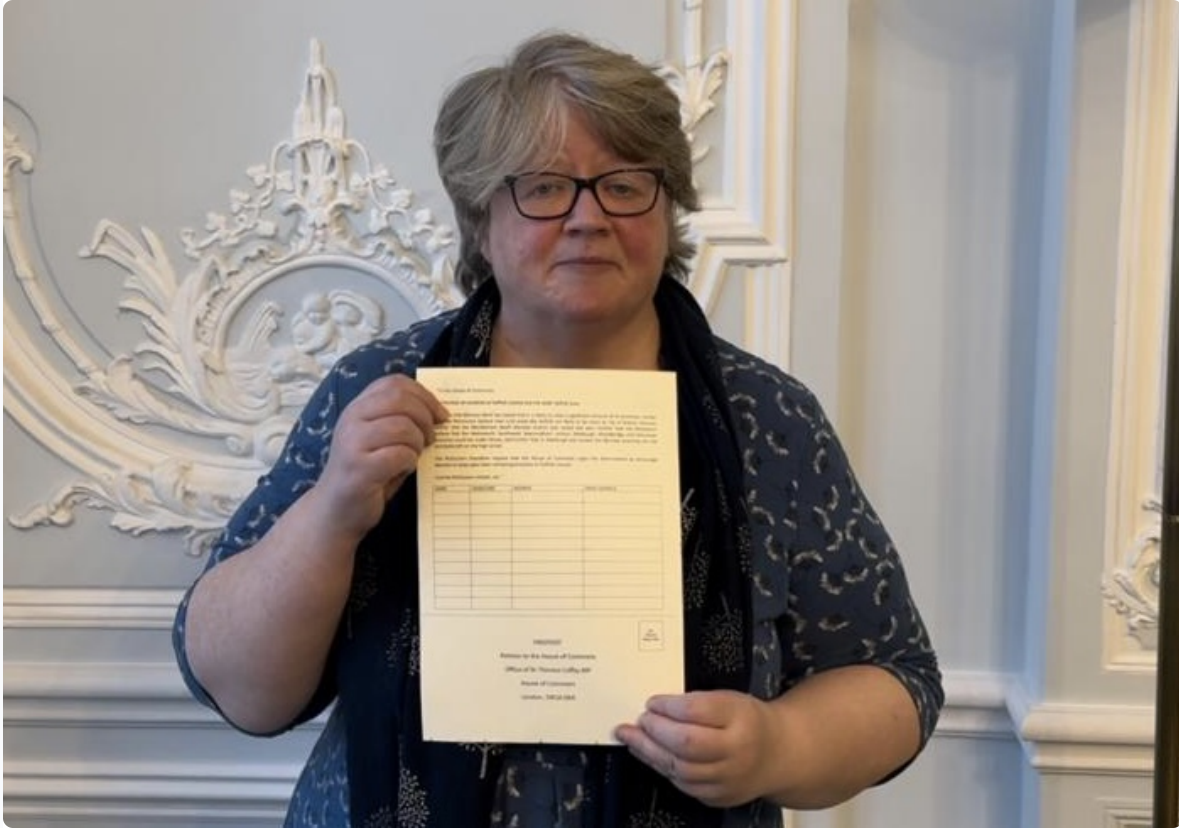


Car Parking: I have been pursuing East Suffolk District Council regarding car parking. Councils are supposed to re-invest parking fees into parking facilities, rather than use for other purposes. Two car parks are particularly bad for drivers – Slaughden in Aldeburgh and Woodbridge station. Slaughden, which resembles the surface of the moon for drivers, is soon to be resurfaced in a joint project with the County Council. As for Woodbridge station, it regularly floods and yet the council still charges people to park there. Of course, it may be dry when people first park there but can return to a hazardous situation. On asking what the council proposed to do if they were continue to charge people to park there, I was disappointed by the Cabinet member’s response essentially blaming climate change, the national government and Network Rail. This may be a historic issue but the council should stop the car park charges till they get it fixed.

OTHER CONSTITUENCY MATTERS

Barclays Bank Petition: Barclays recently announced it would be closing its Leiston branch in May. This is the last bank in Leiston and the last branch of Barclays in Suffolk Coastal after the closures of seven other branches since 2010. We are in a digital age but I know how much of a life-line local bank branches are for all sectors of the community, especially elderly residents and for local businesses. I am meeting Barclays in February to discuss this closure and I will make the local feeling clear. Please help me to do that by signing the petition [here](#).

I also intend to work with the Town Council to apply for a banking hub.



Post Offices: I have asked for an urgent meeting with the Post Office Minister, Kevin Hollinrake and Post Office Executives following the news that Post Office Ltd has decided to unilaterally close the Kelsale outreach service and make changes to the wider network. Including transferring the Snape, Yoxford, Wangford and Walberswick outreach services to a mobile van operating from Ipswich rather than Saxmundham. The changes coincide with the retirement of the Saxmundham Subpostmaster, but his successor has already committed to continuing the outreach services. I am concerned about this, including the proposed reduction in service. I will also investigate why they will not allow another willing sub-postmaster to take on the work. Whilst a mobile van is better than nothing, I want to push back on these proposals and challenge the Post Office to think again.

Local Government Finance: The government announced an extra £600m for local councils to help them continue to provide vital services in the community. Earlier in January, I co-signed a letter to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State making the case that the unique challenges on upper tier authorities need to be recognised in the Local Government Finance settlement. There is an increased demand for children's services and adult social care, inflationary pressures as well as a significant uplift in the National Living Wage but without additional funding. I'm pleased that the government have listened to the case that I and others put to them - working closely alongside the Suffolk County Leadership - and that changes have been made to help alleviate the financial challenges.

Flagship and the sell-off of Housing Stock: I raised this issue in [Parliament](#), asking Housing Secretary, Michael Gove to meet me to discuss the sell-off of affordable housing stock to second homeowners by Flagship. This follows an unsatisfactory meeting I held recently with Flagship (also known as NewTide). I think this is a scandal and I want to make sure that housing that was originally given to housing associations stays for local people.

Armed Forces' Accommodation - Rock Barracks: I visited Rock Barracks near Woodbridge (home to 23 Parachute Engineers and 28 Engineers Regiments) with Defence Minister and fellow Suffolk MP, James Cartlidge MP. Rock Barracks itself is a modern base that has seen lots of investment, including in its homes for our finest and bravest. However, some of the older accommodation from the legacy RAF Woodbridge has not been well serviced by contractor Amey - causing difficulties for families. We had a thorough discussion and I was assured that there has been a lot of progress in

rectifying these issues. However, that is still not the experience residents are facing. I look forward to meeting Amey and service families onsite in the near future to keep up progress.



DIY Waste – free to dispose of properly: Thanks to regulations the government changed when I was Environment Secretary, from the beginning of this year households no longer need to pay to get rid of small-scale DIY waste at local recycling centres. It should help with residents disposing of waste like plasterboard much more easily than in recent years. I am glad this has already been welcomed by Suffolk farmers who have experienced fly-tipping in the past.

Charity: I was delighted to attend a coffee morning in Westleton Village Hall, laid on by resident Pam Hargreaves and her daughter in advance of running the London Marathon for Lung UK.

PARLIAMENT & WESTMINSTER

In January, I made a number of full speeches in Parliament, with further interventions in debates and questioning of ministers. These included contributions on the Household Support Fund, The Media Bill, the NHS Winter update, Energy infrastructure and others. You can read all my contributions here - www.theresecoffey.co.uk/parliament.

Pet Abduction Bill: I spoke in the second reading of the Pet Abduction Bill. This new offence of abduction is an important tool for capturing criminals and reuniting beloved pets with their owners. Prosecuting for theft, police have to show evidence that the intention is to permanently deprive someone of their pet. I am confident this legislation will make rapid progress through Parliament.

Driving Licenses: If you passed your driving test before 1997, you can drive a minibus in a not for profit capacity and you can drive a delivery van. Due to EU rules, those licence categories were removed. Instead, people who want a D1 or C1 licence have to pay £2,500-3000 to take the lessons and a test. Halesworth Community Transport Association brought this issue to my attention many years ago. Now, we are out of the EU and I am no longer in government, I raised this issue publicly in a debate. I want to see the law changed and will take this further when I debate my private members' bill in

February.

In Parliament, I met the BBC on local TV and radio issues. I met the National Audit Office to discuss their report on NHS supplies of services and equipment.

Media Appearances: Now I am out of government, several media outlets are interested in my experience as a minister. I was interviewed by Jeremy Vine on BBC Radio 2 on 23rd January. You can catch it on BBC Sounds. I was also interviewed by Kate McCann on [Times Radio](#). The full interview starts a minute in.

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