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# 'Our libraries will adapt and survive'

## County chief's statement comes as number of borrowed books falls

The head of Suffolk's library service says she envisages "more years of resilient survival" amid news that the number of books being borrowed dipped below the three million mark for the first time.

Last night Alison Wheeler, general manager of Suffolk Libraries, said she was not "scared" of the future after the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

**Matt Stott**  
matt.stott@archant.co.uk

book borrowing figures showed that the number of physical books taken out from the county's branches fell from 3,171,903 in 2013/14 to 2,904,656 in 2014/15. That drop of 8.4% is set against one of just 2% the previous year.

The data emerges as talks continue

between Suffolk Libraries and Suffolk County Council over future funding.

Suffolk Libraries became a separate organisation from the county council in 2012, but relies on the authority for its main source of income. Funding for libraries fell from £8.9million in 2010/11 to £6.4m in 2014/15.

Ms Wheeler said: "Book borrowing

is still important to us, and we still lend millions of books every year and always will lend millions of books I think, but what we know is that the library building has got to do lots of different things for different people.

"It is our duty to keep up with people who like reading in a different format, too."

■ Full story: Pages 12 & 13

## 'Innovative' budget cuts

St Edmundsbury Borough Council faces being "worse off than before" following the Chancellor's autumn statement, according to Conservative council leader John Griffiths, who said the authority would continue to be "innovative" in the way it deals with budget cuts.

■ Full story: Page 4

## Parking hike divides traders

A bid to increase car parking charges in Newmarket has received a mixed reception from town traders.

The town's retailers' association has backed the plan but other shop owners have warned against it.

■ Full story: Page 16

# Shoe Sale

## 17th December

## JOHN IVES

Woodbridge

386393



# Libraries lending fewer books

**Matt Stott**

matt.stott@archant.co.uk

The number of books being borrowed from libraries in Suffolk is falling at a faster rate and has dipped below the three million mark for the first time, the *East Anglian Daily Times* can reveal.

But last night the boss of Suffolk Libraries, which has suffered funding cuts of almost 30% since 2010, insisted she is not "scared" about the future and said for the community to expect "more years of resilient survival".

The latest Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) book borrowing figures, given to this newspaper, showed the number of physical books borrowed from Suffolk's libraries fell from 3,171,903 in 2013/14 to 2,904,656 in 2014/15 – a fall of 8.4%.

In 2012/13 the figure was 3,236,652 – a 2% decline.

The number of borrowed children's physical books has also fallen, from 1,017,946 in 2013/14 to 973,456 in 2014/15 – a 4.3% drop.

The figures come amid ongoing talks between Suffolk Libraries and Suffolk County Council over future funding.

Suffolk Libraries became a separate organisation from the county council in 2012, but relies on the authority for its main source of funding. Funding for libraries fell from £8.9million in 2010/11 to £6.4m in 2014/15.

Library bosses last month pledged that none of the 44 branches in the county will close under their management. But the county council's current budget proposals include a reduction of 11% over the next two years.

In an interview with the EADT, Alison Wheeler, general manager of Suffolk Libraries, said: "We are not



Children watch a magic show at Kesgrave Library's reading challenge celebration.

Picture: SU ANDERSON

complacent about what is coming, but neither are we scared. We have got a good three years of successful and resilient survival behind us. I see more years of resilient survival ahead.

"I think we have done more in the three-and-a-half years that we have been independent and with less money than we ever did in the five or 10 years before, so I don't see our library service going into decline whatsoever.

"There is more community support and a really strong understanding of what the customers like. We are looking to the future with determination, not anxiety. We are going to be here in the future, always changing a bit to

**“I don't see our library service going into decline. We are looking to the future with determination, not anxiety**

Alison Wheeler, Suffolk Libraries

respond to changes around us, but at the core still there to support reading, knowledge, ideas, and learning.

"But the best way for someone to support us is to carry on using us, because the more they use us, the more we know that what we are doing

is the right thing and it is a better case to present to the funder."

Libraries are now much more than just a place where you can borrow a book.

Ms Wheeler explained the organisation has had to "diversify" to increase usage and make them relevant community facilities.

She said: "Book borrowing is still important to us, and we still lend millions of books every year and always will lend millions of books I think, but what we know is that the library building has got to do lots of different things for different people. It is our duty to keep up with people who like reading in a different format, too. "We are going to be challenged if

## Libraries diversifying to function as 'community hubs'

Libraries are relied upon by many groups within the community, particularly older residents who could otherwise become isolated if they are on their own.

Alison Wheeler, pictured right, general manager of Suffolk Libraries, said: "We recently received a pack of quite touching and really moving cards from old ladies who use Newmarket Library. They say how much they value the library, why events are important parts of their week, that in some cases they look forward to going because it is when they spend a whole afternoon in the company of other people and it just reinforces how a library is much more than a place where you can enjoy reading matter and information; it is a social centre where people can get the



resilience to stay independent by having contact with others which is enjoyable, social, and interactive."

One letter sent to the library

service from a Newmarket Library member read: "I look forward to the club on a Thursday. I enjoy all the speakers who come and seeing my friends, so I hope the library will stay open for years to come as it is needed by the senior citizens to get together, especially when you are on your own after losing your husband."

Ms Wheeler added: "When you don't have that type of facility, it is much more likely that older people will become isolated and more dependent on the system. You can just imagine it.

"We talk a lot about community hubs in today's world and I think the library is a community hub. It is a lot more than just a building, equipment and resources; it is the people that

make it all work. It is very clear in tiny and large libraries that the public really value staff, who have got that expertise that can support a child learning to read, somebody looking for a job, somebody who needs help with quite a complicated personal health situation or a care enquiry.

"We are constantly moving up the ratings. Our opening hours have increased and our libraries are run by paid staff. In councils where they have unfortunately chosen to close places or only provide them through volunteers, then obviously the public perception is different.

"But in terms of the investment in Suffolk Libraries, we have kept the investment in the frontline service as strong as before, and that shows."



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# but service is 'responding to changes'



■ Above, 'Inside the Lines' adult colouring group at Ipswich Library. Left, the age-friendly sports group at Chantry Library in Ipswich.

Pictures: LUCY TAYLOR/PHIL MORLEY



■ A creative play session at Ipswich Library.

Picture: PHIL MORLEY

our funding is cut radically. At the moment, we are in negotiation about our budget for next year and the year after, and we know that our library service is valued by Suffolk County Council, our funder, but we also understand that they are facing pretty significant cuts themselves.

"So there will be a challenge for us and other library services to keep a good-quality service with less money.

"That means we have to be inventive, look at how we can do things a bit differently, take advantage of the goodwill in the communities towards us, find new ways of providing what we have done before, but keep the standard and high levels of satisfaction.

"We have got 44 community groups in Suffolk who I know will help us and keep us on our toes."



■ The Local Food & Produce Fayre at Ipswich Library.

Picture: LUCY TAYLOR

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**EAST ANGLIAN**  
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## Libraries might cost, but their value's priceless

It's disturbing to watch the world you cherish being chipped away – including library services, which (dare we say) are surely a cornerstone of civilisation.

It's been three years or so since a major threat to Suffolk's libraries was averted. Although the county council is still the paymaster, the service became a separate organisation and funding has over five years dropped from £8.9m to £6.4m. Council proposals now talk of a cut of 11% over two years.

Suffolk Libraries' general manager is rightly bullish about more years of "resilient survival", pointing out the service has probably done more since independence – and with less money – than in the five or 10 years before. Communities have indeed rallied round – Wickham Market's library, for instance, has been buoyed by volunteers and more activities are offered – but it would be unfair to expect Suffolk's public to do more.

It would be good to see the number of loans of *physical* books going up rather than down, but libraries are more than warehouses. They have become a key part of our social safety net in a nation running low on officially-provided TLC. They provide help, information and company, and the kind of computer access many of us take for granted but which not everyone enjoys. They come at a price, but their value is immense.

## Keep town moving

One of our key wishes for the new year: that the axe hanging over the Ipswich park and ride service is removed. We know the county council has to weigh every penny, but no politician will want to be seen as the person who added to the town's frustrating traffic woes. Surely

Even if each user is subsidised by £3.27, that seems a small price to pay to ease congestion – and we'd expect imaginative reorganisation and promotion could increase the number of users and thus lessen the cost.

The county must sustain Ipswich, which means workers and shoppers moving freely and cheaply. If park and ride is not part of the answer, it's incumbent on the council and other parties to find a solution that works.

## A hero's return

It's been a special year. A year marking the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. As 2015 draws to a close in a flurry of materialism and mince pies, it's right we remember again those who in the 1940s had rather more to worry about.

How joyous to welcome back Frank McCauley for his first return to Halesworth since 1943. The 99-year-old fighter ace symbolised the demands conflict made: a young man raised on a dairy farm in Ohio and sent to fight Nazis in the skies of Europe.

We'll be forever grateful that so many did that, willingly and well, to give us freedom.

## Thought for the day

**JOHN 1 V 18:** No-one has ever actually seen God, but, of course, his only Son has, for he is the companion of the Father and has told us all about him.

# Where are dissenting views in climate change 'feeding frenzy'?

Sir, - I feel it only right that the self-congratulatory outpourings by 'environmentalists' following the Paris UN Climate Change Conference need to be tempered with reality. In fact, the outcome, as in the previous annual climate jamborees, is a fudge, so that everyone feels a winner, not just President Obama, who has taken on the role of party conjurer to pull a rabbit out of the hat to end his show. The outcome of the conference is in no way binding on nations, who can return to their respective countries to do entirely as they wish. This includes China and India building coal-fired power stations as it suits them, at home and in the developing world, while the UK stumbles on with its half-baked energy policy, which will push millions of its citizens into fuel poverty and kill what little competitiveness there is in our commercial and industrial sectors. I hope the politicians, the lobby groups and NGOs, enjoyed their highly costly junket.

Little of course has been heard in the press, still less in the politically correct TV coverage, that any dissenting views exist. This surely is not a good state affairs to exist? Debate, exchange of views and careful consideration, that excludes factional slanging and suppression of a valid viewpoint, must always form the basis of a democratic society.

The climate change 'feeding frenzy' has also been fuelled by the extreme flooding in Cumbria (and also in southern Scotland and parts of Northern Ireland). It has become de rigueur over the past two decades for each major extreme event to be instantly attributed to climate change or global warming, but on closer analysis, this has never been confirmed. I notice that even last week, Dame Julia Slingo, the head of the Met Office, was somewhat reticent to make connections. Quite right, if she wishes to maintain a proper scientific and ethical approach.

The events resulted from a major weather front remaining stationary for many hours over a wide area of the northern British Isles. The front contained a series of waves along its length, was fed by warm, moist tropical maritime winds on one side, which were forced to rise dynamically over highly contrasting polar maritime air from northern latitudes, which are not so warm as many 'environmentalists' would have us believe. The rainfall-producing characteristics of the situation was enhanced by orographic uplift over mountain areas, and the extended duration of heavy rain on saturated catchments (as upland areas usually are from

## Bus station needs the basic facilities



■ Mr R A Smith agrees with WI members who marched through the streets of Ipswich to demand toilet facilities at the Cattle Market bus station.

Photo: SARAH LUCY BROWN

Sir, - Well done for featuring those brilliant WI members wanting decent toilet facilities at the Cattle Market bus station in Ipswich (December 11). In the past I have desperately needed such a facility (which I never found despite asking around) because of a common medical condition and, because I needed to catch the connecting hospital bus, and was desperate anyway, missed one hospital

appointment and was lucky to find a vacant slot on being late for another.

If others, like me, never found the existing facility, how can the security camera measure demand in all honesty? It is noteworthy that passengers disgorging from towns outside Ipswich can not only both find and access their toilets at places like Sudbury, Hadleigh, Felixstowe - but Ipswich and

Suffolk are in denial over need. Indeed, they seem quite blasé about providing essential human needs for tourists, hospital patients, the sick and elderly and general travellers. Don't expect either my footfall in Ipswich (emergencies excepted), or my recommendation to shop there

**MR R A SMITH,**  
Hadleigh.

November onwards every year) resulted in major floods. Such a situation has been recognised for a long time by hydrologists, and has led to the concept of Probable Maximum Precipitation and Probable Maximum Flood as a means of defining the upper bound of conditions for engineering flood design, that has tiny, but nevertheless finite probability of occurring.

I do not apologise for the technicalities – that is the nature of natural phenomena, which cannot be subsumed into simple jargon like 'carbon-footprints'.

**JAMES DENT,**  
Hadleigh.

Surely we have paid for bags?

Sir, - Re. Tendring District

Council stopping the supply of "free" black bin bags. I am heartily sick and tired of Tendring District Council telling us our bin bags were free. Surely if we pay our council tax, we have paid for the bin bags?

**MRS LESLEY LORD,**  
Walton on Naze.

## Our influence is not evident

Sir, - The news on Monday that little has been done to eliminate the mobile 'not spots' in Suffolk is disappointing, after being promised that £150m was available nationwide for the Mobile Infrastructure Project. Just two extra masts have been put up locally some four years after the scheme was announced. The information was released in a FOI request and did not come

voluntarily by those responsible for the progress of this lacklustre project, which is perhaps not surprising.

Good mobile and broadband connectivity are essential not only for day-to-day communications, but also for the longer-term viability and economic health of rural communities, which should not be denied technical infrastructure already available to the urban dweller. In other aspects Suffolk is also behind, especially our transport systems. Leaves on the line which have been banished in other regions, and failing old rolling stock, are still a monotonous feature. Our road system still awaits improvements to the Copdock junction, and a second Orwell crossing or northern bypass, are all distant promises. The risk rating report (EADT, December 8) on the state of schools, listed 85 as 'red' and