

# Dr Thérèse Coffey MP

## Newsletter – March 2024



*Please find below my latest newsletter covering issues with which I have been dealing and meetings and events I attended last month. I also update my website [www.theresecoffey.co.uk](http://www.theresecoffey.co.uk) and [Facebook](#) regularly. If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, there is a link to unsubscribe below. You can catch up on my Parliamentary contributions at: [www.theresecoffey.co.uk/parliament](http://www.theresecoffey.co.uk/parliament).*

### NEXT SURGERY

Please note casework can be handled without the need for a surgery appointment, however, if you do want to speak to me, the next surgery will be held on the 26th of April. Future surgeries will provisionally be held on the 30th of May, 28th of June and 12th of July. Please contact my office for an appointment by [email](#) or on 01394 248980.

### ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

**Policy Statement for Energy:** In Parliament, I spoke for 35 minutes highlighting the failures in the Government's Strategy and Policy Statement for Energy regarding the substations and converter stations in Suffolk Coastal, pushing for consideration of brownfield sites. I'm still awaiting answers from the department. I later tried to block this strategy from receiving government approval but as I was the sole voice of objection to the strategy, which the Deputy Speaker recognised, it was passed. You can watch my full contribution in the Delegated Legislation Committee [here](#).

**PM Meeting:** I met the Prime Minister to lobby for the communities of Suffolk Coastal regarding the concentration of connections and converter stations in greenfield sites along our coast. While he had received a short briefing from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), it was clear it was the same approach which while frustrating is what I expected. I pointed out failures in the approach taken, the alternatives possible and I also requested a moratorium on any further connections being granted. There was a commitment to discuss this issue further with the Secretary of State for DESNZ. I will keep following up on this.

**Interconnectors – Lionlink:** National Grid Ventures published their supplementary non-statutory consultation response, which includes a proposal for landfall into either Southwold or Walberswick with a huge converter station at Saxmundham and a substation at Friston. I completely oppose NGV's proposals and continue to make the case to National Grid ESO and government ministers that brownfield sites closer to London should be used instead. Now that Ofgem is not supporting the Nautilus project, I am calling on National Grid to investigate the Isle of Grain as their landing point for Lionlink, which they were previously investigating for Nautilus.

Ultimately, there is still a long way to go before final permissions are granted, including NGV having to undertake a detailed Environmental Impact Assessment. That will not be easy for them to justify considering the impact this would have on the specially protected sites in the Blyth Estuary. I am already engaging with statutory bodies such as Natural England on their response to these proposals. This includes their initial assessment of Sealink which seems to be more problematic at the proposed Kent site, rather than Suffolk. However, if that site is not suitable, the obvious choice will be Isle of Grain for a connection – which would then point to a connection further down the coast in Essex at

either Tilbury or Bradwell.

**National Grid ESO study:** I attended two meetings in Friston Village Hall regarding this study. The first was to an East Suffolk group including local councillors with the outcome of their study of a variety of connection points. I also attended the meeting held by Friston Parish Council for all interested people later in the month.

I was disappointed as there was little transparency on the study which effectively ruled out Bradwell as an alternative landing point. The other options will be considered more broadly by developers but candidly, this does not help Suffolk Coastal, Friston and other potential station sites and landing points at all. I will continue to press the case on an integrated offshore grid rather than multiple connections into the Suffolk coast.

**Water Quality Treatment:** Any water going into your home will be treated comprehensively, including with ultraviolet (UV) light/radiation UV light and chlorine. UV kills off all bacteria and chlorine helps maintain decontamination once it is in the system. It is why we protect ourselves from the sun, through sunscreen or filters in sunglasses and why closing the ozone hole and trying to protect the ozone layer is so important for human health.

Wastewater that leaves waterworks into the rivers and sea is treated, but only disinfected if it is expected to flow towards designated bathing water sites. This disinfection is done by blasting the treated wastewater with UV. You may wonder why only certain waterworks proactively disinfect wastewater as we end up with e-coli ratings being found in places like Martlesham Creek. The standard approach for most waterworks is for the disinfection process to happen via a natural way of using UV – direct from the sun. If there were undisturbed intensive sunlight, it would take just a few hours to decontaminate, say, a bottle of water. However, in our environment, it takes a couple of weeks to do the same. The engineered UV solution is available but is expensive and carbon-intensive.

A few years ago, I pressed Anglian Water to tackle the problem at Southwold Denes beach. It sought permission to trial using Polyfluorinated Substances (PFS) to disinfect the water leaving the local waterworks. The result was an excellent bathing water status. When the Deben at Waldringfield was designated bathing water status, action would need to be taken at the waterworks in Woodbridge. Based on their experience at Southwold, Anglian Water have considered using the same PFS. To do this means a rather long process of getting a special permit from the Environment Agency. Going back into the department, I asked our scientists to look at using PFS to be a permanent option. They were initially reluctant to expand this, despite this being one of the processes being used in Paris in the River Seine ahead of the Olympics and Paralympics, as well as very large storm overflows of the type used in this country.

In Defra Questions, I pressed the minister for the successful trial of Polyfluorinated Substances in Southwold to be rolled out across the country to help clean up our waterways. If it's good enough for swimmers in the Seine during the Olympics, surely, it's good enough to start using this treatment more widely here. In response, the Minister said that he was having conversations within DEFRA and the Environment Agency about it and committed to meet me to talk about it further. You can watch my question [here](#).

None of this takes away from the over-use of storm overflows and why the water companies are still under a criminal investigation by the Environment Agency. The sooner the agency comes to their conclusions the better.

## HEALTH & CARE

**Ambulances:** I caught up with the Chief Executive of the East of England Ambulance Trust, Tom Abell. I am pleased to say since our last meeting, he has taken up the issue of ambulance reliability, getting advice from the West Midlands Ambulance Trust who use similar vehicles. By changing practice on maintenance including keeping more spare parts in their repair shops, availability of ambulances has significantly increased. Hospital handovers are still quite a significant issue in different parts of the region; the N&N continues to be one of the worst performing including James Paget Hospital though there has been some improvement.

**New James Paget Hospital:** I met the health minister, Lord Markham and other Suffolk MPs to discuss progress on the new hospital – the issues seem to be the business case and the value of the land to be purchased. I will continue to follow up with the hospital,

the NHS (and ministers) on the business case and land acquisition to enable the building project to get started.

**NHS Awards:** Nominations for the NHS Parliamentary Awards 2024 are now open. I am looking for local individuals, teams or organisations who have made a real difference to patient care through their dedication and innovation. If you have experienced great care locally, or know of a team who fit this description, I want to hear from you. Send your nominations to me at [therese.coffey.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:therese.coffey.mp@parliament.uk) before the 18th of April so I can nominate the fantastic staff who work in Suffolk Coastal. I have already had some nominations. Find out more at: [www.nhsparliamentaryawards.co.uk](http://www.nhsparliamentaryawards.co.uk).



## EDUCATION

**New SEND School:** East Suffolk is going to host a new school for children with special educational needs, ministers confirmed last month. Working closely with Suffolk County Council, Unity SLD School will offer specialist education for 117 pupils, plus a nursery, aged 3 to 16 with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD), Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty (PMLD), Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), Hearing Impairment (HI), Vision Impairment (VI) and Multi-Sensory Impairment (MSI). I spoke to Regional Schools Commissioner Jonathan Duff and raised again using Saxmundham School as the site. He assured me it is on the list of options being considered. I have also had confirmation that it is the preferred site for the County Council. This is good news as we have a perfectly good building that should be put to good use. I will follow up with Unity Trust regarding its feasibility study. I would hope it would be quick.

**Alde Valley Academy:** I met Headteacher, Jonathan Harris, SENDCO, Claire Wills, and Craig Morrison CEO of the Kingfisher Schools Trust which hosts Alde Valley (and Snape Primary School). to discuss the school and its needs. With the closure of Saxmundham School this summer, many more children are expected to attend this coming September. I have taken up their issues with the Department for Education and will also raise various points discussed with Suffolk New College. Whilst I was there, I met a group of students and participated in the Q&A.

**Farlingaye High:** I spoke to the Regional Schools Commissioner to secure an update on timing of further RAAC works and re-building for the school. The school is safe for students and staff but understandably, moving into permanent buildings is desirable as soon as possible.

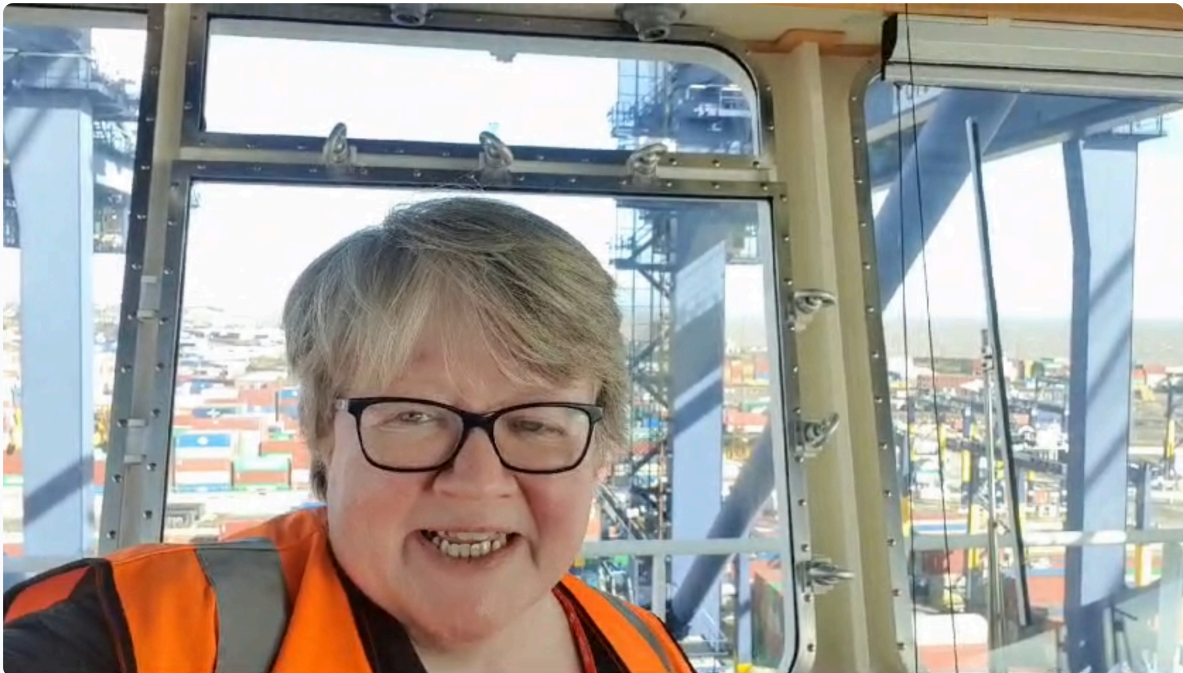
## BUSINESS AND FARMING



**Farming Debate:** Farmers should always be at the forefront of our minds when we think of the food that we eat, the animals we see and the countryside we enjoy. During the recent farming [debate](#), I raised various issues with ministers including the need to deregulate, skills and water challenges, highlighting the success of the Felixstowe hydrocycle. I also called on the Rural Payments Agency to be more agile and flexible in supporting farmers. Since leaving the EU, we've moved from a scheme that paid farmers and landowners for how much land they had to one based on supporting the environment and on providing grants to help their farms become more sustainable. In the past, half the money went to just 10% of landowners. The change opens up the opportunity for many more to get involved and crucially it does not stop farming. As Secretary of State, I changed the Sustainable Farming Incentive so many farmers, like pig farmers, that were previously excluded can now secure funding. I'm concerned though that out of 305 farms in Suffolk Coastal eligible for the Basic Payment Scheme only 55 have applied for the Sustainable Farming Incentive in this current year. That is why we need a County-by-County analysis to get a sense of whether farmers are taking up the opportunities that are there, listen and get feedback. Being alert to these issues and making any required changes is crucial.

## TRANSPORT

**The Orwell Bridge:** I welcomed the Maritime Minister, Lord Davies of Gower, to the Port of Felixstowe. I took the opportunity to lobby him on a number of issues including ensuring greater resilience of the Orwell Bridge. The Port of Felixstowe and the successful movement of freight is so important to our national and local economy and bridge closures are frustrating for residents and businesses. I'm pleased that Lord Davies visited to learn about the issues.



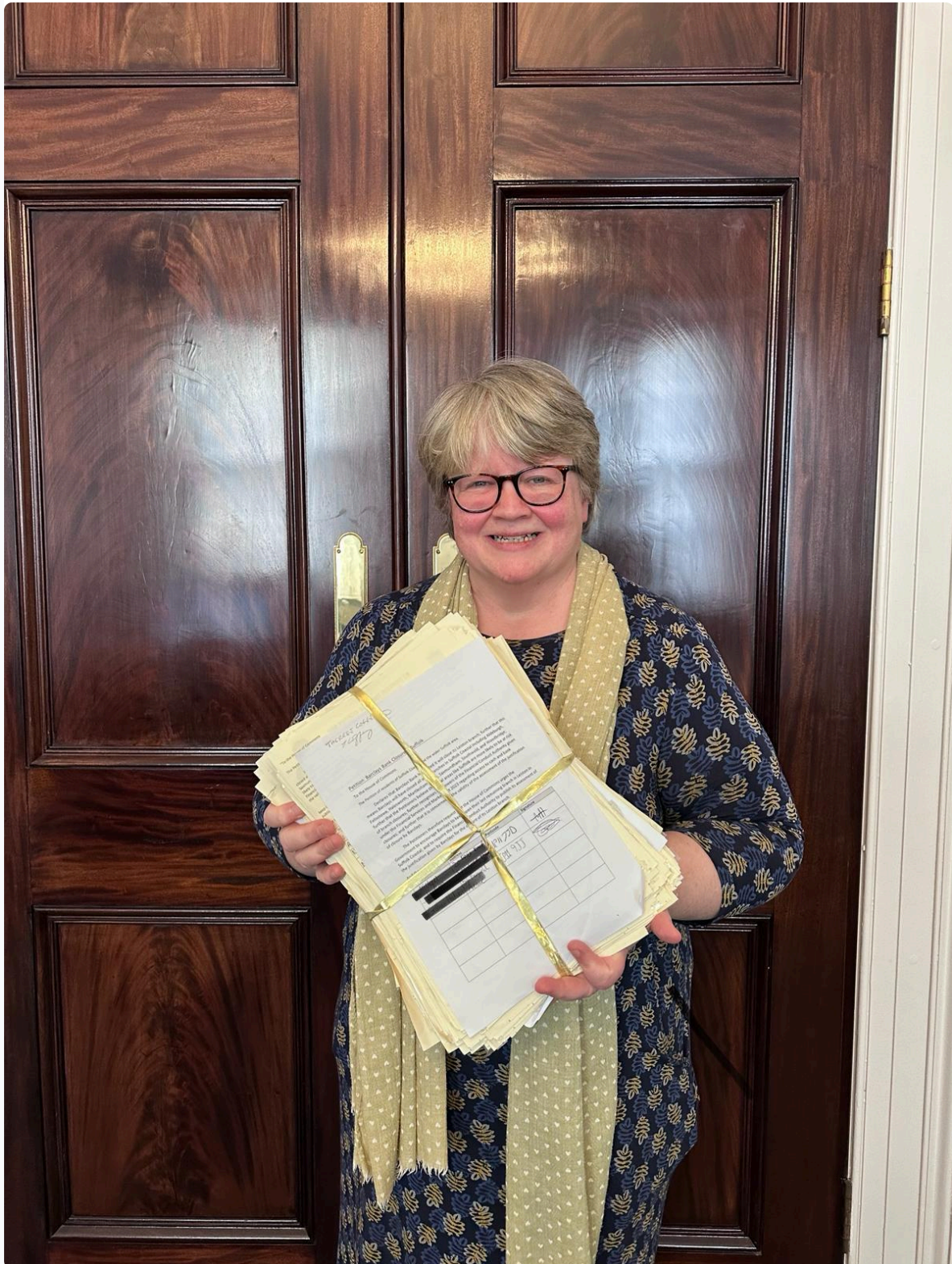
**Potholes:** Suffolk County Council officers fessed up they have messed up on fixing the potholes by Melton Station. Work was supposed to start in March including partial road closures but they forgot to do the notifications needed to efficiently close the road. This vital work should now take place during April. I will keep chasing the council to keep on top of their contractors who are supposed to be doing repairs. Please do also report potholes the council [here](#).

**Community Transport:** Following my attempt to change the law to make it easier for people to become community transport drivers, which was blocked by Labour MPs (I still do not understand why), I am still keen to see a change in the law and I met the national Community Transport Association. We will continue to lobby the Department for Transport on this policy and particularly will hold it to account under its pledge in the National Disability Strategy.



## OTHER LOCAL MATTERS

**Barclays Bank:** I formally submitted my petition - signed by 1,762 people - to the House of Commons to try and keep open the last remaining branch of Barclays Bank in Suffolk Coastal. The premises on Main Street, Leiston is currently due to close at noon on Friday 17th of May, but I'm calling on the Government and the Financial Conduct Authority to intervene. Last year the government changed the law so the Financial Conduct Authority can start investigating these closures and that's why I'm also pressing the case with them. The petition requests they publish their assessment of the justification given by Barclays for the closure of its Leiston branch.



**Treasury Select Committee:** I've also been pursuing the shameful and shameless behaviour of Barclays Bank through the Treasury Select Committee and on the floor of the House of Commons. I attended a roundtable on bank closures, where it came to light that LINK only considers the impact of a bank or cashpoint closure on a town plus a 1km circumference. That is not how the rural economy works, so I am pursuing that with ministers. I'm grateful to the Economic Secretary to the Treasury for his commitment in working with me on this and I'm pleased the City Minister has also agreed to meet me soon.



**Rock Barracks:** I hosted a housing surgery at Rock Barracks in Woodbridge. It was a chance for serving soldiers and their families to raise issues they are having with their accommodation. I was pleased to hear the solutions being presented and will continue to chase for improvements to be made.

**Anti-Social Behaviour:** I raised the issue of anti-social behaviour and Flagship's failure to take action during housing questions in Parliament. I was reassured that as well as the new action plan, from the 1st of April the regulator of social housing will also require registered providers to work with the appropriate local authority departments, the police and other relevant organisations to tackle ASB. You can watch my contribution [here](#).

**Bicentenary of the RNLI:** I attended the special service on Aldeburgh Beach to thank the crew and the support team who are on call to help those in peril on the sea.



**The Community Ownership Fund:** The Community Ownership Fund is now open for new applications. This fund has already helped local communities in Suffolk Coastal to buy the Racehorse Inn, Westhall and Holton Pits for continued public access to nature and the countryside. The fund covers a wide range of buildings and land used by the community which is at risk due to the end of a lease or an unsustainable business model. Find out more [here](#).

## PARLIAMENT

**Schools visiting Parliament made easier:** I have been lobbying for some time to allow schools in Suffolk Coastal to benefit from the Travel Subsidy that the House of Commons offers to encourage trips to Westminster. I still do not understand the logic on why Suffolk has previously been excluded but I am delighted that my attempts have finally paid off. Schools can benefit from a subsidy from April.

**Animal Welfare – Private Members' Bills:** I spoke in the House of Commons to back my colleague, Salaine Saxby's, Animal Welfare (Importation for Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill. The Government is supporting the new legislation which will close existing loopholes exploited by unscrupulous breeders and traders who illegally smuggle cats and dogs into the UK. The Bill will strengthen the Pet Travel Scheme to ensure that no one can fraudulently import animals for sale under the guise of being an owner travelling with their own pets. It was great to meet Pixie the one-eyed spaniel and Bruce, the French bulldog after the Bill got its Second Reading.



I also attended the Hunting Trophies Bill debate. Another MP is taking through the Bill that I helped to craft while Environment Secretary. This is another attempt as the House of Lords blocked it in the last Parliamentary session.

**Child Maintenance:** I have raised in Parliament the issue of enforcement options on how we can get people to pay their child maintenance. There are a number of routes including removal of a driving licence, passport and/or a prison sentence. These are intended to act as a deterrent though I know that restricting a driving licence or a prison sentence can have impact on people's job prospects. One power not yet being used is that of requesting curfew orders. This power is available in law but, to use a technical term, this has not yet been commenced. While I was Secretary of State at the Department for Work and Pensions, we consulted on starting this. However, the Government still has not done so. I met Viscount Younger to discuss this. He is clear that there is a change in view with current ministers but was only able to give one example of why they thought it should not proceed. I have asked to meet the Secretary of State to pursue this.

For more about my contributions in Parliament, visit [www.theresecoffey.co.uk/parliament](http://www.theresecoffey.co.uk/parliament)

#### **OTHER VISITS/MEETINGS:**

- I enjoyed Wrentham Band's Spring Concert in Wrentham Village Hall. As a youngster, I played the trombone and have always liked a bit of brass.
- I attended the Suffolk Orchid Show at Martlesham Heath.
- I attended Suffolk's Greenest County Awards. Congratulations to Russ and Denise Rainger representing Leiston's Longshop Museum, one of the winners.
- I attended a reception in 10 Downing Street to celebrate International Women's Day.
- I attended the English Tourism Week Reception.
- I attended Cancer Research UK's Race for Life launch.
- I was elected to become Vice-Chairman of the APPG for the Commonwealth.
- I attended the AGM of the International Conservation All Party Parliamentary Group.
- I attended the End Sewage Pollution Coalition Reception.
- I visited the Men's Shed in Parliament. There are quite a few in Suffolk Coastal all keen



to see new members.



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