

Dr Thérèse Coffey MP

Newsletter



Happy Christmas. Please find below my latest newsletter covering issues with which I have been dealing and meetings and events I have attended in November and December. 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 <https://www.theresecoffey.co.uk/parliament>.

As Christmas approaches, I have enjoyed many of the festive lights, fayres and carol services. I was particularly struck by the lights switch-on in Southwold and the Illuminated Tractor Ride with nearly 100 tractors setting off from Campsea Ashe. I would like to wish all readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.



My MP office will be closed from Friday 22nd December and will re-open on 2nd January. Emails will not be checked. The emergency number for the council is 0800 440 2516.

Energy/Environment:

I have continued to raise Energy infrastructure issues in Parliament. The minister delegated to look after this topic has reverted to Minister of State Graham Stuart MP.

I have signed [EDM 214](#). This does not guarantee a debate however, it is a way for MPs to express views individually or with other MPs.

Sealink: I attended one of the public exhibition meetings and have also visited several farmers with specific concerns regarding the Sealink consultation.



I have responded to National Grid Electricity Transmission's Sealink consultation opposing landfall into Aldeburgh with underground cabling to a convertor station to the southeast of Saxmundham then further cabling into a proposed substation at Friston, which is currently subject to a judicial review. It is my strong view that onshore connections should be placed on brownfield land much further down the coast such as Bradwell in Essex, the site of a disused nuclear power station. This is particularly the case as East Suffolk will already be hosting the new Sizewell C nuclear power station. As Sealink has also now been included in the Offshore Coordination Support Scheme process, there is an opportunity for alternative landfall sites to be identified. You can read my full submission [here](#).

SEAS: I have consistently been working with campaign groups like SEAS and SASES to raise concerns about the impact of excessive energy infrastructure on the Suffolk coast. I was pleased to be their guest speaker at a public meeting in Saxmundham in November. I also enjoyed meeting Fiona Gilmore in Parliament, as she was giving evidence to the Energy Select Committee.



Bathing Water Quality: I visited Felixstowe's blue flag beaches to celebrate their excellent rating in the 2023 bathing water classifications as was released recently. Southwold's two beaches were rated excellent too. The brand new bathing site in the River Deben at Waldringfield requires further work and only registered a poor. The additional monitoring at that site means that the Environment Agency, Anglian Water, the East Suffolk Catchment Partnership and the local authority will now make the appropriate interventions. However, I was very disappointed that East Suffolk District Council blocked the bid for the Woodbridge bathing area to seek bathing water status from the government. The same application for 2022 was supported by the Council, though under different leadership. I will continue to investigate why the bid has been blocked.



Climate Change: I used my first speech from the back benches in nine years to contribute to a debate in Parliament about climate change and the COP28 Conference. I highlighted the necessity of a 'just transition' to net-zero recognising the particular impact on rural communities. I also underlined the point that there is no solution to climate change without protecting and restoring nature - talking about the magic of mangroves and the importance of salt marsh. You can watch my full speech [here](#).

COP28: I attended the COP28 Climate conference in Dubai with other MPs and ministers, my fifth time attending this global climate conference. Overall, it was a very good success with the UAE consensus. I spoke in Parliament before going and after [returning](#). I will do a separate update on COP28 in January.

Global Biodiversity Framework/TNFD: In marking a year since the world came together to agree the Global Biodiversity Framework, I asked the Chancellor to introduce mandatory reporting on nature-related financial risks. This is already in place regarding carbon. I had strongly supported the global work that had recently been reported in UNGA and London. I hope that we will introduce this soon in the UK.

Health & Care:

Ambulances: Following my meeting with the Chief Executive, I received an update on ambulance availability. I was surprised to learn that only 60% of the fleet is expected to be available at any moment, particularly due to maintenance. The Board has been focusing on this and has made some changes. In particular, after their review of utilisation, more ambulances will be moved to the Suffolk and North East Essex area. Across the country, it is expected that we will move away from the current fleet provider to improve reliability. Locally and nationally, this is a welcome step. I will continue to scrutinise the trust and the NHS nationally.

NHS Norfolk/Waveney: I joined the regular catch-up meeting with the ICB and received an update on the estate programme, including the new James Paget hospital.

Eye Health Day: I joined #TheEyesHaveIt at the Westminster Eye Health Day. According to statistics 3.3% of people are living with sight loss in Suffolk Coastal, so I am backing their campaign for a national plan to drive improvements in patient eye care and outcomes. Enabling everyone to access the right care, where and when they need it.



Education:

Suffolk New College: I visited Suffolk New College, which included a tour of the construction, hair and beauty, motor vehicle, Net Zero Skills and Tech Campuses. I was also able to speak to the Principal about the two Suffolk New College On The Coast campuses in Leiston and Halewsoth. They asked me to raise the issue of the syllabus for the T levels for agriculture. There has been a big change as we move away from BTEC qualifications to fewer T levels – in the interest of quality and higher standards. However, the new agriculture qualification does not work for pig farming. I have pursued this issue with the Further Education minister and will be meeting the Institute director, who does this on behalf of government, in January.



Business & Farming:

Farm visit: It was good to visit Greenwell Farms and meet farmers from the sugar beet and turf industry. British Sugar was also present. It was useful to hear their issues and also a different take on the pricing negotiations.

NFU: I attended the NFU's Christmas reception and spoke to their President, Minette Batters. I will continue to back our farmers, including by introducing tougher legislation to tackle livestock worrying



Protection of Livestock Bill: I presented my Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Bill on the floor of the House of Commons. You can watch it [here](#). The Bill makes provisions for changing the law about the offence of livestock worrying, including changes to what constitutes an offence and increased powers for the investigation of suspected offences. It reaches its next stage in Parliament on the 2nd of February 2024.

Buy British through your Online Shop: When you go to the supermarket, you can see the labelling from where a particular fruit or vegetable was grown – but not online. Well done to Morrisons Supermarkets for responding so positively to the excellent campaign for clearer signposting to British produce for customers who shop online. I was pleased to support this when I was Environment Secretary. Their new British section of morrisonsonline.com is great news for British farmers and I am sure consumers will support it. I hope other supermarkets will follow.

Rosie's Coffee Lounge open for business: I visited Rosie's Coffee Lounge in Leiston. A new business run by the fantastic Frances and Frank Newsome. Impressively they managed to open within six days of taking over the former Norwich & Peterborough building and their great coffee, snacks and cake offer will be a great addition to the town. As the sign says, supporting a small business makes a big difference and I was pleased to be an early customer.



Easyblinds growth through Amazon: I attended an Amazon event in Parliament to celebrate small businesses that have started exporting on their platform over the last 25 years. It was especially great to meet, Audrey Buck, the founder of Easyblinds International Limited, a blackout blind business based in Reydon - and hear about her journey to becoming an exporter.



Transport:

Orwell Bridge: After the extremely long closure of the Orwell Bridge on 1st December, I asked to meet the National Highways CEO. Instead, with Tom Hunt MP for Ipswich, I met senior managers from National Highways and the Department for Transport just before Christmas. The extended closure was concerning on the impact on households and businesses. There seems to have been a double mechanical failure on the equipment. There are only four of these machines in the country and it is the first time that a double mechanical failure has ever happened. The broader failure was how long it took for the contractor to provide an appropriate engineer to fix and remove the equipment. Once the engineer arrived, it took about 90 minutes to sort the issue. There are more questions for diversion routes and also with the Police on traffic management. However, when the bridge survey is undertaken again in March, there will be an appropriate engineer on site so that any equipment failures can be addressed straightaway.



A12 improvements: Following the announcement of the funding for A12 improvements, I met the County Council to discuss the next steps on the changes to come. I am particularly keen to see the widening of the A12 between the roundabouts by Seckford Hall and Dobbies. That should lead to fewer queues during the day. I expect works to start in 2024.

Road flooding: After the various storms, with farm fields not being able to absorb all the rain, there are clearly some particularly challenging issues along parts of the A12 and villages just off it. I am expecting the County Council to undertake several reviews and will press them to do some major fixes. Now that the A12 is part of the major roads network, it is more important than ever that we can rely on these roads to be passable. I know that there are some significant issues in and out of Leiston too which I will take up. Potter's Bridge - After obtaining a warrant, I am pleased that the Environment Agency undertook the work to release water from the Broad which has largely helped the B1127 be passable. I hope that the landowners will not resist remedial work in the future.

Railway - Haughley Junction: I pressed the Minister in Parliament on timescales for delivering the Haughley railway junction project. The upgrades will hugely help the resilience of the network, important for both passenger trains and freight to and from the Port of Felixstowe. I asked for a commitment for the project to start in 2024. You can watch my intervention [here](#).

Other Matters:

Remembrance Sunday and Veterans: I was honoured to attend the National Memorial

Service in Whitehall. I want to thank those who represented me and laid wreaths in the seven towns in the constituency. I also want to thank those who collected funds for the RBL and other charities that help veterans. We will remember them.

Johnny Mercer MP, Minister for Veterans, updated Parliament on the Strategy Action Plan including changes to be made from 2024. The Office for Veterans has a dedicated website for further information [here](#).

Telecommunications: I spoke in a debate on the planned withdrawal of the copper wire telecommunications network. Whenever there is a power outage residents share with me their deep concern that they will not be able to contact anyone in an emergency, with the transition away from copper without adequate mobile signal being a real worry. I have also challenged Ofcom's mobile coverage maps, which often relies upon predictions from providers rather than the reality on the ground - meaning there is an assumption of adequate signal, which is often not the case. We cannot end up in a situation where the existing network is taken away based on these inaccurate assumptions. I will keep pursuing this issue. You can watch my speech [here](#).

I also visited BT at Martlesham to discuss Artificial Intelligence – the opportunities and the risks. It was interesting to see how this is already being used in agriculture locally as well as in health. This coincided with the government holding a global AI Safety summit in Bletchley Park.



Armed Forces' Accommodation - Rock Barracks: While there has been a lot of investment in new accommodation blocks at Rock Barracks, there is a lot of older accommodation too which is maintained by contractor Pinnacle. I raised the problems of poor accommodation and maintenance suffered by residents of Rock Barracks and Pinnacle's failure to get a grip on the issue with the minister, and neighbouring MP, James Cartledge. I am pleased he will visit and look into the problem. You can watch my question in Parliament [here](#).

Action for Warm Homes Campaign: Fuel poverty can be especially prevalent in rural Suffolk, especially for those who are off the gas grid. In 2013, I co-chaired a report that made some specific recommendations about the heating oil market that encouraged the use of buying groups to reduce the cost. Now I am outside of government, I intend to take up some of those recommendations that have not yet been implemented and campaign for the better roll out of ECO4 grants for the benefit of rural residents. There is help out there now though I am conscious some of that is not claimed.

There are specific grants for residents who are off the gas grid and are on low incomes to improve the energy efficiency of their home and reduce costs, which I would urge local people or the families of vulnerable residents to take advantage of. Help, support and information is available at Warm Homes Suffolk via www.warmhomesuffolk.org or by calling 0345 037 686.

I also visited local business Sunlite who can undertake surveys and help access these grants, which are targeted at people on low incomes. More information on this [here](#).



I met Chief Executive of East Suffolk District Council to discuss a number of matters including byelaws regarding water quality, litter on the A14, local social housing availability, and the poor state of a car park in Aldeburgh.

Parliament:

In November and December, I made 10 full speeches in Parliament, with further interventions in debates and questioning of ministers. These speeches were on debates and legislation on COP28, XL Bullies, Copper Wire Telecommunications Network, Animal Welfare – banning the export of livestock animals for slaughter, funding for rural councils, government support for rural communities, the apprenticeship levy, marine protected areas in the South Atlantic, the media industry and the Autumn Financial Statement.

Autumn Statement: I [spoke](#) backing key measures on business investment and the uprating of pensions and raising concerns about the impact of energy infrastructure locally when there are alternatives available. I also took the opportunity to highlight my campaign to remove the restrictions on modern driving licenses so anyone can drive small delivery vans or minibuses without the need for additional expensive tests. Boosting productivity and supporting community transport.

Other matters introduced in the Autumn Statement included: a National Insurance tax cut from 12% to 10%, equivalent to £450 for the average worker; an increase in the National Living Wage to £11.44 an hour; an increase in the State Pension of 8.5%; uprating benefits by 6.7% and a freeze in alcohol duty.

Treasury Select Committee: I have joined the Treasury Select Committee. After all my years in government, I now have an opportunity to scrutinise and ultimately, the Treasury has a say in pretty much every policy and delivery. We have had two meetings so far scrutinising the work of the Financial Conduct Authority and an evidence session regarding progress for women in financial services.

Next Surgery: 12th January. Please contact the office for an appointment on 01394 248980. The other provisional dates for 2024 are February 9th and March 8th.

I am also pleased to be re-opening my constituency office in Woodbridge next month. Appointments will mainly be by prior agreement as my constituency assistant will be out and about across Suffolk Coastal during the week.