

# Suffolk Building Society AGM 26 March 2025

## Speech by Peter Elcock - Chair

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and a very warm welcome to this our 175th AGM of the Suffolk Building Society. Thank you for being here today.

For those of you who don't know me, I am Peter Elcock the Chair.

This AGM is being broadcast live online and so I extend a welcome to those who are watching and following remotely.

Firstly, I would like to formally thank and welcome this evening our special guests: Chris Bales and Gemma Theobald, cyber security advisors with Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies.

Chris and Gemma will be talking to us about cyber security, online scams, how to avoid them and keep ourselves safe. This is a very current topic and sadly a threat we all have to deal with and be conscious of every day.

Thank you Chris and Gemma and we look forward to your talk later.

I would now like to introduce to you my colleagues joining me on the stage

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- Steve Reid, deputy Chair and Chair of our Board Risk and Compliance Committee
- Fiona Ryder, Senior Independent Director
- Steve Liddell, Chair of our Audit Committee
- Elaine Lenc, Chair of our Remuneration Committee
- Sian Hill, Independent Director
- Richard Norrington, our Chief Executive who you will hear from shortly
- Rebecca Newman, our Chief Operating Officer

Paul Johnson, our Chief Financial Officer, is unfortunately unable to attend this meeting and sends his apologies.

I will now summarise the agenda for this evening:

- The AGM is formal part of evening where we present you, our members, the report and accounts and ask for your approval of these and for the appointment and reappointment of our Directors and Auditors.
- We also ask for your approval of our Directors' Remuneration report.
- I will spend a couple of minutes highlighting my thoughts about the UK economy, key aspects of the Society's performance last year and then ask you to vote on the various resolutions (If you have not already voted)

- Later we will collect in your voting papers and whilst the votes are counted, I will take the opportunity to announce the winner of the David Coe customer service award for this year.
- I will then hand over to Richard Norrington our Chief Executive who will share his reflections on the last year.
- After this we will consider questions from members including any that have been submitted online
- Finally, I will announce the results of the voting on the resolutions, before bringing the AGM to a close, following which Fiona Ryder will introduce our guests Chris and Gemma.

So we will now let the formal part of the AGM begin.

Starting with apologies for absence. 7 members have given apologies for the meeting. These names are not read out, but the list can be inspected after the meeting.

Secondly, the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 27th March 2024 have been read and signed by me as Chair of that meeting.

I will take these as read, but if anyone would like to read them, please could you indicate now.

I am pleased to say here, at the Suffolk, we are proud of being a 'mutual'. We are, and we remain, very much committed to this status.

I am delighted to report that we delivered another very good set of results for this last year and are extremely well positioned for this coming year and 2026.

For the last financial year, we delivered a respectable profit before tax of £2.2m, adding to our capital base and further strengthening the Society's resilience and an already robust balance sheet.

This profit was less than the previous year, but it was expected and planned for; it reflects our capital investment in the business – including our new on-line savings offering and new streamlined mortgage broker portal.

Rising costs and inflationary pressures and tight margins (i.e. the difference between what we pay our savers and charge for our mortgages) are factors.

Furthermore, previous years' profits were somewhat inflated by high interest rates. As mentioned earlier, I will now share some reflections about the world and the geo-political situation, the UK economic picture and outlook, and our plans for the rest of 2025.

As I am writing, this speech, and following last year's change of UK prime minister and US President, world affairs are changing at pace: earnest efforts are being made to bring settlement to the Ukraine and the Middle-East conflicts, as Europe as a collective and the world's powers and G7 nations seek to find solutions; however, having enjoyed some 80 years of relative peace, I suggest the world seems at its most unsettled and unstable as it has been for some considerable time.

The main powers - US, Russia and China coalesce around, and are pursuing what one might define as 'totalitarian' and 'isolationist' political models, whilst other important nations such as India, Indonesia, Iran, North Korea and Brazil seem to be sympathetic towards the Russia/China axis.

Europe is becoming increasingly fragmented with close cooperation and political alignment not necessarily the order of the day any longer, as it shifts to the right. However, the vast majority of European countries share the UK's values and democratic principles. The UK is currently divided into thirds: Labour, Conservative and Reform: the latter now seemingly the most popular party, according to the polls, with a similar distribution of these forms of political parties being replicated across most of Europe.

Turning now to the UK, as mentioned earlier, we have had a change of government since our last AGM.

Public perception of the current administration is low according to a wide range of commentators and personal approval ratings are poor – in fact amongst the lowest in history. That said, recent efforts in Europe and in relation to the US and dialogue with the US president have all attracted favorable press comment.

There are pressures on inflation and interest rates, whilst dropping by ¾ % since our last AGM, remain stubbornly high, although employment is robust. GDP growth forecasts have, however, been considerably dampened down in the light of last quarter's deficit. There are, however, likely to be further tax rises to accommodate increased Defence spending and preparation for possible (USA) tariffs.

Looking forward to 2025 and beyond, strategically, we will remain completely focused on you, our members; we shall look to enhance further our on-line savings proposition, develop innovative and fresh mortgage products, and carefully consider our branch offering and footprint.

For the wider community, we will continue to actively engage in member-events, charity work and support for those in need.

Opportunities presented by Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be pursued where we see member and business benefit.

I would like to place on record my thanks to my colleagues, your board of directors and the CEO and executive management for supporting me in exercising strong governance throughout the Society. This is essential for the proper, thorough and correct running of our business and adherence to the corporate governance code and to meet the exacting standards set by the Regulators – and of course – the expectations of our members, partners and the broader market.

I would like to commend our Society to you and iterate my confidence that we are very well placed to continue our growth and development.

Thank you for your support and confidence in us. We look forward to serving you this year and to our ongoing work together.

Having concluded my personal reflections on what has been a great year, I would, firstly, like to commend to you the Annual Report and Accounts which is the first Resolution;

Resolution 2: to approve the Directors Remuneration report; this report is included on pages 32-33 of the Annual Report and was also included in the Review of the Year which was sent to members with the notice of this AGM;

(we are not required to seek your approval for this report, however we think it is in the interests of good governance and transparency that members have a say)

I propose that the Remuneration report is approved. Please may I have a seconder.

Resolution 3: To re-appoint BDO LLP as Auditor

An annual requirement for this meeting is for you to consider, and if thought fit, to pass an ordinary resolution to re-appoint our Auditors.

I propose that BDO is reappointed as auditor. Please may I have a seconder.

Resolution 4: To Re-elect the Society's Directors

I propose that Richard Norrington, Rebecca Newman, Paul Johnson, Steve Reid, Elaine Lenc, Fiona Ryder, Sian Hill, Steve Liddell and Peter Elcock are elected as directors.

Please may I have a proposer and a seconder.

For those of you who had not already voted and requested a form earlier please you kindly cast your votes now on papers provided and pass to member of team. These will be collected and added to votes which have been cast online, posted to us or collected in branches.

We now come to our annual award presentation...

I am delighted to present the David Coe award.

The winner of the David Coe award is defined by providing outstanding customer service that exceeds the normal requirements of the job. It is based on nominations from Society employees and can be awarded to head office and branch staff.

It is always a tough decision, and we received some wonderful nominations this year, but after much consideration I am very pleased to announce this year's winner.

This member of staff joined the Society at the beginning of 2014 having applied to be an apprentice in our Facilities team. It was thought that his skills were better aligned elsewhere in the business and he was subsequently offered an apprenticeship in Business Administration and the role of Trainee Mortgage Sales Administrator.

Since then, he has progressed through the mortgage team, achieving CeMap qualifications along the way and he is currently in the role of Technical Mortgage Underwriter, demonstrating the wide knowledge of the mortgages which he has built over the past ten years.

His colleagues have said that his customer service has been second to none, since becoming our Technical Underwriter and that his assistance with the Lending Team has exceeded all expectations.

Away from his own team, he is highly respected and has provided presentations to external organisations as well as providing training internally. He is a key point of contact for all staff with any queries relating to processes and procedures.

His nomination for this award made a point of saying that he is a great asset to the Society and his outstanding customer service and positive attitude is highly appreciated by all his colleagues.

It gives me great pleasure to present this year's David Coe Award to Brandon King.

I will now talk to the questions we have had submitted to us.

We have received 19 questions and comments, in writing, in advance of the meeting. All have received individual replies, and the questions and answers are posted at the back of the room.

A further 10 questions have come through to us in the last day or so, and we will respond to these members individually, but these questions are not displayed tonight.

There are four main themes to the questions that we have received so far.

The first theme relates to new branch locations and whether we will look at closing branches in the future.

In response we have said that we have just opened our tenth branch in Felixstowe as we remain committed to serving our local communities, and we recognise the value that our branches provide and have no current plans to close any of our current branch locations.

With regard to opening new locations, we do need to balance this commitment to the local community with the need to balance our expense base to ensure that we can also continue to provide competitive products for our members. We therefore don't have any current plans to open branches in new locations, but we are actively looking at how we can best serve as much of the local area as possible.

The second theme relates to offering new types of accounts and services. In response we have said that as a Building Society, we are focused on providing savings and mortgage services. We do now offer online savings, and this provides members with the ability to open new online accounts and view their existing savings accounts and mortgage balances online. We do plan to continue to expand the online product range.

Our third theme relates to the composition of our Board and their prior experience. Our Board members have extensive experience across the Financial Services sector. This experience includes positions within both banks and building societies. It is this valuable knowledge and understanding and unique expertise which help the Society navigate an increasingly complex environment and safeguard the long term interests of the Society's members.

Finally, and pleasingly we have received expressions of satisfaction with the Society's progress in recent years. We would like to thank you for your kind feedback, and we remain fully committed to the Society's long term future.

We will also post the questions and answers on our website within a week of the AGM.

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We will now conclude this evening's formalities and I will now read out the results of the voting.

- I declare BDO LLP duly re-appointed as the Society's Auditor.
- I declare that Richard Norrington, Rebecca Newman, Paul Johnson, Steve Reid, Elaine Lenc, Fiona Ryder, Sian Hill, Steve Liddell and Peter Elcock are all re-elected as Directors

The full results will be available on our website within a week of this meeting.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attendance and your attention. I will now formally close the Annual General Meeting and hand over to our Senior Independent Director Fiona Ryder to introduce our guests for this evening, Chris Bales and Gemma Theobald.

Peter Elcock - Chair  
Wednesday 26 March 2025