Annual Town and Parish Newsletter 2025

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March

New Suffolk campaign urges drivers to switch their engines off

A new campaign urging Suffolk's drivers to switch off their engines when parked has launched today (1 March 2024). The campaign against Idling particularly focuses on turning off engines outside schools to protect children's growing lungs from unnecessary pollution.

Pupils and staff at Castle Hill Infant and Junior School support Suffolk Idling Action campaign Idling engines, where a car is stationery with its engine on, cause peaks in harmful pollutants which when breathed in overtime can lead to asthma, heart disease, cancer and stunt children's growing lungs.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of pollution because their height puts them closer to exhaust fumes, they breathe more rapidly than adults and so absorb more pollutants and because their developing organs are more easily damaged.

Children living in highly polluted areas are four times more likely to have reduced lung function in adulthood, improving air quality for children has been shown to halt and reverse this effect.

A study published in January 2024, found that hospital admissions among children were "significantly associated" with exposure to higher levels of air pollution over a two-week period and that only around half of them would have needed hospital care if pollution had been within legal limits.

Research shows that idling engines produce up to twice the amount of exhaust emissions compared to when a vehicle is moving. In a survey carried out in Suffolk at the end of 2022, 35% of respondents said they never switch their engine off when parked or stationery.

Councillor Paul West, Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

The evidence is there, pollution is damaging our health and damaging the environment. Switching our engines off when parked is a simple action we can all take and it's been proven to make a huge difference to air quality, particularly outside schools. This campaign is just one of the actions Suffolk County Council and its partners are taking, through our joint Air Quality Strategy work, to improve air quality in the county for residents and visitors alike.

Suffolk County Council has joined forces with schools across the County along with Babergh and Mid Suffolk, East Suffolk, Ipswich and West Suffolk Councils to deliver the campaign.

For more information visit www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/airquality. To request materials, email: ph.widerdeterminants@suffolk.gov.uk.

Funding boost for new and existing bus services across Suffolk

Suffolk County Council is to spend £3.6 million of Government funding over the next two years on strengthening and expanding Suffolk's bus network.

The council has been awarded £1.8 million per year for two years – a total of £3.6 million – from the Department for Transport's Bus Service Improvement Fund Phase 2 (BSIP 2, renamed from BSIP+) to deliver improvements to public transport in Suffolk.

Suffolk's Enhanced Partnership, which represents the county council and local bus operators, has agreed to allocate the first year's funding in three ways.

First, following an open call for suggestions, £1.2 million will be allocated to support operator- and local community-led proposals for new or enhanced services across the county.

Submissions were reviewed against criteria including value for money, the number of passengers that could benefit, how they integrate with existing services, and their likely long-term financial sustainability after the BSIP 2 funding ends.

Schemes awarded funding include:

- Enhancements of the 84 and 753 services connecting Sudbury to Colchester and Bury St Edmunds
- Enhancements of the 521 service connecting Halesworth, Saxmundham and Aldeburgh
- A re-route of the 14/15 service from Haverhill to Bury St Edmunds to serve West Suffolk Hospital and to increase frequency
- Enhancements to the Buzzabout community transport service serving villages north of Lowestoft
- New services connecting villages between Stowmarket and Mendlesham and surrounding villages
- Development of a new demand-responsive transport service to connect Brett Valley villages with commercial services in Hadleigh and Lavenham
- New services from Bramford to Ipswich and Stowupland to Stowmarket
- Enhancements to the operation of the Beyton/Thurston/Elmswell/Woolpit taxibus

A full list of the successful schemes can be found here.

All schemes are expected to commence operations between April 2024 and September 2024.

Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Skills, Transport Strategy and Waste, said:

"Our focus for allocating Suffolk's BSIP 2 fund was to look at how we could increase long-term patronage and revenues to stabilise the existing bus network, whilst also considering new ideas for services. I am pleased that the successful new schemes will support residents not only in our urban centres but in communities spread across the county.

"We have chosen schemes that test different approaches to delivering public transport in our predominantly rural county, following parish council suggestions for new connections to help communities access services.

"These are schemes that have been deemed likely to be sustainable once the initial funding has ended, but, as with all public transport, these services will require passengers. I would encourage residents to make the best possible use of them to ensure they continue into the future."

A further £450,000 has been allocated to commercial bus operators in order to support and stabilise the existing bus network and maintain essential social and economic transport links for local communities.

The final £150,000 will be used to develop bus priority schemes, creating opportunities for smoother and more convenient bus journeys and making bus travel a more attractive transport option.

It is proposed that funding for the successful schemes will continue into the second year using a similar proportion of that year's allocation.

A decision on how to spend any remaining funding will be informed by further reviews of the existing commercial bus network in collaboration with the operators and continued feedback from partners and communities.

Suffolk to benefit from huge £7.3 million EV investment

Suffolk County Council has secured millions of pounds of funding to help develop electric vehicle (EV) charging across the county.

The county council has been allocated the money after successful bids to the Government's Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund, which supports local authorities to plan and deliver charging infrastructure for residents without off-street parking.

Suffolk residents without off-street parking will benefit from £5.9 million to support EV charging, and a further £1.4 million will be used to develop the county's existing EV charging network in community locations.

Homes without a driveway face challenges when it comes to charging an EV - in some cases it is just not possible, and it is unsafe and hazardous to run cables across pavements. Along with inconvenient access to public charging, these are common reasons that people give for

not choosing an EV. However, the funding will start to provide solutions to some of these issues, with opportunities to develop:

- kerbside charging points
- community charging hubs
- car park charging points
- fast and rapid charging point infrastructure improvements

Suffolk residents are invited to 'nominate' their street for consideration for on-street charging points, using this online form. Although not every road may be suitable, suggestions from residents will help indicate where there is demand for charging points.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

"The recent EV:Ready Report, which the county council commissioned on behalf of all local authorities in Suffolk, suggests a need for 2,000 standard chargers and 40 to 60 rapid charging stations in Suffolk by 2030, to meet the demand of the EV transition.

"The LEVI funding will enable the council to play its part in moving Suffolk closer to those numbers, building on all our EV achievements so far – for example, the county council has been working on the county's EV charging infrastructure since 2018 when we launched the Plug In Suffolk project.

"Supporting Suffolk's residents, businesses and visitors to move to EVs goes beyond just using less petrol and diesel. It's about improving Suffolk's air quality and enabling us to live healthier lives, and reducing the impacts of climate change which have once again been brought into sharp focus by the many storms and flooding events we've seen in recent months."

Technology and Decarbonisation Minister Anthony Browne, said:

"This Government has a plan to help speed up the installation of EV chargepoints, which we're getting on and delivering.

"This dedicated funding to local councils is part of our plan to ensure people can switch from a petrol or diesel car to an EV when they choose to do so."

This investment continues the council's contribution to the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan, which identifies that the decarbonisation of vehicles in Suffolk is a key aspect of meeting the net zero by 2030 target for the county.

Complementing the new funding, is Suffolk County Council's recently published Suffolk Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy. It has been written with the input of all borough and district councils, aiming to improve the EV charging experience for drivers in Suffolk.

Cllr Rout continues:

"The Strategy gives us a clear picture of what Suffolk has achieved already, but importantly shows where we must focus our efforts to further support Suffolk's residents, businesses and visitors.

"We of course promote walking, cycling and using public transport where possible, but for the vehicles that remain on our roads, we want to encourage the transition to EVs. It is an important culture to embrace, as it positively impacts so much from climate change, to our health, to our local tourism economy.

"Both the Strategy and the successful funding bids are an indication of the county council's continuing commitment to encouraging EV use and our drive to net zero by 2030."

Even more potholes filled as Roadmender trial hits Suffolk

The Roadmender has arrived in Suffolk, as the county sees a 34% increase in pothole repairs through extra investment, more resource, and new ways of working.

The county council has been working to repair the increasing number of potholes which have been breaking out following very wet and cold weather recently. One way in which the council is increasing its repair rate is by trialling new methods of fixing potholes.

Suffolk Highways welcomed 'Highway Workforce' with their Roadmender Elastomac solution - a repair method which results in sealed, longer-lasting pothole repairs; which are quicker to carry out. The trial which began on 11 March, is eco-friendly and lowers the carbon footprint of repairs by 80% is effectively supporting Suffolk Highways in its fight against the rising number of potholes on the county's roads.

The 'Roadmender' works on both asphalt and concrete roads and is designed for repairs to all types of road defects and is capable of overlaying areas with multiple defects in a single visit. The process is more efficient, reducing material and waste by 90% and avoiding unnecessary disruption on roads.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for Ipswich, operational highways and flooding, said:

"Potholes are a huge issue currently facing local authorities up and down the country, here in Suffolk is no different.

"The extremely wet weather conditions have meant an increase in the number of potholes breaking out, so we are doing all we can to stay on top of the problem.

"Our efforts have included bringing additional resource in and trialling new machinery and methods which are focussed on fixing more defects, quicker and more sustainably.

"By investing more resource and trying new methods, we have been able to fix 34% more potholes than last year."

April 2024

Highways Report and Statistics

Since Storm Babet in October 2023 (which generally coincided with the commencement of the new highways contract with Milestone) there has been a substantial increase in the number of customer reports received by Suffolk Highways.

Annual data from 2022/23 (40,003 customer reports) and 2023/24 (60,043 customer reports to 23 February) shows there has been an increase of over 20,000 reports so far in 2023/24.

If this continues at the same rate, it is expected that the volume of customer reports could top 65,000 representing a 63% increase on last year.

Between October and February, Suffolk Highway completed in total **10,533 safety defect repairs,** a 45% increase on the last 2 years. **7,328 road defect repairs** have been completed since October.

During the period October to February, the average number of reactive gangs provided is 20.2 per day (excluding Dragon Patcher).

For the same period during 2022/23, the old contract provided an average of 12.6 reactive gangs per day.

May 2024

East of England local authorities collaborate to appeal for more foster families to work with their council

Eleven local authorities across the East of England have joined forces in a bid to collectively recruit more foster carers to look after some of the region's most vulnerable children.

Suffolk is taking part in a new initiative for fostering under the banner Foster East. There is an urgent need for foster carers in the East of England with more than 7,000 vulnerable children already in the care of their local authority, and a further 150 children coming into care every month.

The Foster East initiative which is funded by the Department of Education and launched today Wednesday 29 May 2024, is a new, collaborative approach to foster carer recruitment and support. Councils will work together to provide more comprehensive training, support and best practice. Each applicant will be nurtured through their fostering journey with their local council and via a buddy network. Foster East advisors will help people find out how fostering can become part of their life.

In Suffolk there are more than 900 children and young people ranging from babies to 18-year-olds who need safe, loving and nurturing homes where they can thrive and develop. Every local authority aims to keep children and young people local to their support networks, but a shortage of foster families in our area means this is not always possible.

Fostering is a flexible role with options for short term care from a weekend a month to longer term opportunities, all providing life-changing support for local children.

Councillor Bobby Bennett, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, said:

"Through the Foster East Partnership, we are united in our ambition to provide more loving foster families for children in their local area.

"By fostering with your local council, you are supporting children, teenagers and families from your own communities. This means you are helping to minimise the disruption to their lives: staying local means that children can continue to attend their usual school, see their friends and family members, and participate in their usual activities, whilst having the support they need in a safe home environment.

"We always have opportunities to foster children of any age, including sibling groups, but we currently have a particular need for carers to look after teenagers who are 11+. Welcoming a young teenager into your home means becoming their role model and guide. You will help them navigate their teenage years through to their independence.

"We provide in-depth training and support to ensure our foster parents can care with confidence. Because we know our children and our carers, we can take care to match the right child to the right family, where they can thrive."

Foster carers working for independent fostering agencies are also invited to transfer to their local council via Foster East. They will benefit from local training, and a linked foster carers support network which will offer support for foster families needing a short break.

Foster East will give people considering fostering the opportunity to speak to an advisor from 8am to 8pm daily, and the chance to talk to an experienced foster carer to find out more about what the role involves and ask any questions they may have. More information can be found on the Foster East website.

June 2024

Residents advised - don't do business with cold callers

Suffolk Trading Standards is reminding people to stay alert to the risk of being ripped off by cold callers knocking on their doors.

The warning comes after recent incidents of people approaching householders on the doorstep and touting for business.

Suffolk Trading Standards advises people to only use businesses registered with the Suffolk Trusted Trader scheme.

Trading Standards urged anyone thinking of having home improvement work done to use a business that has been vetted and approved under the Suffolk Trusted Trader scheme.

Residents can also protect themselves and their neighbours by nominating their area to become a No Cold Calling Zone, of which there are now more than 200 across Suffolk.

Graham Crisp, Head of Suffolk Trading Standards said:

"These doorstep traders target the vulnerable and are very persuasive, delivering poor, shoddy work then all too often just disappearing, leaving their victims out of pocket.

"We strongly advise householders and companies to use Trusted Trader, it is a scheme where consumers can be confident in the work that is being done and in the businesses carrying it out.

"No Cold Calling Zones make it clear that residents in that zone will not deal with any trader who knocks on their door out of the blue."

In the last few weeks, Mr Crisp said Trading Standards had been made aware of:

- Kessingland – A trader called at a property offering various home improvement services. The resident was looking to have a conservatory installed which the trader advised that they could do and could provide a quote. The trader returned later in the day and stayed for more than four hours until the resident agreed to have the work carried out and paid a 25% deposit. The consumer has since tried to contact representatives of the company and cannot get any reply.
- Brandon – A consumer contacted a trader who had delivered leaflets in the area to look at a leak in their roof. The trader visited and advised there were two broken tiles which would cost £2,000. Work started the next day and the trader then advised that a new roof was required and quoted £29,900 to remove all roof tiles, felts, batons and repointing and rebuilding chimney, to install new tiles and batons and install a new ridge system. The resident paid £9,000 deposit by cheque. The

trader then advised that new beams and insulation would also be required at a further cost of £800. The trader requested two cheques for £13,000 and £8,000 but asked for the payee details to be left blank. Thankfully, the customer's bank became suspicious and froze the cheques.

- Bury St Edmunds – A doorstep caller persuaded a resident to change their broadband provider after a sales pitch lasting two hours, only leaving after the resident finally caved in just to get rid of them. The resident has now been without a phone and call alarm service for five weeks.
- Hadleigh – A doorstep caller convinced the elderly individual to have foil insulation installed, despite the property being a new-build bungalow. £7,600 was paid. The client's son later learned of the installation and on investigating found only half the loft space had had the insulation added. He also found old insulation had not been removed and was in perfect condition.

Mr Crisp said there had also been reports of traders going door to door in Barking, near Needham Market, offering driveway work, and in Lowestoft offering window and door installations.

Suffolk Trading Standards launched its first No Cold Calling Zone in 2009 in Ipswich. It now has 219 across the county, with 91% of the residents receiving less or no doorstep visits since the introduction of their zone and 94% of residents saying they feel safer.

Anyone wishing to nominate their road should go to the No Cold Calling page on the Suffolk County Council website.

For more details about Suffolk Trusted Trader go to trustedtrader.team Anyone contacted by traders on the doorstep should report them to Trading Standards via 0808 223 1133.

July

Suffolk County Council Backs Youth Justice Plan with a focus on keeping families together

Suffolk County Council has backed the Youth Justice Plan 2024/25 at a meeting of the Full Council on the 11th of July 2024.

The plan has a focus on supporting young people into education, training and employment and reducing the numbers of young people offending, supporting the council's ambition to keep more families together and to keep Suffolk safe.

Each year the Suffolk Youth Justice Management Board produces a Youth Justice Plan for Suffolk. The Board includes representatives from: Suffolk Constabulary; Suffolk Probation Service; NHS Suffolk and North-East Essex and NHS Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Boards, and Suffolk County Council. The Youth Justice Service also consults with staff, children, and volunteers.

With the new plan, the partnership is aiming to support more children that the service works with into education, training, or employment. This year the service is running a pilot project with specialist staff to work with education providers and children to support them to remain at, or return to, school or college. The service also offers children short, accredited courses, which have been proven to have positive outcomes for young people and can encourage young people into further training.

Another key theme of this year's plan is to take a restorative approach to Youth Justice. This is when The Youth Justice service works with victims of youth crime to find out how they think the harm caused to them can best be put right. The service then supports the young person involved to understand how their own behaviours impact on others and to re-engage with their community and society by repairing harm and restoring relationships.

As well as helping to prevent re-offending we know this approach improves outcomes for victims. This year the service is aiming to deliver more restorative approaches including within families where relationships have been fractured by the child's contact with the youth system.

The plan also outlines how the service will be looking in detail into the reasons why some groups of children are more likely to enter into the youth justice system, to inform interventions which aim to reduce the number of young offenders in Suffolk.

Cllr Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services said:

"I am pleased that Suffolk County Council has endorsed the Youth Justice Plan for 2024/25.

"Suffolk's Youth Justice Service takes a child first approach – children are at the heart of all that we do. The service and the partnership can be most effective if they understand the children and young people they work with, as this means we can deliver the interventions they need to stop offending."

"This year we have a strong focus on understanding the reasons why young people offend and supporting more young people to stay in education, training and employment. All of this strengthens our ambition of keeping families together and providing the best outcomes for our young people."

Outcomes will be measured against four national key performance indicators:

- To reduce the numbers of children entering the formal youth justice system for the first time
- To reduce the numbers of children already in the system who reoffend
- To reduce the number of reoffences they commit
- To reduce the use of custody for children.

Councillors recommended to approve an extra £9.1 million for SEND services

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet will discuss a further investment of £9.1 million over three years to expand special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services at its meeting next Wednesday 24 July.

- Funding would pay for new permanent SEND staff to support children and young people
- If approved, this year more than £20 million would have been committed to expanding the service
- Investment to be discussed at Cabinet next week

The additional investment would mean that more than 30 new permanent members of staff could be recruited to help the council keep up with expected need for SEND services and deliver its important improvement plans. It would also pay for contracts to secure more educational psychology capacity – key to helping children and young people access the help they need.

This investment is in addition to the £11.2 million over three years agreed by Cabinet in February 2024, which is being used to grow the SEND team by 15% or around 60 members of staff.

In total, the council is proposing to commit more than £20 million over the next three years to bolster SEND services.

Cllr Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Education and SEND at Suffolk County Council, said:

"At the moment, our staff have significant workloads and are under pressure to deliver our improvement plans.

"This new investment, which I hope my colleagues will be minded to approve, will increase productivity, lead to reductions in staff absences and enable important improvements to the experiences of Suffolk's children and young people, and their families.

"Reforming SEND services is our top priority and this investment, especially given the challenging financial situation we face, shows our commitment."

Of the £9.1 million, £2.6 million will be spent in 2024/25. This investment in permanent staff will recur in subsequent years as they continue to support children and young people with SEND. In 2025/26, £500,000 will be added to the SEND budget and in 2026/27, a further £500,000 will be added – both of which will be recurrent in subsequent years.

This investment follows an Area SEND inspection by Ofsted and CQC in November 2023, which found widespread failings across the Local Area Partnership. As a result of this, the partnership, which delivers SEND services and is made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, published a Priority Action Plan. One of the actions in the plan includes increasing the timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care plans and Annual Reviews. The proposed new staff would, in part, support the delivery of this work.

The Cabinet meeting begins at 2pm on Wednesday July 24. You can read the Cabinet papers here.

New technology comes to the wilds of The Brecks

The Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers (BFER) project, managed by Suffolk County Council, is installing four new Wi-Fi-enabled Info-Points, to help visitors better understand the importance of the unique landscape surrounding them. The installation is possible thanks to funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

A number of remote sites around the area suffer from poor mobile network signal and connectivity, however, the new Info-Points have their own WiFi networks, meaning visitors can download information, images, audio recordings and video.

The Info-Points are located at:

- Ancient House Museum, Thetford
- British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford
- RSPB Lakenheath
- West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village

Councillor Philip Faircloth-Mutton, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Environment, Communities and Equality, said:

"The Brecks covers such a vast area, around 400 square miles containing thousands of species, with nearly 30% of the UK's rarest species found there. There are also over 150 scheduled monuments, and over 1,000 listed buildings.

"So naturally, there will be areas which don't have such great network coverage, but these new Info-Points will give visitors access to find out more about their surroundings, and its history.

"I'm proud that Suffolk County Council has been able to bring together so many local partners to share in protecting and enhancing this landscape, and that we have found a new, technological way to share information about The Brecks."

As well as the four permanently located Info-Points, there is also a portable unit which can be used to complement them.

New All-Age Autism Strategy launched in Suffolk

A joint strategy and action plan has been launched today to help support autistic people of any age and their families.

Produced by Suffolk County Council, Suffolk and North-East Essex and Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Boards, the vision of the new strategy is that all autistic people in Suffolk, their parents, friends and carers are able to live fulfilling and rewarding lives in a county that accepts and understands them.

The strategy and action plan were both co-produced with autistic people, and their families, and includes their experiences and voices. Autistic people can often experience differences in how they process information, their sensory environment and how they interact with other people. While autistic people share some similar characteristics, they are also all different from each other, it was therefore important from the outset that this strategy looked to capture those differences.

Alongside the strategy an action plan was also published which looks to take the priorities outlined by the strategy, and autistic people in Suffolk, and deliver them. The priorities are:

- Improving acceptance, awareness and understanding of autism within society
- Building the right support in the community and supporting people in inpatient care
- Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people with a focus on needs lead by diagnostic pathways
- Improving autistic children and young people's access to education, and supporting positive transitions into adulthood
- Supporting more autistic people into employment Improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems.

Speaking about the new strategy Cllr Beccy Hopfensperger, Cabinet Member for Adult Care said:

"I am pleased that Suffolk will have a strategy that is not only covering the whole lives of autistic people but has also been co-produced with the experiences of autistic people at its heart. I look forward to seeing the progress made with the action plan, and creating a county within which autistic people can truly feel safe and accepted."

Cllr Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Education and SEND said:

"Many people who have autism face barriers in their lives, including within education.

"I am proud that this autism strategy, and action plan, encompasses the whole life journey of a person, which includes our work to improve the outcomes of children and young people with SEND."

Lisa Nobes, Chief Nurse, NHS Suffolk and Northeast Essex Integrated Care Board, said:

"The new strategy and action plan are very much welcomed and represent a significant step forward in delivering on our commitment to helping ensure those living with autism can live happy and fulfilled lives, and that their families and carers receive all the support they need.

"We will continue to work closely with our partners and the county's autistic community to drive this plan forward and make sure that it delivers a real and positive difference to people's lives."

The strategy and action plan are available on the county council's website with hardcopies being sent to libraries across Suffolk.

Major flood investigation report published as Suffolk continues response to Storm Babet

Suffolk County Council has published a detailed report into one of the worst-hit communities during Storm Babet.

A detailed investigation into the flooding which occurred in Framlingham during October 2023 has taken place to understand what caused these events and recommend what could be done to alleviate flooding here in future.

As lead local flood authority, the county council has a duty to investigate significant flooding under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act. These investigations help to establish the source of flooding, factors which may have caused or exacerbated the flooding, the impacts on people, services and infrastructure and any actions which could be taken to increase resilience to future storm events.

The reports include a list of short, medium and longer-term recommendations, which serve as potential actions to improve resilience and reduce the risk of flooding in these communities. The actions have been tailored to a range of parties, including individual homeowners, community groups, landowners and Risk Management Authorities, all of which can contribute to help mitigate local flood risk.

For short term measures, key highlights include the implementation of community flood plans, maximising Property Flood Resilience (PFR) grants, removal of blockages within watercourses and drainage infrastructure, as well as improvements to flood warning systems and the sensitive management of land – some of these measures have already been taken.

For medium to longer term recommendations, there is emphasis on potential improvements to drainage infrastructure and the creation of new natural flood management features, to reduce flood risk within the catchment. These longer-term recommendations would require external funding and collaboration with landowners and communities to implement.

Since the storm, targeted recovery work has been carried out across the county to ensure damaged highway infrastructure is repaired, those whose properties were flooded get help and that investigations can start which will identify how to reduce flood risk. In any usual year, Suffolk County Council carries out around three or four of these flood investigations, however following Babet, approximately 50 have been commissioned.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

"The impact of Storm Babet is still being felt across the county with some people still not back in their homes. Communities such as Framlingham have suffered as a result of this storm and these in-depth investigations will help us work with them and other communities to lower flood risk and build resilience ahead of future flood events.

"We recognised the importance of carrying out these investigations thoroughly following Storm Babet, so invested an extra £1 million of funds to bring in additional specialists – ensuring we could do more for our communities, and quicker!

"I also urge anyone who suffered internal flooding as a result of Storm Babet to apply for the £5k grant to make their homes more resilient to future floods. Applications can be made until April 2025 and anyone interest should make contact with the Council at floodgrants@suffolk.gov.uk."

August

Small improvements needed as children's services' Ofsted report published

Ofsted has published its report into Suffolk County Council's children's services. The report rated the service as 'requires improvement to be good'.

The ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) report conveys a mixed picture across Suffolk. Importantly, inspectors concluded that children's safeguarding is strong and that the experiences and progress of children in care were good. They also reported that 'children in care thrive'.

However, they highlighted weakness in some of the processes and systems in place. These included inconsistences with the way first contact with children and young people is processed, and the quality and support to children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless. It also found inconsistences in the level of understanding that care leavers have about the range of support available to them.

The report outlined seven points for improvement, which have either been implemented already through small amends to systems or processes, or are in progress.

Cllr Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People Services at Suffolk County Council, said:

"It is disappointing that Ofsted didn't find all our services to be consistently good.

"However, what really counts is that the report shows that our children are safe and well-taken care of and - in particular - our children in care are thriving.

"We need to improve some of our processes and systems, and address inconsistencies in the way we do things. These things can be improved with small uncomplicated amends and a plan of action agreed by Ofsted.

"I was delighted to read the extent of praise for staff throughout the report, including the strength of relationships with the children and families we work with, and their sensitivity and compassion. This public recognition is huge testament to their hard work and dedication."

The inspection looked at four areas; the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families; the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection; the experiences and progress of children in care; and the experiences and progress of care leavers. Although the majority of the report is positive, three of these were graded as 'requires improvement to be good'. The experience and progress of children in care was 'good'.

Following publication of the report, an action plan will be sent to Ofsted by the end of September and a partnership board will be set up to oversee improvements. The council will also carry out a quality assurance review of systems and processes.

You can read the report here.

September

Uncertainty looms for 177,000 Suffolk residents currently eligible for winter fuel payments

As many as 177,000 Suffolk residents are currently eligible for winter fuel payments and should be protected from Government plans to cut the allowance, Suffolk County Council has warned.

According to 2023 mid-year population estimates from the ONS, around 177,000 people over the age of 66 in Suffolk are eligible for these crucial payments, leaving them potentially vulnerable if they are withdrawn.

In response, Suffolk County Council's leader, Councillor Matthew Hicks, has written to all of the county's MPs - urging them to vote against the proposed changes. The council is particularly concerned that rural areas, like much of Suffolk, will be disproportionately affected due to reliance on expensive oil heating and the added burden of rural deprivation.

Rural homes are statistically less energy efficient compared to urban homes, meaning they require more energy to maintain a healthy temperature. Furthermore, many rural homes are not connected to mains gas, forcing households to rely on more costly heating sources like wood, canister gas, or oil. The price of heating oil has now risen to 66p per litre, a 12p increase since 2020.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

"The removal of winter fuel payments will have a devastating impact on many of our residents, particularly those living in rural areas. With homes in these locations often being less energy efficient and lacking access to mains gas, they rely on expensive alternatives like oil and wood. This, combined with the rising cost of heating oil, is putting increased financial pressure on households.

"Winter fuel payments provide a lifeline for many, and we urge Suffolk MPs to vote against any changes that would leave our most vulnerable without this crucial support."

Energy projects and the wellbeing of communities

Suffolk County Council has produced guidance to help protect the wellbeing of local communities impacted by large Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).

The new document - Community Engagement and Wellbeing Supplementary Guidance - complements the council's Energy and Climate Adaptive Infrastructure Policy, and is aimed at project promoters, parish councils and local communities.

Research by Suffolk Mind, and the experiences of the county council, show that the wellbeing of local residents and communities suffers when NSIPs are proposed in a local area, especially when multiple projects are on the table.

Feelings of fear, mistrust, anger, and frustration are all reported, along with impacted sleep, and inability to plan for the future, due to the uncertainty created by the proposed development.

The new guidance stresses the importance and value for project promoters of an NSIP to collaborate with local communities from the early proposal stages, through to life after construction, to protect the wellbeing of those local communities.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

"So often we see project promoters doing the bare statutory minimum to engage with local communities, through a few local events and consultations.

"This is never enough, and in fact doesn't do the promoter any favours in the long run. I believe they could often do a far better job working with local residents, parish councils and community leaders, throughout the process but particularly following approval if a project is given the go ahead by government.

"An NSIP can cause stress, insecurity and anxiety amongst communities, particular for local community leaders who bear a burden of responsibility, often with little experience of the technicalities and enormity of such complex planning applications.

"A promoter simply informing communities is one thing, but there is a real opportunity to empower them – but promoters need to show a commitment to healthy, continuous engagement, and help local communities to understand their project, feel listened to and feel included in its progress.

"This new guidance won't stop us standing up to project promoters, fighting for a fair deal for Suffolk and, where necessary, objecting to a scheme. However, if promoters listen to our recommendations it should markedly improve the experience, and wellbeing, of local communities whether a scheme is approved or refused."

The cumulative effect of NSIPs has resulted in considerable impacts on the wellbeing of individuals, the overall wellbeing of the community, and has also led to feelings of lost identity.

One member of the public described how the association with the energy projects has "created a perception that the nature of our village and parish… has been completely altered, and is now one to be defined by the presence of large industrial complexes, rather than what it actually is, a rural community... it remains a small rural village, with living breathing people, who strive to protect its unique quality."

The document provides a framework for promoters to follow, to help them understand their project's impact on the wellbeing of local communities, and what they can actively do to mitigate it.

£500 million investment in Suffolk scrapped by Government

Suffolk's proposed in principle devolution deal, which would bring more than £500 million to the county over 30 years, has been scrapped by the Government.

The additional funding – which would come with new local decision-making powers over areas including housing, transport, adult education and regeneration – is no longer being offered to Suffolk. The deal would mean local people who know and love Suffolk would be empowered to make more decisions about the county's future, rather than people in Whitehall.

Key aspects of the deal included:

- Control of a new investment fund worth £480m over the next thirty years
- Local control of the Adult Education Budget each year (worth £9.4m in 2025/26)
- £5.8m one-off funding to prepare brownfield sites for development
- Multi-year transport funding plus an additional £500,000 over two years to finalise Suffolk's Local Transport Plan
- The leader of Suffolk County Council would be directly elected by the people of Suffolk – rather than by county councillors.

Most people who responded to an independent survey, run by Ipsos, were in favour of the proposed deal. 63% of people supported or strongly supported it while 7% disagreed. 21% of people were unsure. In a separate but linked poll run by Suffolk County Council, 49% of people who responded supported or strongly supported the deal, whilst 40% did not and 11% were unsure.

Suffolk County Councillors were expected to vote on the deal after the General Election in July.

Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

"This feels like a real slap in the face for Suffolk from a Government that won't listen to what local people are saying. First, they waved through the Sunnica application, showing little regard for the communities affected. Then, they scrapped the winter fuel payments, which will adversely affect older people living in rural areas. Now, our proposed devolution deal – which has widespread public support – is in the bin.

"Governments of any colour should be pro devolution because councils know how best to serve local people. Local councillors have now been stripped of the opportunity to support or reject the proposed deal which is a sad day for democracy by any measure."

Plans unveiled for A12 Major Road Network improvements in East Suffolk

Suffolk County Council has unveiled its proposals for improvements to the A12 in East Suffolk, between the A14 Seven Hills junction and A1152 Woods Lane in Melton.

The A12 is a key route in East Suffolk, linking Ipswich and Lowestoft and provides an important connection for local communities and visitors, as well as access to the Energy Coast.

The scheme is designed to upgrade key junctions on the A12, between the A14 at Seven Hills and the A1152 at Woods Lane. These proposals would help to tackle congestion, provide space for future growth and improve conditions for all road users including pedestrians and cyclists.

The scheme introduces a new dual carriageway at Seckford Hall between the B1438 and B1079. It also enhances bus journeys and improves local walking and cycling connections, including a widened overbridge at Martlesham Heath.

Councillor Chris Chambers, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for transport strategy, planning and waste, said:

"I am delighted to see this important project progressing closer to delivery. The county council is firmly committed to delivering on these improvements, which look set to provide major benefits to all those travelling between our two largest towns, Ipswich and Lowestoft.

"Following public consultation back in 2021 and a commitment of government funding last year, we are now in a position to share our detailed designs and proposals with residents.

"These improvements will provide greater access to the east coast, an area with several Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) including Sizewell C, easing congestion and network disruption during its construction. I encourage residents to take a look at the plans, read up on the benefits and let us know their thoughts."

October 2024

Suffolk County Council set on major investment to further protect Suffolk from flooding as it calls on Government to 'step up'

Suffolk County Council has announced its intention to invest another £1.5 million to carry out important flooding prevention work.

- Council set to agree £1.5 million to deliver first phase of works identified in initial flood investigation reports
- Authority calls on Government to recognise ongoing impact of Storm Babet and fund £20 million of further prevention work urgently needed
- Extensive work already completed since Storm Babet including more than 111,000 drains cleared and significant road repairs.

The commitment comes as initial flood investigation reports have identified that a further £20 million is needed to complete the work – a figure that the county council can't afford. The council has therefore written to the Flooding Minister, Emma Hardy MP, and demanded the government step up and plug the funding gap.

- Read the council's letter to DEFRA

Examples of the kind of projects that could be delivered include:

1. Creating flood water retention ponds in land above villages and green spaces within communities to capture water and slow the flow into residential areas.
2. Installing flood doors and non-return valves on drains to stop water entering properties that are particularly at risk of flooding.
3. Help landowners with advice and guidance, especially those within responsibilities to maintain ditches and streams on their properties (known as 'riparian ownership').
4. Bolstering Suffolk Highways' resources to deliver planned and reactive maintenance on the county's roads and footpaths.

Councillor Paul West, Cabinet Member for Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

"Since Storm Babet, our teams have been working hard to repair the damage it caused, investigate what happened and to help reduce the flood risk in future. This preventative work is complex, costly and requires lots of agencies work together.

"Despite limited resources and budgetary challenges facing all county councils, we have managed to find extra money to tackle flooding and propose investing a further £1.5 million to deliver work identified in our investigations. However, this isn't enough and - so steep is the challenge facing areas like Suffolk, who were hit hard by Storm Babet - the government must act and provide extra funding. This is why we've written to the Flooding Minister asking for additional money. The

government needs to step up to the plate and help us ensure Suffolk's residents don't face uncertainty when these extreme weather events occur.

"I saw firsthand how devastating the impact of Storm Babet was for many families and businesses across Suffolk. The finished flood investigation reports give us a clear understanding of what work needs to be done and at what cost. It is right that we continue to increase our resources appropriately, but unless the government acts too we will not be able to go as far as our residents deserve."

Storm Babet struck between October 18 and 21 last year and caused substantial flooding and disruption across Suffolk. A month's worth of rain fell in 24 hours, flooding more than 900 homes and businesses. The impact of the storm was exceptional and demanded an urgent multiagency response.

So far, Suffolk County Council has committed more than £13.75 million for work to aid recovery from Storm Babet. Suffolk County Council has made several achievements as part of our continued commitment to reduce flood risk.

The council has already committed £12.25 million, including:

- £1 million on bringing in additional flood investigation specialists
- £1.25 million for repairs to Suffolk's highways following the flood damage
- £10 million funding, which was committed in 2021, to address long-standing drainage issues over three years. This complements £2 million a year invested in drainage repairs and improvements funded from the Department for Transport maintenance grant.

The council has completed seven location-based flood investigations, with an estimated 50 to complete. This compares to an average of three or four investigations in an average year. These reports provide a detailed account of events for each flooding location and recommendations for other organisations, landowners, businesses and residents.

Carried out extensive works on Suffolk's highways. Specifically:

- Cleared 96% of highway drainage gullies across Suffolk, more than 111,000. This involves lifting the iron grates and sucking up the debris that has washed off the roads
- Attended more than 3,500 emergency call outs for flooding related incidents – an unprecedented number. This includes pumping an estimated 2.5million litres of water from the roads, removing 53 tonnes of debris and clearing 121 fallen trees
- Rolled out the DEFRA-funded Recovery Scheme which meant that flooded property owners could apply for up to £5,000 to make their homes and businesses more resilient to future flooding. Suffolk County Council is administering the scheme on behalf of government. Applications are open until April 2025.

The new money is set to be agreed by the council's Cabinet on 5 November.

November 2024

Suffolk Launches Good Health at Work Programme

Suffolk County Council has officially launched the Good Health at Work Programme, a new initiative aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of the working-age population across Suffolk.

Running initially for 18 months, the programme will provide essential support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), focusing on businesses whose employees are at the highest risk of health inequalities, such as those on low incomes or with long-term health conditions. The programme will be delivered by Get Set UK, a leading people services provider.

SMEs in Suffolk are encouraged to get involved and take advantage of the range of resources now available. Key elements of the programme include:

An Online Resource Hub – This hub offers employers access to practical tools, advice, and evidence-based strategies to create healthier workplaces based on good work principles like fair pay, job security, and opportunities for growth.

An Ambassador Network – Businesses can join a community of employers committed to promoting good work practices, with opportunities to collaborate and improve their workplace using a self-assessment framework to review their workforce wellbeing practices against a set of six standards. Participants can achieve tiered recognition, starting with a bronze award upon completing the first standard and progressing to silver and gold as they advance.

A Navigator Service – Providing one-on-one support, the Navigator Service helps SMEs assess their challenges and strengths, offering tailored advice and guidance to enhance their workplace and improve employee well-being.

Councillor Steve Wiles, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Protection, said:

Healthy employees mean a healthier business. The Good Health at Work programme has been developed to help Suffolk SMEs thrive in today's challenging environment. This new support service offers practical support and advice through free online resources and one-to-one personal business health checks. It's a complete service for any small or medium sized business in Suffolk, looking to become a healthier, happier workplace.

Businesses can explore the available resources and learn more about the Good Health at Work Programme by visiting www.goodhealthatwork.co.uk

Stronger Families Partnership keeps children out of care for the equivalent of 1,000 years

The Stronger Families Partnership which delivers innovative family therapy has as of 30th September supported 584 children at risk of being taken into care, or who have returned to their families from care, to remain safely with their families.

The Partnership – made up of Bridges Outcomes Partnerships, Norfolk County Council, Suffolk County Council, and Family Psychology Mutual – has cumulatively saved the equivalent of 1,000 years of days in care.

With over 105,000 children in care across the UK, and about one child in care in every 140 in England, too many children are being separated from their family. Research suggests that looked-after children tend to experience significantly poorer life outcomes than other children, affecting areas including mental and physical health, education and socioeconomic circumstance.

As well as limiting life chances, the growing population of children in care is putting local authority resources under increasing pressure; nationally all 151 councils with children's services responsibility overspent on their budgets following growing demand to remove children to care.

Since 2019, 584 families have completed Stronger Families' evidence-based clinical interventions, Functional Family Therapy (FFT) and FFT Child Welfare (FFT CW), remaining out of care for over 365,000 cumulative days as of 30th September 2024.

Stronger Families' approach enables families to address challenging patterns of behaviour and communication in order to build their capacity for sustainable, positive change. The delivery works to prevent family breakdown and give families the tools to cope, so that children can remain safely with their families and experience reduced involvement with children's services.

The programme's tracking process monitors number of care days saved alongside other measurable impacts that go beyond at-risk children to benefit whole families: the 365,000-day milestone saw 93% of children not entering/re-entering care during the tracking period, and a majority reporting improved family functioning.

Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils have taken bold steps to support this innovative and collaborative outcomes-based approach, which champions a more flexible, tailored, data-driven delivery model, and better value for money.

Keeping these families together is directly linked to cost reductions for the local authorities in both care costs avoided (where children are on a trajectory to care) and immediate cost savings (where children have been reunified with their families). During the initial 18-month tracking period, the delivery saves between £39,000 and £88,000 per family that successfully completes the intervention, in relation to the estimated cost of supporting a

child in care – amounting to a total net savings to date of at least £29.4m. When compared to pay-for-inputs approaches, outcomes-based family therapy delivers an average 25% better outcomes for 80% more families at 20%-50% lower cost per family, keeping more children safely out of care.

Of the service, one young person reflected: “The therapist helped us understand each other. Thank you so much for your help, I appreciate it millions. [I] don't know what we'd [have] done without you.”

Robbie Smyth, Director at Stronger Families said:

“We are absolutely delighted to have kept young people we supported out of care for an enormous one thousand years’ worth of days since 2019, strengthening the relationships of so many young people and families.

"The milestone goes to show just how effective outcomes partnership can be – not only in supporting individuals and families to create long-term, positive change, but in providing a clear partnership blueprint for the entire system to support families in personalised, sensitive, and effective ways. Thanks to our partners Family Psychology Mutual, Family Functional Therapy LLC and to Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, for embracing innovation.”

Cllr Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People’s Services at Suffolk County Council, said:

“Families tell us that the work the Stronger Families Partnership is doing alongside wider children’s services in Suffolk, provides help that really, really matters.

“Working with families that are facing a wide range of pressures and that have the potential to result in family breakdown and young people potentially needing to become Looked After, the partnership is supporting more families to safely stay together.

"It’s an achievement that Suffolk County Council is proud to be a part of.”

For more information on the Stronger Families Partnership, visit Stronger Families | Bridges Outcomes Partnerships

Council welcomes news that the Nautilus Interconnector project will not be coming to Suffolk

Suffolk County Council has welcomed the news that a major energy infrastructure project will no longer impact the Suffolk coast but has asked for urgent clarity on whether another project will simply take its place.

In July, a consultation was announced by the energy regulator Ofgem for the Nautilus interconnector. The overall project would involve a new subsea cable allowing electricity to flow between the UK and Belgium. The plans would see the project make landfall between

Sizewell and Thorpeness, with cables running to Friston, where the interconnector would be sited, connecting to the Grid at an as-yet unbuilt substation.

It has been announced today by Ofgem that, following the consultation, the Nautilus interconnector, proposed by National Grid Ventures, will now come ashore at the Isle of Grain in Kent. This connection point had been preferred by Suffolk County Council for a long time and had the strong support of Suffolk's coastal communities.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

"As a council, we have long argued that that this project should connect at the Isle of Grain. While it's good news for communities in East Suffolk that Nautilus will now connect elsewhere, like us they will want urgent clarity that another project won't take its connection here in Suffolk. Suffolk was yet again bracing itself for the impact of another large energy project so there is some relief following this announcement. The council has always supported the need for the country to ensure energy security, but we're now seeing layer upon layer of uncoordinated energy projects impacting Suffolk, irreversibly damaging communities, their heritage, and environment. The risk of the government's headlong dash to decarbonise the grid by 2030 is that another project will simply take the place of Nautilus and there will be no respite for our coastal communities."

The council will carefully consider the regulator's Nautilus decision, particularly in light of the Sea Link project, which is currently being developed by National Grid Electricity Transmission.

Suffolk celebrates as local organisations are awarded the King's Award for Voluntary Service

It has been announced that five voluntary organisations in Suffolk have been awarded the King's Award for Voluntary Service.

Created in 2002 to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee and previously known as The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (QAVS), the Award has been shining a light on the fantastic work of voluntary groups from all across the UK for many years.

Equivalent to an MBE, KAVS is the highest Award given to local voluntary groups in the UK, and they are awarded for life.

The local organisations are:

- **Ipswich Outreach**
  Supporting the homeless people of Ipswich to improve their health, wellbeing and life opportunities.

- **Let's Talk Reading**
  Working to improve literacy of children and adults in Ipswich.
  Website:
- **Still Good Food**
  Rescuing surplus food, reducing waste and redistributing it to benefit the community.
- **Tattingstone Good Neighbour Scheme**
  Providing vital support, promoting social interaction and community integration in Tattingstone.
- **The Caribbean and African Community Health Support Forum**
  Promoting a community legacy of health and wellbeing in Suffolk.

Speaking after the announcement **The Lord-Lieutenant of Suffolk, Lady Clare, Countess of Euston, said:**

"I send my heartfelt congratulations to all the organisations that have been awarded a King's Award for Voluntary Service this year. The work they do within our communities is absolutely vital and it is wonderful to see them formally recognised in this way."

Suffolk's new gritting fleet to keep county safe and moving during the colder weather

With temperatures forecast to drop, Suffolk's new gritting fleet will commence its winter season shortly, treating thousands of miles of roads to help minimise risk for highways users.

During the warmer autumn months, highway teams have been carefully planning for the winter gritting operations, preparing for the potential snow and ice that winter will bring. In total, there are 36 gritters ready for action, with two additional spare vehicles available to be deployed to any location, if needed.

Earlier this year, at the Suffolk Show, a competition was held to name the new gritters, and more information about the winning names, including Morgan Freezeman and Kieran McSpreader, can be found here.

The new fleet is equipped with advanced digital systems and the latest route planning software to support winter maintenance drivers and enable them to grit their routes efficiently and effectively.

All gritters in the fleet use hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO), which reduces carbon dioxide emissions by around 90%, supporting Suffolk County Council's continued commitment to protect and enhance our environment.

During the last winter season, Suffolk used around 7,822 tonnes of salt to treat a total distance of 198,594km/123,400 miles – which equates to travelling the circumference of

Earth five times! Suffolk Highways currently has a stock of around 21,000 tonnes of salt across the county for the season ahead and is well prepared for any drop in temperature. Our highway teams are responsible for gritting 36 Priority 1 (P1) routes, which amounts to around 1,259 miles, including all A and B roads, roads to fire stations, hospitals, main bus routes and rail stations.

There are also 34 Priority 2 (P2) routes, which amounts to around 843 miles of the network. This includes other bus routes where the service level is 5 days a week in the school term, roads leading to rural villages and access to schools.

P1 treatments are considered when road surface temperatures are forecast to drop below 1°C, whilst P2 routes are carried out when the forecast predicts there to be a longer period of cold weather conditions.

Further details of which roads are gritted can be found on one.network, by selecting the 3 lines on the search box, then data layers, driver information then winter gritting routes.
All gritting decisions are based on forecast road surface temperatures, not air temperature, as the road surface temperature is often cooler and reflects the true risk to highway users. The timing and amount of salt we use considers factors such as traffic levels, wind and rain.

During the lead up to the winter season, our teams also dedicate their time to refilling grit bins across the county at registered locations, such as the bottom of hills, or on junctions of minor roads. To date, we have filled over 50% of the total grit bins and will conclude the remaining refills over the next few weeks ahead of the commencement of the core winter season.

Suffolk Highways fills grit bins that are approved and owned by parish and town councils, however, to ensure that the contents of grit bins are used to make roads safer, communities are encouraged to monitor how and where the grit is used and request grit refills via the reporting tool. Suffolk Highways do not fill private grit bins.
Suffolk's residents are requested to support us, as well as emergency services throughout the year, by parking considerately and leaving enough room so that our vehicles can grit the road – if we can't fit, we can't grit!

Drivers are reminded to always drive to the conditions; although the gritting teams have treated the roads, this doesn't mean they are completely risk-free.

Those wishing to know when and where we are gritting over the coming months, should follow Suffolk Highways' X (formerly known as Twitter) and Facebook, to keep updated of our teams' movements this winter season. Safety messages will also be issued during spells of cold and wet weather.

More information on gritting can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/highway-maintenance/check-which-roads-are-gritted.

Royal opening for the Gull Wing bridge

Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal has officially opened the Gull Wing Bridge in Lowestoft.

Crowds lined the bridge as Her Royal Highness unveiled a commemorative plaque formally opening the iconic structure.

The new bridge opened publicly to pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles in September, and is already bringing huge benefits through reduced congestion and improved mobility around the town, according to businesses and residents.

On arrival at the offices of Suffolk County Council at Riverside, Her Royal Highness met the High Sheriff of Suffolk, Mrs Yvonne Gilchrist Mason OBE, Councillor Anthony Speca, the chair of East Suffolk Council, Mayor of Lowestoft Councillor Nasima Begum, MP for Lowestoft Jess Asato, and Councillor Liz Harsant, the chair of Suffolk County Council.

The Princess was introduced to people and teams that worked on the bridge project, including with the planning, design and construction.
During a tour of the bridge itself, The Princess Royal saw the bascule wings up close before going into the control tower. Here, Her Royal Highness pressed a button raising the bridge and allowing through The Excelsior, a traditional Lowestoft fishing smack.

The Princess is Patron of the Excelsior Trust, which restored and operates the boat.
Back on the bridge, The Princess was invited by Councillor Harsant to unveil a commemorative plaque recording her visit and officially opening the bridge.

The Princess then met Jack Baldry, aged 16, Hayden Nicholls and Eva Ainslie, both 15, the Lowestoft young people who coined the name ‘Gull Wing’ in a competition for local schools. They were Year 6 pupils at Somerleyton Primary School and took the inspiration for the name from the shape of the bascule span's beams and their resemblance to the wings of a gull.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, the leader of Suffolk County Council, said:
“It was a great honour for Suffolk to welcome Her Royal Highness to Lowestoft to open this landmark bridge.

“It is a wonderful piece of engineering that is already bringing significant benefits to the town and will do so for decades to come, so it was only fitting it should receive a Royal visit to formally mark its opening.”

Minister for the Future of Roads, Lilian Greenwood said:
“I know the importance of the Gull Wing Bridge to the people of East Suffolk. It will be transformational for local people and businesses.

"Our £73 million investment in this iconic structure will improve journey times through the town, and better connect communities to spread growth as we embark on our decade of national renewal."

The bridge was built on behalf of Suffolk County Council by leading civil engineering contractor Farrans and provides a long-awaited third crossing over Lake Lothing.

It significantly eases traffic congestion in the town centre, shortening journey times, and improving journey reliability, and helping to attract new investment to Lowestoft.

New study considers impacts of nuclear and major infrastructure projects

A new study published considers the impact of the construction of the nuclear power station, Hinkley Point C.

The building of Hinkley Point C began in March 2017, with work currently nearing peak construction. EDF Energy estimates the first unit being operational "near the end of the decade".

The Hinkley Point C Peak Construction: Impacts Monitoring and Auditing Study (2023-24) was commissioned by the New Nuclear Local Authorities Group (NNLAG), a collection of 10 councils across the UK, whose areas already host or are likely to host nuclear new build projects.

It aims to help local authorities understand how construction of a nuclear power station can affect their area.

The document will be a useful reference point for project promoters, their teams, the government, and local authorities, be it for nuclear or other infrastructure projects, to better plan for and implement their projects in a way that maximises benefits and minimises negative impacts, to the advantage of all involved.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council, Chair of the New Nuclear Local Authorities Group, said:

"Learning from Hinkley Point C provides vital information for new nuclear sites that follow on – be it large scale, small modular or nuclear fusion projects.

"Many of the findings are also applicable to other major infrastructure projects, including all Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).

"There is not much research available about the implementation of NSIPs, so this study will further inform and shape the debate of what good execution and monitoring of NSIPs should look like. This applies to the government's national NSIP reform or any individual project being developed in the country."

Led by renowned Professor John Glasson at Oxford Brookes University, this is the second study of its kind commissioned by NNLAG, following Oxford Brookes University's initial study of early years construction of Hinkley Point C in 2018/19.

The latest study assesses the actual socio-economic and biophysical impacts at peak construction (as measured by the size of the workforce) and to compare those with predictions. It also seeks to explain any differences, how they can be managed and provide recommendations for future planning and assessment processes.

Cllr Rout continues: "Our thanks go to Professor Glasson and the Oxford Brookes University team, as the study is helping us all to learn lessons, to reduce community impacts and increase benefits in our local communities.

"It is already showing its value in real terms. For example, in Suffolk there are many similarities with Hinkley Point C and Sizewell C, which has recently begun construction on our doorstep and has the potential to bring numerous benefits to the county.

"As a result of the report, we are watching - with some concern - the increase in workforce numbers at Hinkley Point C. We will be looking for reassurances and strong monitoring mechanisms to ensure that, should an increase of the maximum workforce at Sizewell become likely, additional mitigation is in place before this occurs."

The report recognises the difficulty in predicting all impacts of a large infrastructure project, and therefore calls for an adaptive approach. It provides a number of recommendations of good practice for such projects, including:

- An independent body preferably provides the auditing of the monitoring information against predictions
- All monitoring and auditing information should be publicly available, and 'published' on a regular basis
- Monitoring and auditing reports provide a vital resource for future major project developments in all their various sectors; there should be a repository for such reports
- Rigorous monitoring and auditing can be resource intensive, therefore a light and proportionate approach using publicly available data and focusing on significant impacts can provide a useful way forward, with developer and local authority co-operation.

New Deputy Chief Fire Office for Suffolk is appointed

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has appointed Henry Griffin as its new Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

Henry is currently Area Manager for People & Resources at SFRS, with which he has served for 20 years, and will take up his position in the New Year.

He has led initiatives such as introducing electric vehicles to the fire service fleet, implementing cultural improvement programmes, and managing major incident responses including for the summer fires of 2022.

His expertise includes strategic planning, workforce planning, and operational training. Henry, who is married with three children, succeeds Deputy Chief Fire Officer Dan Fearn, who has retired.

He said:

"I am delighted to be appointed to this role. I am a native of Suffolk and proud to have served with SFRS all my career.

"I began as a firefighter at Newmarket Fire Station and to now be made Deputy Chief Fire Officer is a real honour for me. I would like to thank Dan Fearn for the service he has given to Suffolk and wish him well in his retirement.

"I look forward to continuing to serve our staff, this county, and its community in a fire service of which I and all my colleagues are proud to belong to."

Henry was chosen following a selection process of seven sections, culminating in an interview with members of Suffolk County Council.

Chief Fire Officer Jon Lacey said:

"Henry was appointed following a rigorous interview process of an incredibly strong field of candidates, it is no exaggeration to say that competition for this role was intense.

"I am delighted for him personally and I look forward to working with him in his new role, in which I have no doubt he will excel."

Councillor Steve Wiles, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Public Protection, said:

"I congratulate Henry on his appointment, the quality of the candidates was extremely high. I have no doubt that he will continue to serve Suffolk well in his new role."

December 2024

Suffolk's rural communities hit by loss of £3 million in Government funding

£3 million of vital public funding - designed to support rural communities in Suffolk - will be cut by the government next year, it has been revealed.

The funding, known as the Rural Services Grant (RSG), was introduced in 2016/17 to support councils who serve rural communities and sparsely populated areas where it costs significant amounts of money to deliver public services. Suffolk County Council will, from April 2024, no longer receive the grant. The government announced last week that the funding will be redirected elsewhere – adversely impacting rural areas like Suffolk.

Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills, said:

"It is deeply disappointing that the government has once again made a decision that disproportionately harms rural areas.

"Delivering essential services, like bus services, social care and road maintenance, is inherently more expensive in county areas like Suffolk due to our sparse population. The decision to scrap this grant compounds the challenges we are facing already with the rising costs of services like adult and children's care and home-to-school transport.

"Yet the government continues to overlook these realities, prioritising urban areas instead.

"It is becoming clear that any additional funding promised to support local authorities is to be undermined by cuts and additional costs elsewhere. This is a troubling pattern where supposed solutions offer no real relief and councils are faced with great financial uncertainty.

"I am concerned that the government's response to rising local government costs is to shift the burden onto residents, forcing councils to impose steep Council Tax increases to balance the books. This approach is both unsustainable and unfair to those in rural communities."

Nationally, the Rural Services Grant is worth £110 million a year to rural communities. Other counties, including Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire and Northumberland have also spoken out about the removal of the rural grant.

Cabinet approves bold new vision for Suffolk's future

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet has approved ambitious new plans to position Suffolk as a national leader in sustainable growth and innovation.

Suffolk's Economic Strategy, also known as a Local Growth Plan, has been developed by the Suffolk Business Board in collaboration with businesses, partners and stakeholders across the county.

It seeks to harness Suffolk's unique strengths, including its thriving renewable energy sector and innovative, collaborative business environment, to transform the region into a hub for clean technology, long-term economic prosperity and competitiveness.

By 2045, the strategy sets out to achieve:

- An additional £14billion contribution to the economy, surpassing the average growth rate in England
- 45,000 more people qualified to Level 3 or higher
- 35,000 more people participating in the workforce
- A significant increase in average wages across the region.

At its core is EPIC Suffolk, a framework to guide investments and funding priorities built on four key pillars: **E**conomic wellbeing**, P**roductivity**, I**nclusivity**,** and **C**lean growth.

Mark Pendlington, Chair of the Suffolk Business Board, said:

"This strategy is all about boosting opportunity and growth as we plan a massive collaborative effort to secure a prosperous and sustainable economic future for Suffolk.

"It reflects the views of many hundreds of leaders from across business, local authorities, education, health and the voluntary sector, all of whom have shared their ideas and expertise, and have been very clear about the challenges and opportunities we face.

"We all recognise Suffolk's role as a key driver of the UK economy and are determined to promote Suffolk as one of the best places in the country to live, work, learn and invest."

The strategy identifies several key areas for economic growth:

- **High Growth sectors:** Suffolk is already a national leader in clean energy, with offshore wind and nuclear projects at the forefront. The county's agri-food and drink sector is set to grow through sustainable practices and agri-tech innovation, while the county's ports and logistics sector is a critical gateway for UK trade.
- **Emerging and Value Growth sectors:** Suffolk's technology sector also shows strong potential for growth, in areas such as ICT, digital creative industries, life sciences and financial services. Elsewhere, there are opportunities to further improve productivity and job quality in advanced manufacturing, construction, health and social care, and the visitor economy.

- **Tech Convergence:** Suffolk has the potential to become a leader in Tech Convergence, where technologies such as digital, AI, clean tech, robotics and satellite applications intersect and integrate with existing industries, creating an environment ripe for innovation and growth.

To support Suffolk's continued growth, the strategy places a strong emphasis on workforce development and infrastructure. Investments in skills, housing, digital connectivity, and road and rail networks will be critical to meeting the demands of a growing economy and ensuring that the region remains competitive in the global marketplace.

The strategy is underpinned by a comprehensive investment plan which aims to attract £4 of private investment for every £1 of government economic funding, including a multimillion-pound pipeline of projects to boost productivity, create jobs and attract new companies to Suffolk.

Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills, said:

"This new strategy represents a bold vision for Suffolk's future – a county in which, by proving its competitiveness and levels of productivity, we can all be proud.

"For residents, it means better jobs, improved infrastructure and greater access to skills training, creating opportunities for everyone. For businesses, it fosters a dynamic environment driven by innovation, sustainability and cutting-edge technologies like AI and clean technology.

"Together, these efforts ensure Suffolk isn't just a leader in growth but an exceptional place to live, work, learn and invest."

The Suffolk Business Board was mobilised in May 2024, following the government guidance that the work of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership should be brought to a close. The Business Board comprises 17 members representing business, education, voluntary sector and local government and is responsible for the economic strategy for Suffolk and steering of former LEP-led functions.

The Economic Strategy will be discussed at the meeting of Suffolk County Council's Cabinet on Tuesday 3 December 2024. Papers for the meeting can be viewed at https://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk

Council calls on government to prevent scrapping of influential department

The CAA is intending to close down its Airfield Advisory Team.

Through its work on major infrastructure projects, officers at Suffolk County Council have learned that the team will not be available to provide advice to planning officers or planning inspectors after March 2025.

Suffolk County Council has written to Mike Kane MP, Minister of State for Aviation, to review the proposal.

The Airfield Advisory Team has been instrumental in helping to shape improvements to infrastructure projects and informing planning across Suffolk. This includes the proposed Norwich to Tilbury pylon project, as part of National Grid's 'Great Grid Upgrade' and other proposed energy projects such as solar farms and wind turbines.

Without this team, it is anticipated that there will be no robust and effective advice to support the design and delivery of new infrastructure projects, and that this will compromise scrutiny of their design and delivery.

The impact of obstructions such as where pylons are placed or the glare from solar farms may also limit the commercial, strategic, and recreational operation of airfields across Suffolk and the rest of the country.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

"The effective and technical advice that we have received from the Airfield Advisory Team has been essential to a number of projects that we respond to, on behalf of Suffolk's communities.

"As an example, they have directly helped with making improvements to the Norwich to Tilbury pylon project, to lessen the impact on Suffolk residents and businesses.

"Without such expertise, considerable projects such as pylon runs or solar farms could end up being put in ill-informed locations, risking the viability of existing airfields, and the safety of those that use them and who live and work nearby.

"As such, we have written to the Minister for Aviation, asking that he work with the CAA to reconsider the scrapping the Airfield Advisory Team."

In July 2024, Suffolk County Council raised its concerns about the proposed Norwich to Tilbury pylon project when it formally objected to plans, published at the time.

Amongst a number of fears, it cited that there would be "serious implications on nine airfields" with pylons close to runways which, in some cases, could possibly stop flying all together.

Suffolk County Council's letter to Mike Kane MP, Minister of State for Aviation, can be read on suffolk.gov.uk

Suffolk and East of England councils seek fairness in the face of energy projects

Suffolk County Council is joining with other local authorities in the region to challenge National Grid and the government on energy projects, demanding fairness for their communities and environment.

The county councils from Suffolk, Essex, Norfolk and Lincolnshire all face similar challenges with Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) being planned for their counties.

These are typically related to energy projects, including solar farms, wind turbines, pylons and the infrastructure associated offshore wind farms, such as substations and cabling.

Two of Suffolk County Council's main concerns, shared with the other counties, are:

- The uncoordinated approach to NSIPs - this is creating significant challenges for Suffolk's rural communities under the current planning policy as applied by the planning inspectorate and Secretary of State

- The government's 2030 target for decarbonising the electricity grid – this is too hasty, making it impossible to deliver alternative solutions to pylon projects like Norwich to Tilbury

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

"Along with colleagues from neighbouring county councils, we are asking government and National Grid for fairness to our communities.

"Unbelievably, many energy projects are simply not being coordinated, even those proposed by the same umbrella organisation. This means upheaval for local communities, unnecessary infrastructure, construction and disruption – all of which is preventable, if only there was some organisation.

"Successful motions at our full council meeting last week (12 December 2024), saw references to the impacts that significant energy projects will likely bring to Suffolk – which are also felt across Essex, Norfolk and Lincolnshire. For example, many energy projects significantly threaten Suffolk's best and most versatile farmland, our rural communities and landscape."

Suffolk County Council has had a longstanding position to support the need for low carbon energy to provide energy security for the country, and the progress to net zero – but not at any cost.

Cllr Rout continues:

"The government's urgency to decarbonise the grid by 2030 is causing damaging decision-making and threatening the food security, habitats, and natural beauty of our countryside and its communities.

"It means the only solution for grid upgrades to projects like Norwich to Tilbury, are pylons. There are other viable alternatives, such as offshore or underground cabling. These options have still not been properly costed, despite what the government or National Grid may say, and are likely to prove more beneficial and efficient if given suitable consideration and time."

January 2025

Council's budget prioritises vulnerable residents and essential services

Suffolk County Council has unveiled its proposed budget for 2025/26, with a strong focus on supporting vulnerable residents across the county.

Under the proposals, the council's net budget would rise by 6.7%, from £752.9 million in 2024/25 to £803.7 million in 2025/26. Key allocations include:

- £18.1 million extra for children's services, ensuring continued support for young people and families in need
- £35.2 million extra for adult care, aimed at addressing the growing demand for social care services.

To help fund these essential services, the council is proposing a 4.99% rise in Council Tax. This would consist of a 2.99% increase in general Council Tax and an additional 2% specifically for adult care services.

This means the costs for a household would be:

- **Band B property**: £24.67 per week, a £1.17 increase from 2024-25 (Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
- **Band D property**: £31.72 per week, a £1.51 increase from 2024-25.

The council will also receive £12.1 million of the additional £880 million allocated by the government for adult and children's social care. It also expects to receive £2.2 million of the £263 million earmarked for a new Children's Services Prevention Grant.

To balance the books, the council has also identified £10.9 million in additional savings, building on the £17.5 million approved last year. This brings the total savings to £28.4 million for the 2025/26 financial year.

Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills, said:

"We remain committed to supporting vulnerable children and adults in Suffolk. Despite the financial challenges posed by increasing demand and broader economic pressures, we are proposing a balanced budget without drawing on unallocated reserves.

"It is deeply disappointing that, despite our significant deprivation levels, Suffolk will receive nothing from the government's new £600 million Recovery Grant. Further, the scrapping of the Services Grant and Rural Services Delivery Grant will see £3.7 million struck from our budget.

"Nevertheless, we understand the pressures facing families and businesses in Suffolk, and that is why we will continue to ensure every pound we spend delivers the best value for our residents."

The budget proposals will be presented at a Scrutiny Meeting on Tuesday, 14 January 2025. The meeting will be live-streamed on Suffolk County Council's YouTube channel, and relevant papers can be viewed on the committee minutes page.

The final budget will be debated and voted on at a Full Council meeting on Thursday, 13 February 2025.

Unique landscape to be changed forever by pylons

A large area of landscape on the Norfolk/Suffolk border with particular uniqueness, rivalling those of other nationally protected landscapes, is set to be decimated by pylons as part of National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury project.

In a letter to both Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council, and other local leaders, National Grid has outlined that it has decided to install overhead lines through the Waveney Valley, rather than running cables underground, as they had set out in their previous consultation.

This is a significant blow to local communities and the natural environment, especially following last year's Valued Landscape Assessment, a report jointly commissioned by Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council.

The report concluded that "the length of the Waveney Valley expresses many special qualities, and in the context of Suffolk and Norfolk, it is considered to be a valued landscape. Conserving and enhancing the special qualities articulated in this report is a key aspiration of existing planning policy."

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

"This decision not to underground any of the proposed pylons through the Waveney Valley, is nothing short of contemptible. The study we commissioned saw the area recognised as a valued landscape and National Grid's plans will wreak untold damage on it. There was a clear alternative to this and they've chosen not to take it.

"What I find particularly flagrant - if this what National Grid will press ahead with - is a lack of any suggestion of mitigation or compensation package for the local area.

"This council has engaged fully with discussions and consultations on Norwich to Tilbury, providing additional evidence to help protect the affected communities and environment in the Waveney Valley. We have worked closely and in good faith with National Grid, and yet they have not delivered a fair deal for the local area. There is nothing on the table from them, or Ofgem, to soften this blow.

“Yet again, I see this as more evidence of the government’s short-sighted and rushed mission to decarbonise the grid by 2030. Their influence is pushing through the cheapest and fastest options, with no consideration for local residents, businesses or the environment – we are still to see any progress from them on community benefit schemes, to support situations just like this.

“As a council, we still maintain that the opportunity to underground the whole pylon run between Norwich and Tilbury, using HVDC cables, has not been properly explored. Revisiting the 2030 decarbonisation target and pausing the project would allow that to happen."

Councillor Kay Mason Billig, Leader of Norfolk County Council, said:

“The decision by National Grid to plough on with the destruction of our countryside is disgraceful. There seems to be a determination to create an energy wasteland across Norfolk and Suffolk, with no regard for the local impact.

“The Waveney Valley is well known for its unspoilt rural tranquillity, historic buildings and rich natural habitats. National Grid have clearly disregarded local views and seem determined to cover the landscape with miles of pylons.

“We recognise the need to create a secure and clean energy system, but this can’t come at the unmitigated expense our communities and natural environment.

“National Grid have not provided any benefits for local communities or businesses associated with their current plans to upgrade the transmission network. There is no clear plan to upgrade the existing energy infrastructure in Norfolk needed to deliver new homes and jobs. National Grid’s current plans will simply see electricity generated from offshore wind passing through the county with no tangible benefits for Norfolk as a whole.”

The councils will now look to take up their concerns with National Grid and discuss the issue further.

February 2025

New cabinet role to lead on devolution and local government reform in Suffolk

A new Suffolk County Council cabinet role responsible for devolution and local government reform has been created, following a reshuffle announced by council leader Cllr Matthew Hicks. The changes take effect immediately.

Cllr Richard Rout has been appointed to the role – which comes as Suffolk is one of only six areas in the country chosen by the government to be fast-tracked for devolution and local government reform.

The reforms will see all six of Suffolk's district, borough and county councils disbanded, to be replaced by one or more unitary (singular) authorities responsible for delivering all local services that are currently delivered by the different tiers of local government.

It will also see the election of a mayor (covering Suffolk and Norfolk) in May 2026, who will take control over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, economic development, health improvement and blue light services – along with devolved government funding to deliver positive change. The mayor would not run the unitary councils or have oversight of them.

Cllr Hicks said:

"These proposals represent the most significant changes to local government in Suffolk County Council's 50-year history. This is a pivotal moment for our county, which presents an opportunity to streamline local government, reduce costs for taxpayers and deliver more effective services.

"Given the scale of these changes, I am creating a new cabinet role to lead this work. Cllr Richard Rout's expertise and leadership will be crucial in guiding these reforms locally and working with our partners to ensure the best possible outcome for Suffolk and its residents."

Alongside his new responsibilities, Cllr Rout will continue to lead on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), a role he held as deputy cabinet member prior to this reshuffle.

The new Cabinet and Deputies will now consist of:

- **Richard Smith** – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills
- **Beccy Hopfensperger** – Cabinet Member for Adult Care
- **Paul West** – Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding

- **Andrew Reid** – Cabinet Member for Education and SEND
- **Bobby Bennett** – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services
- **Philip Faircloth-Mutton** – Cabinet Member for Environment, Communities and Equality
- **Chris Chambers** – Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy, Planning and Waste
- **Steve Wiles** – Cabinet Member for Public Health and Public Protection
- **Richard Rout** – Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and NSIPs
- **Alexander Nicoll** – Deputy Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy
- **Nadia Cenci** – Deputy Cabinet Member for Property and County Farms
- **Debbie Richards** – Deputy Cabinet Member for SEND
- **Judy Cloke** – Deputy Cabinet Member for Flooding

Suffolk prepares for another significant solar farm proposal

Suffolk County Council is preparing to respond to another large solar farm proposal, set to cover around 1,500 acres, near Eye.

EcoPower Suffolk is putting forward plans to build a solar farm and battery storage facility, which would impact Yaxley, Brome, Gislingham, Mellis, Eye and Occold, with connections made at the existing substation to the north of Yaxley.

The project aims to deliver around 250 megawatts of renewable energy. At that size, it will be classed as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), requiring planning approval from the Secretary of State, rather than the local authority.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and NSIPs, said:

"Another NSIP is looking to land in Suffolk and for many of the communities impacted by EcoPower Suffolk's plans, this comes hot on the heels of discussing the Norwich to Tilbury pylon proposals. So I can fully understand how local communities are wearily bracing themselves for a time-consuming and uncertain road ahead.

"It does feel like a case of 'here we go again', but I am expecting regular, productive engagement with EcoPower Suffolk – not just with the council, but with local residents and parishes.

"I trust that their opening words on their website are sincere – they talk about collaboration, and a commitment to community engagement and understanding local challenges and aspirations."

A number of consultations, beginning in March 2025, will be held by EcoPower Suffolk as it shapes its final planning application.

The county council will be contributing to these, to support and represent residents, businesses, agriculture, our landscape and ecology.

Cllr Rout continues:

"Suffolk County Council has previously been clear in setting out its views that solar farms in Suffolk should not take our best quality farmland out of food production and that, broadly speaking, solar installations should be rooftop before rural.

"Moreover, the council has the highest possible expectations that any solar developer fully rules out any possible links to forced labour in China or elsewhere in the world."

"Ultimately, any decision to approve or refuse this scheme will be made by the government. The worst-case scenario is that we will suffer a similar farce to the Sunnica project: an incredibly poor proposal, seemingly rushed through on a whim by the Secretary of State, with no interest in the welfare of local communities or the environment. All because the government is hastily chasing an unrealistic target of decarbonising the Grid by 2030."

EcoPower Suffolk hopes that the project will connect to the Grid in 2030.

More information can be found at www.ecopowersuffolk.com

£1.6 million investment proposed following inspection of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service

Further funding is earmarked for the county's fire service following a key report by Government inspectors.

Suffolk County Council is proposing to invest an extra £1.6 million over two years into Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) following a government inspection.

Inspectors from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) found SFRS effectively operates its 35 stations, 43 fire engines and a range of specialist vehicles strategically situated around Suffolk.

The inspectors rated the service as good at preventing fires and risk, and protecting the public through fire regulation, and that it met requirements for responding to major incidents, plus managing and developing its leaders.

However, the assessment highlighted areas where inspectors feel the service needs to improve – leadership, culture, commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, and IT infrastructure.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Chief Fire Officer, Jon Lacey, said:

"The report recognised that in the key areas of emergency response readiness, preventing fires and protecting the public the service we perform well, and I want to take this opportunity to thank our incredibly hard-working members of staff for their ongoing commitment to keeping Suffolk's residents safe.

“We recognise there is much work to be done, which is why we are already developing an action plan to drive improvements across all service areas – taking into account the challenges we’ve experienced over the past 12 months, I am putting the inspection outcomes front and centre as our driver for change.

“It is essential that my colleagues from across the service are involved in developing our action plan so we can reflect the experience of all those working here, ensuring we are inclusive during the delivery of our improvements.

“Keeping Suffolk’s residents safe and responding to emergencies remains our top priority – this will continue to be our key focus, whilst building on our core values and cultivating a positive and collaborative working environment for all. I welcome the investment as pressures on fire services increase.”

A targeted action plan is already being developed with staff to drive improvements in areas highlighted within the report.

These include IT infrastructure and staff, cultural changes and risk management.

To deliver the plan, Suffolk County Council is set to propose an additional investment of £1.6 million.

Councillor Steve Wiles, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Public Protection, said:

“I thank His Majesty’s Inspectorate for their recent inspection and feedback on how we in Suffolk can provide the best possible fire services to our residents.

“We acknowledge and accept the findings within the report. It will be reassuring for residents to know we are already tackling areas that have been highlighted for improvement. Our additional £1.6 million investment proposal will mean the service can push on with its action plan.

“I will work closely with the chief fire officer and his team to ensure the improvement plan is clear and deliverable - ensuring necessary changes are made swiftly and effectively."

All fire services in the UK undergo inspection every two years. The last inspection report of SFRS was published in 2023.

However, new assessment criteria has since been introduced by HMICFRS that gives a more stringent evaluation, which means the 2025 report for SFRS cannot be compared with inspection gradings from previous years.

The inspection took place last autumn and assessed how well Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service performed across a number of areas.

OPINION: Devolution is a win but myths must be tackled

Column by Cllr Richard Rout, Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and NSIPs.

On Monday, I was appointed as Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. This is a new and important role and one that will require hard work to ensure everyone in Suffolk feels they can help shape the future of local government in our county should they wish.

In case you missed it, Suffolk is one of only a handful of areas on the government's new fast-track Devolution Priority Programme. What this means in practice is that Suffolk's 50-year-old two-tier council structure is set to change with the government proposing to abolish all six of Suffolk's district, borough and county councils and replace them with just one authority providing all councils services in an area. It is argued that unitary councils (as they're known) can deliver better outcomes for residents and save money that can be reinvested into public services. They also bring clarity for residents – when I'm out in Bury St Edmunds, local people talk about 'the council', often not knowing or caring which council delivers a given service. Nor, really, should they. Like me, they just want their bins emptied on time, their roads fixed, for support to be there if they or their family need it and for their council tax to be well spent.

The government also intends to create a mayor (covering Suffolk and Norfolk) who would take control over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, economic development, health improvement and blue light services – along with devolved government funding to deliver positive change. The mayor will be elected in May 2026.

There are a lot of myths buzzing around about the council restructuring elements of this programme. There is, for example, absolutely no truth whatsoever in the claim that a single remote council will govern all of Norfolk and Suffolk or that all public services in Suffolk would be governed by a new mayor. The mayor would have set responsibilities for strategic areas like transport infrastructure and economic development. Emptying your bins, deciding on planning applications, filling potholes and caring for vulnerable adults and children – these are all services that will remain the responsibility of your local council.

The government is clear that it wants to see unitary councils and has indicated these should represent a minimum population of 500,000 residents or more – unless there is a good reason for smaller councils.

I want our proposal to be evidence-based and focused on the best outcomes for Suffolk's residents and businesses and the best value for money for local taxpayers. This shouldn't be an emotional or ideological decision. I am already checking and testing my own assumptions and encourage everyone else to do the same. This decision is too important for a snap judgement and this is why the county council will spend the next few weeks assessing the options and evidence before announcing our preferred model ahead of 21 March. A final business case will be submitted in September 2025.

Some people are concerned that larger councils are intrinsically distant from the communities they serve. This can be the case with any sized councils but I for one want this whole reorganisation process to fundamentally improve those connections – whether that's through elected councillors, better community engagement or transparency.

I fear I might have to spend a lot of time dispelling myths in the coming weeks and months, but if that is the case then so be it because residents deserve the facts.

Devolution and local government organisation is a once in several generations opportunity to make positive changes for Suffolk. Our local government structure has been in place for over half a century, and few will disagree that it could be more efficient, simpler and cost effective. This opportunity hasn't happened before in my lifetime and is unlikely to again. It's a chance to improve outcomes, improve services, reduce costs and duplication.

I've been asked several times how people can be part of the decision-making. The government will lead on public engagement and consultation with number opportunities coming forward in the next few months. However, from our perspective, I want residents, businesses, community organisations and public sector partners to be part of this journey and help to shape the future of local government in Suffolk. Everyone has a role to play and the input of all sectors is vital.

Being on the government's fast-track is a major win for Suffolk and one that will be welcomed by those who want to see efficiency, accountability and streamlined delivery of council services. It is an opportunity to improve our county for everyone in it and move forward with renewed ambition and optimism. The decisions ahead of us as we shape this future may be difficult, conflicting arguments may be put forward, but it is incumbent on all of us to park our emotions and personal ambition and base our proposals firmly in evidence and on outcomes for Suffolk's residents.

Funding made available for safer, healthier and accessible travel around Suffolk

Suffolk County Council has been awarded £3.7 million to continue to encourage cycling, walking and active travel across the county, and making journeys more accessible.

Government has awarded the county council £0.9 million from the Round 5 of the Active Travel Fund, and £2.8 million from the Consolidated Active Travel Fund.

Funds are available to be spent on projects such as:

- Better footpaths and crossing points
- Maintenance of existing walking and cycling infrastructure
- Improved cycle routes
- Traffic calming measures
- Improvements to the Public Rights of Way network

- Rail station access improvements

Councillor Chris Chambers, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy, Planning and Waste, said:

"We're looking forward to building on the successes of similar, previous projects such as at Ipswich Waterfront.

"Such schemes are important to the county, making it easier, cleaner and safer for people to get around.

"Cycling, walking and wheeling can help improve our health, whilst also reducing vehicle emissions to improve air quality and protect Suffolk's environment."

With the funding confirmed (12th February 2025), the county council is now considering suitable local projects, which will be announce in the coming months.

Suffolk County Council confirms 2025/26 budget

Suffolk County Council has confirmed how it will spend its money in the forthcoming financial year - an £803.7 million plan focused on protecting essential services and supporting the county's most vulnerable residents.

The council's budget for 2025/26 was approved at a meeting of all councillors on Thursday 13 February, with an emphasis on meeting rising demand for children's and adult care services.

For every £1 the council spends in the next financial year, 77 pence will go directly toward services that support the health and wellbeing of people in Suffolk.

The remaining 23 pence will fund other critical areas such as fire and rescue, highway maintenance, climate initiatives, waste management and bus services, as well as the infrastructure, staff, and technology required to keep services running efficiently.

Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills, said:

"This is another budget set in challenging times. Economic growth remains sluggish, public finances are under pressure from rising demand and global uncertainty continues to create financial instability.

"But it is precisely in times like these that we must stay focused on our responsibility to the people of Suffolk. We are committed to delivering high-quality public services that make a real and lasting difference in people's lives. We will continue to prioritise those who need our support the most, including vulnerable children and adults who require assistance to live independently."

The council's budget will increase by 6.7%, from £752.9 million in 2024/25 to £803.7 million in 2025/26.

Despite a slight uplift in Government funding for local authorities, rising costs and growing demand have required the council to set significant savings targets to balance the books.

The council has approved £10.9 million in new savings, which will focus on restructuring and transforming how services are delivered. This follows £17.5 million in savings approved in the previous year, bringing total savings for the 2025/26 financial year to £28.4 million.

Suffolk County Council's share of Council Tax will rise by 4.99% next year, which includes a 2.99% general increase and a further 2% dedicated wholly to helping meet the rising costs of social care.

This means households will see the following changes in their weekly Council Tax payments:

- Band B property: £24.67 per week, a £1.17 increase from 2024-25
  (Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
- Band D property: £31.72 per week, a £1.51 increase from 2024-25.

Cllr Smith said:

"We know that many of our residents are feeling the pressures of rising costs. That's why it's our duty to ensure that every pound of public money is spent wisely and delivers the best possible value for our residents."

The meeting is available to watch back on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRC6oyo-G-E

Arts organisations and museums across Suffolk get £500,000 funding boost

Thirty-three arts organisations and museums from across Suffolk have been awarded funding from Suffolk County Council's £500,000 Culture Project Fund.

- 33 organisations made successful bids
- Vast array of projects cover all corners of Suffolk
- Successful bids range from £1k to nearly £30k

Thirty-three arts organisations and museums from across Suffolk have been awarded funding from Suffolk County Council's £500,000 Culture Project Fund.

From baby classes to a new community radio show, the successful projects range in size and scope, and support an array of different people across Suffolk. Examples include promoting performing arts in Sudbury with the Quay Theatre, environmental events at Dunwich Museum, and an education and arts project to address racial inequalities in Ipswich.

The successful bids range from £1,000 to £27,000.

The new fund, which was launched last year to boost cultural activity across the county, attracted 131 applications, requesting a total of £2 million in funding. The quality of applications was exceptionally high, and more than 60 projects scored 'excellent' or 'outstanding' against the assessment criteria. Following a rigorous selection process, a panel of experts from across the arts, heritage, and community sectors reviewed 62 shortlisted applications. This resulted in 33 successful bids.

Cllr Philip Faircloth Mutton, Cabinet Member for Environment, Communities and Equality, at Suffolk County Council, said:

"We are thrilled to be supporting such a diverse range of creative and cultural projects through the Culture Project Fund.

"As well as some higher-profile organisations, it's wonderful that lots of smaller projects, which often get overlooked for funding, will also benefit. I know firsthand the difference that grassroots initiatives make to the people that use them.

"The level of ambition and creativity shown in the applications was truly inspiring, demonstrating the incredible talent and passion that exists within Suffolk's cultural sector. This funding will help bring new artistic experiences to local communities, support the growth of our creative industries, and celebrate Suffolk's rich heritage."

One successful bid was made by Ipswich Community Media for a project called Making Waves, which engages young offenders and those at risk of offending in music, media and the arts. The project aims to divert young people from offending towards positive activities, building confidence and self-esteem and was awarded £9,000.

Another example is the Red Rose Chain, which has been awarded £20,000 to deliver theatre activities for disabled and disadvantaged children and young people within mainstream and SEND schools across Suffolk.

A number of small grants – up to £1,500 - are still available for arts organisations and museums across Suffolk. Visit the website for details.

There will be another round of funding for large and medium projects, which will open in Autumn 2025. These new projects will be delivered in 2026/27.

Suffolk communities to suffer from lack of energy project coordination

National Grid's decision for the LionLink interconnector project to make landfall at Walberswick, will have serious implications for Suffolk's coastal and inland communities, and environment.

The interconnector is a new subsea cable, creating an electricity link with the Netherlands, and connecting to a Dutch offshore windfarm.

Should proposals go ahead, the impact on Suffolk will mean significant onshore construction work at Walberswick, a 26-metre tall converter station at Saxmundham, a substation at Friston, and underground cabling between all the sites.

Another National Grid energy project, Sea Link, is already planned to make landfall just a few miles down the coast at Aldeburgh.

In March 2024, National Grid published details to say that it has no intention to coordinate LionLink with the more advanced Sea Link project.

Suffolk County Council has long campaigned that both projects should share as much infrastructure as possible.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and NSIPs, said:

"The lack of coordination between National Grid's own projects - LionLink and Sea Link - is startling. Landfall for LionLink at Walberswick is simply a bad decision.

"If two different council departments had the opportunity to work together to be more efficient and reduce their impact, but didn't, we would rightly be hauled over the coals by taxpayers.

"Given the close proximity of both the LionLink and Sea Link projects, coordination between them should be paramount. But National Grid's failure to do so means that we are now going to see irreversible damage to important landscapes in the county, and further suffering for more local people."

The county council has raised such concerns on a number of occasions throughout LionLink's consultation process in recent years.

It has made clear that any proposals where greater coordination between LionLink and Sea Link is not achievable, would require very robust justification. There should be a full assessment of increased levels of impacts across both LionLink and Sea Link.

Cllr Rout continues:

"Suffolk is at serious risk of suffocating under the sheer weight of proposed energy projects – whether it be the infrastructure from offshore projects, cabling routes, vast solar farms, or pylons.

"I believe much of this stems from the current government's unrealistic target of decarbonising the grid by 2030. As such, decisions are being rushed through - like the Sunnica solar farm - without consideration for local communities, and ironically, the environment.

"More haste and less speed from the government would allow alternative solutions to be properly explored, and energy companies wouldn't feel under pressure to push ahead with the easiest and cheapest options.

"Most disturbingly, government has still not published any guidance on how it plans to support the communities impacted by these energy projects. Our residents feel left in the dark with these schemes being forced upon them."

Should LionLink press ahead with landfall at Walberswick, then the council is adamant that implications such as increased construction traffic, suitability of road networks and long core working hours are addressed.

These are the same critical concerns that the county council currently has with the Sea Link project.

The council's long-standing position has been to support safeguarding the future energy security of the country, but not at the cost of local communities, their wellbeing, and the environment.

You can read the county council's submissions to previous consultations for LionLink. National Grid Ventures expected to submit a Development Consent Order application in 2025.

County leaders to propose one council for Suffolk

One council for Suffolk would make delivering public services simpler, cheaper and quicker, and better meet the needs of residents and businesses, county leaders have said.

Following a recent government announcement that Suffolk's county, district and borough councils will be replaced with a single-tier system, Suffolk County Council argues that consolidating all services under one unitary authority is the only effective way to deliver against the government's criteria for local government reform.

The move would see all council services, such as waste collection and disposal, housing, social care, planning, highways maintenance, leisure, school placements and travel and street cleaning, all provided by one authority - rather than the six that currently exist in Suffolk.

Bringing together district, borough and county council functions is expected to reduce duplication, lower administrative costs and ensure a more coordinated and cost-effective approach to delivering essential services.

The council warns that splitting services among multiple bodies would force the duplication of essential functions - such as social care, highways maintenance and schools - currently managed at a county level.

The key benefits of one council are:

- **Simpler for residents** – one council would make it easier to understand and contact local government
- **Clearer accountability** – there would be less confusion over who is responsible for what
- **Better use of funding** – a more coherent, strategic, financially sustainable, county-wide approach to budgeting
- **Better alignment of services** – since everything is under one roof, services can be more easily coordinated, creating opportunities to improve services for residents
- **More efficient decision-making** – with just one council, decisions can be made more quickly
- **Stronger leadership** – a single, visible and accountable body providing a clear strategic voice for Suffolk.

The council will submit its initial proposal to the government by 21 March, with a more detailed business case to follow later in the year.

The government will then undertake a public consultation.

Cllr Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and NSIPs, said:

"The financial benefits of unitary local government are clear. By cutting unnecessary bureaucracy, the new council – whoever may serve on it – will have more money to invest in frontline public services, ensuring better value for taxpayers.

"But reorganisation must go beyond financial savings. It must also deliver greater accountability, speed up decision-making and lead to better outcomes for local communities. There is huge opportunity in pulling together services currently separated across the district, borough and county councils – such as housing and social care.

"If the government is serious about delivering savings, efficiencies, better outcomes for residents and financially sustainable local government, then there is only one answer - one council for Suffolk. Moreover, it is the only model that meets their criteria of serving over 500,000 people.

"One council for Suffolk will provide clear leadership, simplify access to services and eliminate the confusion of navigating multiple councils. Carving the county in two or three – as has been suggested - would defeat the purpose."

The government's plans will also see the election of a mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk in May 2026, who would take control over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, economic development, health improvement and blue light services – along with devolved government funding to deliver positive change.

March 2025

Suffolk County Council confirms decision to bring Library Services back In-House

Suffolk County Council has confirmed that it will be bringing all 45 libraries back under its care and control. The decision, made at the Cabinet meeting, will ensure continued access to high-quality, community-focused library services across the county. As part of this move, the council plans to:

- Keep all 45 libraries open
- Maintain opening hours
- Create job security for all frontline staff
- Secure a sustainable future for Suffolk's library services

In addition to continuing its core library services, the council is investing £200,000 in mobile libraries, with a further £157,000 for new books and to replace public computers in libraries across Suffolk.

Libraries have long been at the heart of Suffolk's communities. They are essential spaces for learning, connection, and support, and the council is committed to ensuring they remain hubs that bring people together. The focus is on building upon the excellent services already provided, strengthening libraries' role as trusted local resources that meet the evolving needs of residents.

Looking to the future, Suffolk County Council envisions libraries becoming even more integrated into the wider community, serving as convenient access points for a range of essential council services. This includes providing information and support around Adult Social Care, offering health and social care services, facilitating Family Hub activities, and promoting digital inclusion. The aim is to make it easier for residents to access vital services and support, all within the welcoming, familiar setting of their local library.

Cllr Philip Faircloth Mutton, Cabinet Member for Environment, Communities and Equality said;

"This was an incredibly difficult, but important decision for the future of our Library Service.

"Libraries are more than just places to borrow books—they are community spaces where people can access vital services, learn new skills, and build connections.

"With this decision, we are securing a bright future for all 45 libraries across the county, ensuring they remain accessible, vibrant, and sustainable for generations to come."

Suffolk County Council would like to express its sincere gratitude to Suffolk Libraries, who have run the library contract for the past 12 years. Their passion and hard work have been integral to the success of library services in the county, and the council appreciates all they have done to support local communities. We look forward to welcoming library staff back into the county council and continuing to support them in delivering outstanding services to the public.

We would also like to thank the 1,250 volunteers whose commitment has been essential in delivering high-quality services to residents across Suffolk. As we transition the library service back under council control, we remain fully committed to working with our volunteers. Their invaluable contributions will continue to play a central role in the future of our libraries, and we are excited to explore new opportunities to expand volunteer involvement.

The library service will officially return to Suffolk County Council control on 1 June 2025.

200 new specialist SEND places for Suffolk

The creation of 200 new specialist places across the county for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is set to be considered by Suffolk County Council's cabinet.

An extra 100 places could open this year, and another 100 new places by September 2026, with future plans being drawn up. These places will be spread across Suffolk and tailored to meet need and demand.

The plan to be presented to Cabinet next Tuesday April 1st, outlines how £18.6million could best be spent to support the growing population of SEND children and young people who need specialist education. Over the last five years, Suffolk pupils accessing special schools and units attached to mainstream schools has increased by over 40%.

The proposal includes £3million to be spent on small groups and units in mainstream schools from September 2025 and £12million to be spent on developing satellite units linked to existing special schools across Suffolk from September 2026. The remaining £3.6million is earmarked for further SEND provision.

In the past five years, 1,025 new specialist SEND places across Suffolk have been agreed.

Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Education and SEND at Suffolk County Council, said:

"We know the importance of making sure that children are in the right provision for their needs at the right time. We haven't always got this right and keeping up with the ask for new places is challenging, and costly, but we continue to revisit our plans and redirect resources when needed.

"It's reassuring to see the level of support we get from headteachers who are willing to open specialist units linked to their mainstream schools. We remain thankful for these offers."

On top of these new 200 places, future plans will continue to be drawn up. Using the recently published Joint SEND Needs Assessment report, work is underway to create a Joint SEND Sufficiency Plan, written in conjunction with health, social care, inclusion and transport. This will establish how future Department for Education SEND capital money should be spent.

These plans will be discussed at the cabinet meeting on Tuesday April 1 at 2pm. Read the Cabinet papers.