

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISH OF GREAT BLAKENHAM

Minutes of Gt Blakenham Parish Council meeting held on Thursday 9th May 2024 in the Parish Room, Stowmarket Road, Great Blakenham at 7.30pm.

Present: Cllr Steve Plume (Chairman), Cllr Debbie Kemp, Cllr Nick Leonard, Karen Grimwood (Parish Clerk), District Cllr Addrienne Marriott, SCC Cllr Chris Chambers.

1. To receive and approve any apologies for absence. **None**
2. Councillor / Parishioner engagement
 - a. To receive the County Councillor's report – **See attached**
 - b. To receive the District Councillor's report – **See attached**
 - c. To receive questions from members of the public (allow 15 minutes). **None**
3. To approve the Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Parish held on 11th May 2023 **Approved**
4. To receive the Chairman's Annual Report -**see attached**
5. To receive any other reports
 - a. Claydon High School
 - b. Claydon Primary School
 - c. Suffolk Constabulary
 - d. Claydon Pre-school
 - e. Suez

Karen Grimwood

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Date: 09/05/2024

Signed: 
Date: 8/5/2025



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April 2023

99% of pupils receive a preferred primary school place on National Offer Day

99.18% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred primary schools and 95.78% were offered a place at their first preference school.

Suffolk County Council received 7,056 applications from parents and carers indicating which primary school they would prefer their child to join in September 2023.

Families who applied online can log on to the Admissions Portal from today to see the school their child has been offered. They will also receive an email to confirm this offer. Letters will be sent to parents who made a paper application by second-class post today (17th April 2023).

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Once school places have been confirmed, parents need to consider how their child will get to and from school. If their child is eligible for Suffolk County Council funded school travel, they will receive an email by 12 May 2023 with details of how to opt in.

Any parents or carers with a child born between 1 September 2018 and 31 August 2019 who have not yet applied for a school place should make an application immediately.

Information on how to make an application can be found on the [School admission pages](#) or by contacting Suffolk County Council on **0345 600 0981**.

May 2023

Revised policy agreed to protect Suffolk's water supplies

Suffolk County Council Cabinet has today (16th May) agreed to a revised infrastructure policy to support water security in the region.

As part of its focus on adapting to a changing climate, Cabinet members agreed a revision to the Energy Infrastructure Policy to cover future projects needed to protect and maintain water resources, including reservoirs, pipelines, and water recycling plants.

This new policy addition lays out how future water infrastructure projects will be managed and the council's role with stakeholders, such as the water companies, Ofwat and the

Environment Agency. It also sets out how the council will recover the money it has to spend in the planning process for infrastructure projects.

To reflect the changes, the policy has been renamed the Energy and Climate Adaptive Infrastructure Policy.

In February 2021, the Cabinet of Suffolk County Council adopted an Energy Infrastructure Policy, that set out the Council's approach to major infrastructure projects for energy generation and transmission, with a particular focus on those consented under the Planning Act 2008, known as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

As part of that decision, it was agreed that the policy would be revised after two years.

Library services protected as Suffolk County Council approves additional funding

Suffolk County Council has today (16th May) underlined its commitment to library services in Suffolk.

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Suffolk County Council has underlined its commitment to library services in Suffolk, as it approved plans to increase its funding to Suffolk Libraries, to enable the service to continue operating at its current level, until the end of the contract in July 2024.

Suffolk Libraries currently receives £5.9m per year from Suffolk County Council, however the service is forecasting a deficit of £60k per month from April 2023. The service has cited increases in service costs, a reduction in income opportunities following the Coronavirus Pandemic and rising inflation, as causes of the deficit.

This means it is no longer possible for the service to continue operating at its current level of service, within its current contract value.

At Suffolk County Council's Cabinet meeting, the council has approved plans to absorb this cost pressure, funding Suffolk Libraries an additional £720k per year, through to the end of the current contract in July 2024. This additional funding will support Suffolk Libraries to continue delivering its highly valued services to Suffolk Residents.

The council has previously made a commitment to continue to support Suffolk Libraries. At Suffolk County Council's full council meeting in February, the council agreed to fund an additional £250k in the first quarter of the 2023/24 financial year to help with the increased costs Highlighted by Suffolk Libraries. This £250k for the first quarter of the year is included within the overall figure agreed by Cabinet, of an additional £720k for the 2023/24 financial year.

The council also supported Suffolk Libraries with £155,000 for initiatives to support residents with Cost of Living and support for Digital Inclusion in the 2022/23 financial year.

In addition, the Council continues to successfully access Section 106 funding to support ongoing building developments required to ensure buildings are fit for purpose and support service delivery.

Spotlight on improving air quality as county-wide strategy launched

Suffolk County Council has set out its plan for improving air quality in Suffolk following results from a recent air quality survey, as its county-wide Air Quality Strategy is published.

Air quality continues to be an important public health issue and a driver of health inequalities which disproportionately affects some of our most vulnerable residents in Suffolk.

The county council recently engaged with Suffolk's residents about their thoughts on the impact poor air quality has on their quality of life. The survey received 338 responses and had a particular focus on Ipswich residents, because Ipswich makes up four of Suffolk's eight Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs). AQMAs are areas where national target levels of Nitrogen Dioxide are being exceeded.

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Some of the results of the survey showed that there is a need to increase awareness about how residents can reduce pollution by reducing indoor burning of wood and coal, encouraging businesses to replace their fleet with low-emission or electric vehicles, reducing short journeys by car and considering more sustainable forms of transport such as walking, bike or bus. Vehicle idling when stationary is also a contributor to high levels of air pollution, an area the strategy will focus on going forward.

A key element of the Air Quality Strategy is a public engagement plan which is being developed to increase public awareness of the health impacts of air quality in Suffolk, enabling individuals to make choices that protect both their health and the health of others from the harmful effects of pollution.

The delivery of the strategy will be closely monitored by the council to ensure it is accomplishing what it has set out to do. The strategy will also feed into the collective work of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

June 2023

Suffolk Fire Service to bring control room back to the County

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has announced plans to create a new fire control centre here in Suffolk.

Since October 2011, Suffolk has shared a control room with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire and Rescue Service in Huntingdon. The joint project has worked well, saving both fire services money and enabling greater cross-border resource sharing.

However, the company behind a project to deliver a new IT system, initiated in 2019, has run into technical and financial problems, causing a significant delay. This, in addition to advancements in technology, has led to the decision to bring fire control back into the county by the end of 2024.

A new, Suffolk-based control room, with its own market, tried and tested fire engine mobilisation software, will mean modernised IT systems and improved public and firefighter safety in Suffolk.

The proposed new control centre will be brought to Suffolk County Council's Cabinet for approval in September 2023.

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Help for Suffolk Pre-payment Meter customers

A package of support has been created for pre-payment meter customers in Suffolk who are struggling with their energy bills.

Warm Homes Suffolk is a Suffolk-wide Council partnership service, delivering energy efficiency support to low-income households affected by cost-of-living pressures.

Supported by Suffolk's Collaborative Communities Board and funding from Public Health Suffolk's Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), the service is now able to offer specific help for households struggling to pay their energy bills via a pre-payment meter, in addition to its existing support.

The support covers the whole of Suffolk and is available for all residents, whether they are in social housing, council tenants, owner occupiers or private renters.

The Warm Homes Suffolk Service can check eligibility and support applications for grants to increase household energy efficiency, with measures such as loft and wall insulation to air source heat pumps, draught-proofing and more.

It is estimated that more than 24,000 people in Suffolk are pre-payment meter customers.

The service will work with each individual to understand the pressures on their finances and the impact this is having on their lives. The service can carry out a home visit, as well as providing advice over the phone and by email.

The COMF funding of £180,000 will enable this project to run for 12 months to provide the following:

- Income maximisation (through grants and benefits)
- Budgeting advice
- Help understanding bills and heating systems
- Support to reduce energy expenditure (By promoting social tariffs and support to switch suppliers)
- Improving household energy efficiency (By installing insulation, draught proofing, heating systems and solar panels)
- Facilitating switch away from prepaid meters if appropriate

Pre-payment meter customers who would like support can contact prepay@eastsuffolk.gov.uk to find out more, or call: **Prepay West at 07769 365796**, or **Prepay East at 07769 366229**.

Referrals can be made directly from households, the voluntary sector, and professionals to find prepay households who can benefit from an independent look at their bills.

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Warm Homes Suffolk also offers support and advice for residents who are not pre-payment meter customers. To find out more about the support on offer, visit: <https://www.warmhomessuffolk.org/>

Ancestry appointed to digitise Suffolk's popular family and local history sources

More than 400 years of fascinating historical documents held at Suffolk Archives are to be digitised and made available online, thanks to an agreement between Suffolk County Council and Ancestry.

Suffolk Archives will work alongside the family history website Ancestry to create high-quality, full-colour digital images of millions of baptism, marriage and burial records from parishes within the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

The earliest records being digitised date back to 1538 and include events in the lives of notable historical figures, such as the 1776 baptism of landscape artist John Constable, and the 1846 burial of Thomas Clarkson who devoted his life to the abolition of slavery.

It is hoped that Suffolk's main parish records will be published online in early 2025 with other collections of local interest to follow. Public access will be free of charge in Suffolk Archives branches or at any Suffolk Library. Anyone with an Ancestry subscription will also be able to access the records as part of their research from their own computer or device.

Further details about the project can be found on the [Suffolk Archives website](#).

£100m broadband investment in Suffolk under government's Project Gigabit

Better broadband is on its way for around 80,000 properties across rural Suffolk in a £100 million investment under a £5 billion government infrastructure programme.

The county is one of three to benefit from Project Gigabit and was chosen to host the launch of the announcement by Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure, Sir John Whittingdale.

Similar projects were also announced for Norfolk and Hampshire as Sir John was joined in Orford by Suffolk Coastal MP Therese Coffey and Councillor Matthew Hicks, the leader of Suffolk County Council.

Project Gigabit is the government's £5 billion mission to roll out gigabit-capable, reliable broadband across the UK.

Improved connectivity unlocks new opportunities and fuels innovation, supporting the Prime Minister's priority of growing the economy by creating better paid jobs.

Around 62,000 homes and businesses in Norfolk stand to benefit from £114 million of Project Gigabit investment, across locations including Buxton, Castle Acre and Horning.

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A further 8,000 premises in the northwest of the county are being reviewed for inclusion subject to survey in the next six months.

This project is managed by BDUK who in turn have contracted CityFibre to do the actual work of installing the cabling.

CityFibre, the UK's largest independent full-fibre provider, will deliver gigabit-capable infrastructure for around 218,000 homes and businesses having secured £318 million of Project Gigabit funding after a competitive process. The provider will also be making a private investment of £170 million to deliver the project.

Decisions on where broadband infrastructure is installed will be made by BDUK and not by SCC.

Survey work in all three counties commences immediately, with the first installations in the New Year and the first live connections expected by summer 2024.

Once connected, residents and businesses will enjoy access to broadband services over a network capable of supporting speeds of up to 10Gbps.

July 2023

Norfolk and Suffolk councils given authority and funding to help nature's recovery

Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils have been formally appointed by Government as responsible authorities for preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for their respective counties.

This means that they will be working together to help improve wildlife habitats and reverse the decline of biodiversity across the region, working with local communities to develop a tailored nature recovery strategy for their areas.

They will also work with other local planning authorities, the Broads Authority, Natural England, and a wide range of stakeholders and partners, including farming and landowner groups.

This is all part of Government's ambition to further drive nature recovery, with 48 individual local authorities across the country receiving allocations from a £14 million funding pot. Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils will receive £333,000 and £282,000 respectively over

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two years to fund this work. With the best ways to support nature recovery depending on local character and geography, Local Nature Recovery Strategies will help communities map out the action needed in their area to restore nature.

The Norfolk and Suffolk councils have already been working closely with each other, jointly hosting the Norfolk and Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership, and a host of other stakeholders and interested parties to prepare for this moment. The two authorities have pooled resources and expertise and to ensure that strategies effectively join up across the two counties to the wider benefit of nature and people.

The Strategies will focus on how to improve habitats and protect the natural environment across the region, with local approaches tailored to the specific circumstances of each area. Norfolk and Suffolk are home to a variety of beautiful and unique landscapes, from the chalk streams of the Norfolk Coast to the Stour estuary at the southeast of Suffolk and across many habitats in between, and specific policies will be drawn up to best protect and nurture each location.

Future plans will include working closely with other neighbouring counties, to identify and support opportunities for nature recovery at sufficient scale to really benefit wildlife.

Suffolk receives £1.49m funding for walking and cycling pilot

Suffolk County Council has received more than £1 million from the government to fund participation in a national pilot scheme to promote cycling and walking as part of a more active lifestyle.

The county is receiving £1,495,506 over three years as one of 11 local authorities taking part in the £13.9 million Active Travel England social prescribing scheme.

Social prescribing is a national pilot scheme to promote cycling and walking as part of a more active lifestyle.

The project, launched in August 2022, is helping councils run trials to evaluate the impact of active travel on an individual's physical and mental health, such as through reduced demand for healthcare appointments and reliance on medication due to more physical activity.

This also includes allowing doctors and health workers to prescribe walking and cycling to improve patients' physical and mental health.

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As the scheme progresses, GP surgeries in the pilot areas of Ipswich and Lowestoft will be invited to take part.

Work is already underway with Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board and Suffolk Information Partnership to link some referral systems.

Suffolk will use its funding for projects that will see patients in parts of Ipswich and Lowestoft offered free access to guided walks, cycle training and bike loans.

Introductory walk and cycle groups are taking place now on Friday mornings in Ipswich at Murray Park and Holywells Park. In Lowestoft, they are operating from Normanston Park.

These will be available through July and August, with participants offered 1-1 journey planning, 1-1 buddy walking, or cycling and bike maintenance training.

From September, walking and cycling groups will take place across Ipswich at Whitton, Chantry, Gainsborough, Wherstead and Central Ipswich.

In Lowestoft they will be taking place at the Seafront, Normanston Park, Nicholas Everett Park and Sparrows Nest. Other venues will develop as the pilot progresses.

There will be varying levels of activity depending on health needs, with each activity lasting up to 90 minutes with a rest break and free drink in a local café.

There will be plenty of rest stops based on the needs of the participants. Equipment can be provided to include walking aids, bicycles, or e-bikes.

All activities are led by experienced and qualified cycle and walk leaders.

Later in the year other activities are planned in the form of community events, themed walks, or cycle rides, cycling courses and a digital walking app featuring challenges and treasure hunts focused on the areas of Ipswich and Lowestoft.

Participants within the target areas can be referred through a GP or voluntary group or a self-referral by contacting thewaytogosuffolk@suffolk.gov.uk or calling 01473 260060.

For more details about the scheme go the [Way To Go Suffolk](#) website.

Suffolk County Council has also received £545,528 over three years from the Government's Capability Fund to develop and invest in cycling initiatives.

This includes setting up an accessible cycling scheme in Stowmarket for those unable to use a bicycle and working with a selection of organisations offering their staff a free six-week e-bike trial - [launched with Associated British Ports at Port of Ipswich last November](#) - and which now has almost 30 bikes on trial around the county.

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Suffolk's Archive Service Achieves Full National Accreditation

The service achieved Provisional Accreditation in March 2019 and today the UK Archive Service Accreditation Committee has moved Suffolk Archives from provisional to full accreditation status.

Accreditation is the UK quality standard which recognises good performance in all areas of archive service delivery. Achieving accredited status demonstrates that Suffolk Archives has met clearly defined national standards relating to management and resourcing; the care of its unique collections and the service it offers to a broad range of users.

Archive Service Accreditation is supported by a partnership of the Archives and Records Association (UK), Archives and Records Council Wales, National Records of Scotland, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Scottish Council on Archives, The National Archives, and the Welsh Government through its Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales division.

The Accreditation Panels are composed of Committee members nominated by the seven Accreditation partners and openly recruited from the archives sector.

The Archive Service Accreditation Panel "supported the move to full accreditation following the successful move to new premises at Ipswich. The Panel commended the determined efforts made by Suffolk Archives in developing and delivering community engagement across the county."

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August 2023

Formal opening of £1.3 million Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service training centre

The Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Training Centre at Wattisham Flying Station near Stowmarket has recently undergone a £1.3 million upgrade.

It now boasts a tactical firefighting facility, which uses real fire and an LPG-fired facility to simulate incidents firefighters may be faced with.

The most recent addition is the modular office complex, which features additional classrooms and welfare facilities for all delegates and staff.

The centre was formally declared open at the annual base families' day on Thursday August 24 by Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Jon Lacey of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, and Colonel Toby R Moore MBE, Station Commander, Wattisham Flying Station.

The fire service training centre has been at Wattisham since 2011 and occupies a 17-acre site that previously housed the Bloodhound missile system from the Cold War.

The training centre is used throughout the year for a wide range of training requirements which include refresher and ongoing assessments by all staff.

September 2023

Inflation, SEND school transport and care costs contribute to council's predicted overspend

Inflation, school transport for children with SEND, and looking after children in care are the main factors for SCC forecasting to spend £22.3m over its £688.1m budget for this year.

This is a similar story for many councils across the country, due to higher demand for their services, inflation remaining higher than expected for longer, and interest rates rising to levels not forecast by financial markets.

Recent research by the County Councils Network suggests that England's largest councils will need to make at least £1bn in savings to balance their current 2023/24 budgets.

A BBC investigation also reported that councils expect to be £5.2bn short of balancing budgets by April 2026, the average council facing a £33m predicted deficit by 2025-26.

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Suffolk County Council projects a 4% overspend (£29.3m), to be partially offset by an additional Section 31 grant from Government, and additional income from the pooling of business rates with the district and borough councils in Suffolk, totalling £7m.

Details of the main areas of overspend are:

- **School transport** - forecast to overspend by £11.4m (39% of the overspend), with £8.3m of this being travel costs for children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). This is largely due to more children with SEND needs, transport operators being in limited supply, and rising costs from those operators who are also feeling the impacts of inflation, especially fuel costs.
- **Children in care** - forecast to overspend by £8.2m (28% of the overspend). The council has a responsibility to provide care for children and young people under the age of 18. Some of these have incredibly complex needs requiring 24-hour care from multiple carers. There is currently an unexpectedly higher number of children requiring this support, with this costing an average of £22,700 per week, per child.
- **Adult care services** - forecast to overspend by £3.5m (12% of the overspend) for purchasing care, due to increases in demand, and staffing costs in the sector. The fees paid for residential and nursing placements remain high with 64% of new residential and nursing packages being above the published rate of £806 per week, with some specialist packages being over £1,500 per week.
- **Inflation** - inflation and interest rates have been higher than experienced in a generation, with the legacy of COVID-19 continuing to have a significant impact on various services. As an example, there is an estimated £3.0m (10% of the overspend) pressure as pay settlements continue to be above historical norms as inflation has remained stubbornly high during 2023 so far. High interest rates mean it has been more costly than anticipated to borrow money, which the council does to help fund big projects, such as upgrading highways, maintaining schools or developing household recycling centres.

In addition to the net overspend of £22.3m from this main budget, the council is forecasting an overspend of £15.8m against its £256.5m budget from the Dedicated Schools Grant and Pupil Premium Grant. This is money from Government specifically to fund schools and services for pupils. This overspend comes solely from resources spent on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision, not including school transport. Suffolk, like many other local authorities, is seeing a continuous increase in demand which is not being met by the same level of increase in funding.

Despite these challenges, council departments continue to make savings. This year's budget identified £25.1m of savings to be made, and the latest figures show that £20m of this is projected to be achieved.

The Cabinet at Suffolk County Council will discuss the Q1 2023-24 Revenue Budget paper, at its meeting on 12 September 2023. [Cabinet papers are published on the Suffolk County Council website.](#)

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Councils unite against National Grid pylon proposals

In a joint letter to National Grid, the leaders of the three councils address the extensive impact on landscapes and local communities that the scheme would bring.

They also highlight that an offshore solution has not been sufficiently investigated, and the opportunities that this could bring to co-ordinate with other large-scale energy projects off the region's coast.

The Norwich to Tilbury project would see 114 miles of electricity pylons weave their way through the three counties. Only a small percentage of this cabling would go underground, an issue which the councils also raise, stating that more would be needed particularly in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and near Diss and the Waveney Valley.

National Grid held a second, non-statutory consultation, which closed on 21 August 2023. It is expected that a statutory consultation will take place in 2024.

October 2023

New highways services arrive in Suffolk as multi-million-pound partnership goes live

The new contract, which is worth in the region of £800 million - £1 billion, will deliver highway projects and improvements across Suffolk for up to 20 years, including maintaining roads, pavements and rights of way, improving drainage, hedge trimming, construction of new road schemes, snow-clearing and gritting and much more.

Milestone Infrastructure, part of M Group Services, was awarded Suffolk's new highways services contract back in February and since then has been working with Suffolk County Council to mobilise the new contract ahead of it commencing on 1 October.

When seeking a new highways partner, the county council wanted a keener focus on delivering greater social value, building on the council's commitment to carbon reduction and protecting the environment, using local skills and talent, and giving young people the opportunity to work in the sector.

With this in mind, the new partnership was built around six key contract objectives, which will form the basis for all that Suffolk Highways delivers going forward. These objectives are:

- Collaboration and Partnership
- Social Value
- Environment and Net Zero Carbon
- Customer Communication and Engagement
- Commercialism and Enterprise

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- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion



To read about the new Suffolk Streetlighting contract with McCann, visit: [Go Live! Suffolk County Council Street Lighting Services Contract Gets Underway - McCann \(mccann-ltd.co.uk\)](https://www.go-live.suffolk.gov.uk/News/County-Council-Street-Lighting-Services-Contract-Gets-Underway-McCann-mccann-ltd-co-uk)

Developers risk "treating Suffolk communities with contempt" as the latest round of large-scale energy projects in Suffolk emerge

Energy developers who are bringing forward large-scale energy projects without speaking to councils or communities, were criticised heavily today (October 11th) by Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council and Cabinet member for Finance and the Environment, following the latest publication of National Grid's Transmission Entry Capacity (TEC) Register.

The TEC Register is a list of projects, which often end up as large nationally significant infrastructure projects (called NSIPs), that have secured the right to connect to National Grid's network if they are consented, under the Planning Act 2008 by government, not local councils. These connection offers, which form a legally binding contract with National Grid, are routinely published and made, prior to the development and consenting of electricity generation or storage projects.

The current list of connection offers published by National Grid shows that new projects have been offered connections at National Grid's sites in Suffolk, at Bramford near Ipswich, and at Yaxley, near Eye, in north Suffolk. These new projects are large-scale solar panel and battery storage proposals in the same style as the recent SUNNICA scheme in West Suffolk, which is a proposal to create a 2500-acre Solar Farm on the Suffolk Cambridgeshire border.

Suffolk County Council, which is recognised by the Government as a centre of excellence when it comes to managing the impacts of big energy schemes, has previously outlined its concerns over the way large energy developers treat communities. In July this year, Cllr Rout wrote to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, to outline the significant shortfalls of the West Suffolk SUNNICA application, described as "the worst example of what can go wrong" when developers mistreat local communities.

These projects can now be brought forward by the respective developers for consideration under the NSIP programme and, if they meet the criteria, will be considered by the planning inspectorate for approval in due course. Due to the size of these proposals being like the SUNNICA proposal, if they do come forward, their planning applications will be ultimately decided by central government, not local councils.

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New fund delivers digital boost for Suffolk

Almost £250,000 of funding was announced at an event today (October 25th), giving a boost to the county's ambitions to reduce the number of people excluded from the benefits of digital technology.

Suffolk County Council has contributed £100,000, with £143,000 coming from District and Borough Council funding, earmarked for digital inclusion projects.

Suffolk's Digital Inclusion Fund will be open to bidders from early November for initiatives that will support people of all ages, but particularly those who are at risk of being disadvantaged by being excluded from accessing digital support and information.

The fund has been created as a collaboration between Suffolk County Council, district and borough councils, voluntary and private sector partners and Suffolk Community Foundation. It is a direct result of Suffolk County Council's Policy Development Panel, held in 2022, which recommended a series of actions to reduce digital poverty and its effects in Suffolk.

The event called on key partners to support the new fund, making a further commitment to playing their part in the ambition for a digitally enabled Suffolk. Prospective bidders are encouraged to apply through Suffolk Community Foundation's website www.suffolkcf.org.uk

Evidence suggests that by not having the skills or the means to use online services – everything from online shopping, looking up important information and advice and using transactional services such as applying for bus passes – people are at risk of poorer health, reduced income and even a lower life expectancy.

In 2021, Healthwatch Suffolk, who participated in the event, co-produced principles for digital health and care. These principles provide important guidance for organisations intending to deliver health or social care services using digital to ensure people have a meaningful choice over how and when they access information and it is available to them in the format they need.

Speakers at the event included Cllr Bobby Bennett, Cllr Faircloth-Mutton, Stuart Keeble, Director of Public Health, Nick Khan, Strategic Director at East Suffolk Council and Andy Yacoub, Chief Executive of Healthwatch Suffolk, Melanie Craig, Chief Executive Officer of Suffolk Community Foundation and Tim Holder, Director of Development and Communications at Suffolk Community Foundation.

Healthwatch Suffolk's ***Digital Care and Health: Guiding principles for health and social care providers and commissioners planning or delivering digital care in Suffolk and northeast Essex*** is available at www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk



November 2023

Cabinet approved £10 million new funding to resurface residential roads

At Suffolk County Council's Cabinet meeting (7th November), Cabinet approved an extra £10 million to repair and resurface local roads in villages and residential areas across Suffolk.

The funding will nearly double Suffolk Highways' £11 million annual road maintenance budget but be targeted at smaller residential streets which are typically maintained less frequently than busier A and B roads.

Over recent years, the county council has recognised the importance of improving roads for residents, this new proposal follows the successful £21 million contribution towards the resurfacing of 1,000 miles of road between 2017 and 2021, and more recently the committed £21 million between 2021 – 2025 to increase pavement maintenance, deliver drainage improvement schemes and repair road signs.

It is hoped that the extra £10 million boost to resurface some local roads, minor rural roads and urban cul-de-sacs would result in a reduction of new potholes, which in turn will reduce the overall financial burden on the council's emergency and reactive repair budgets. Between 2020 and 2023, 2 out of 3 pothole repairs were carried out on local roads, minor rural roads, and urban cul-de-sacs. During that period, more than half of all defects reported by the public were on these types of roads.

The extra investment will make use of more sustainable materials such as warm mix asphalts that have a lower CO2 footprint than traditional hot mix asphalts and which include recycled materials to reduce raw material use; resulting in a more positive impact on Suffolk's environment.

Government backs A12 road improvements with funding commitment

The government has confirmed (on 31st October) funding for a transformative package of improvements as part of Suffolk County Council's A12 Major Road Network scheme.

The scheme will see upgrades to the key roundabouts from the A14 at Seven Hills, east of Ipswich, north to the A1152 at Woods Lane, and a new dual carriageway section replacing the existing single carriageway bottleneck at Seckford Hall between the B1438 and B1079.

It will also deliver improvements to bus links and walking and cycling connections to reduce the issue of severance for communities on either side of the A12 – for example, where the A12 separates houses from local employment and retail areas.

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The Department for Transport has committed to funding up to £ 54 million of the scheme's estimated £ 64 million total cost. The remainder of the cost will be funded by local development contributions, including from Sizewell C and Brightwell Lakes.

Extra £108 million for Suffolk's roads welcomed

Suffolk County Council has welcomed the Government announcement - which is part of a Department for Transport plan to pump £609 million into highway maintenance in the East of England. £107,590,000 has been ringfenced for Suffolk over the next decade, including £3.4 million in this financial year.

The funding is part of the Government's Network North plan, with money redirected from HS2 funding. Transport Secretary Mark Harper MP today set out his £8.3 billion national long-term plan to resurface 5,000 miles of roads across the country.

Other projects in the East of England set to benefit from the Network North money includes the transformation of the Ely Junction to give an extra six freight trains per day access to the Port of Felixstowe and upgrades to key roundabouts on the A12, from Seven Hills to Woods Lane. A new dual-carriageway section will be built to replace the existing single-carriageway bottleneck at Seckford Hall between the B1438 and B1079.

Suffolk County Council's Adult Social Care service rated Good overall by Care Quality Commission

Suffolk County Council has been awarded an indicative overall rating of "Good" for the quality of its Adult Social Care services.

Following a period of intense inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Suffolk County Council has become one of the first councils nationwide to achieve this standard.

Earlier this year CQC announced that 5 local authorities with responsibility for adult social care, including Suffolk, had volunteered to be part of a Local Authority Assessment Pilot, to help CQC develop the new model of inspection to help assess councils against the requirements of the Care Act. This model would then be rolled out across the country with all 153 Local Authorities with responsibility for Adult Social Care being inspected by the commission.

The assessment process began this summer with a request for information to each local authority taking part in the pilot. This collected the written evidence needed to allow CQC to understand how each council is delivering its adult social care services. Following on from this initial ask, the County Council was then required to arrange over 40 different meetings including 4 staff drop-in sessions, with over 150 people, including staff, partners, providers, carers, and people with lived experiences. These meetings allowed the CQC inspection team to meet people directly and ask questions to help further evidence the quality of social care services provided.

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CQC's final report rated the overall quality of Suffolk County Council's Adult Social Care services as "Good" and highlighted areas of strength including, the quality of its leadership, the culture of learning and support for staff, the range of digital care options available, the good relationships between social care and health colleagues and locality team knowledge and understanding of community needs.

Almost £1 million extra committed to investigating significant flooding following Babet

Suffolk County Council has committed almost £1 million of funds to bring in additional flood investigation specialists as the response to Storm Babet continues.

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.

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.

In any usual year, Suffolk County Council carries out around three or four of these investigations. Following Babet, up to 100 look set to be needed.

The Government has now confirmed the arrangements for the DEFRA-funded scheme which means flooded property owners can apply for up to £5,000 to help make their homes and businesses more resilient to future flooding. Suffolk County Council will therefore start to promote, administer and audit the scheme.

Council's Centre of Excellence to go nationwide

The council has successfully bid for £99,000 from the Government's Innovation and Capacity Fund, which will be spent on more events and materials to upskill and share good practice with councils around England, with Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).

Suffolk's Centre of Excellence was established in August 2022 and has already engaged with 16 local authorities across the East of England, with 429 representatives attending webinars and a conference, held at The Apex in Bury St Edmunds. The new funding will now extend these offers across the country.

The council was recognised by the Government last year for its knowledge and expertise when engaging with NSIPs such as Sizewell C, Lowestoft's Gull Wing, National Grid upgrades and offshore wind farms.

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The county council has long recognised that town and parish councils, who have limited resources, can easily be overwhelmed by the magnitude of NSIPs - the new funding will enable bespoke guidance to be published in partnership with Suffolk Association of Local Councils.

The funding will also allow previous work to continue, such as updating and creating more accessible guides for local authorities, and progress guidance materials for developers.

December 2023

More public money for adult and children's care, but difficult decisions are needed to balance the books

In the next two years, Suffolk County Council needs to pump almost £74 million extra into protecting the county's most vulnerable residents.

- £74 million extra needed to protect the most vulnerable over two years
- £64.7 million savings to be made over two years
- Council set to reduce workforce, services and use savings

As part of financial plans to prioritise those in greatest need, an additional £42.7 million for children's services and £29.9 million for adult care are being proposed.

Along with local authorities up and down the country, the council has been hit hard by inflation and rising demand for services such as children's care, special educational needs and disabilities and home to school transport. It means having to make difficult decisions about the services it provides, including £64.7 million of savings in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The two-year savings proposals, which have been published on the council's website today, include:

- £11 million of staffing costs through changing the way services are delivered and restructuring across the council.
- £30.6 million of additional savings from an extension of the council's hugely successful Adult Social Care Transformation programme, which has focused on reducing demand for more expensive social care options by boosting people's independence and ability to stay well for longer through innovative methods including cutting edge care technology. This transformation programme has already saved £30.7 million over the last six years
- £0.5 million of savings by stopping core funding to Art and Museum sector organisations. To assist with the transition, £528,000 of COVID recovery money will be made available to Arts and Museum sector organisations for 2024/25 which will fully cover the funding reduction for one year.
- £140,000 of savings by centralising Suffolk Archives to The Hold and closing the branches in West and East Suffolk. In February 2023, the council committed £3.4m to relocate the West

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Suffolk Archives branch to the proposed Western Way development. Remaining at its current location would have required over £5 million to protect the historic records and meet modern archive standards. West Suffolk Council has since decided not to progress with the Western Way development, ending that opportunity. Centralising the three branches into one brings Suffolk in line with the majority of archive services across the country and is better value for taxpayers' money.

- £15.9 million of reserves will be used to balance the 2024/25 budget.

Following the recent funding announcement from the Government, Suffolk County Council will not receive enough funding to keep pace with inflation or the level of demand for services. The council has joined national calls for additional funding and lobbied the Chancellor of the Exchequer directly.

Full details of Suffolk County Council's financial plans for 2024/25 will be presented to its Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11 January.

The proposals would give the council a budget of around £752 million for 2024/25, made up of funding coming from Government, business rates, charges for services and council tax. The proposed budget would require a 4.99% increase in council tax in next year. This would be made up of a 2.99% increase in general council tax and a 2% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

This means the costs for a household would be:

- Band B property: £23.50 per week (£1.12 per week increase from 2023/24)
(Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
- Band D property: £30.21 per week (£1.43 per week increase from 2023/24)

The budget proposals will be discussed at the council's Scrutiny Committee and then presented at the Cabinet meeting on 30 January. At the Full Council meeting on 15 February, the proposals will be debated, with a vote taking place on the budget for 2024/25 – the first year of the two-year budget proposals.

The Scrutiny Committee meeting will be available to stream on Suffolk County Council's YouTube channel, and public questions can be submitted in advance, details available at www.suffolk.gov.uk

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January 2024



Visitor attractions invited to join 'Good Journey' scheme

Suffolk Growth Partnership and Suffolk County Council have teamed up with the national organisation 'Good Journey' – the UK experts in car-free leisure – in a push to cut carbon emissions and widen access to our leisure, culture and nature for more people.

The initiative, launching in March 2024, supports Suffolk's Greenest County journey towards a carbon net zero visitor economy and will welcome car-free visitors to an array of attractions across Suffolk.

Around 25 local tourism and visitor attractions are now invited to join the Suffolk Good Journey scheme offering residents and visitors discounts and incentives to leave the car at home and explore more of the county on foot, by bike or using public transport. Suffolk visitor attractions participating will be supported and feature on goodjourney.org.uk – providing easy travel information and discounts to domestic and international visitors.

Visitor attractions participating in the Suffolk Good Journey scheme will also form part of a marketing campaign showcasing sustainable tourism visits to Suffolk, offering adventures by train, bus, bike and foot to suit all ages and tastes – from exploring the towns, coast and countryside, and local food and drink delicacies to discovering the cultural and heritage attractions and film locations.

Visitor attractions and venues interested in joining Suffolk Good Journey county can find out more details by contacting Loretta Jones at Good Journey on loretta@goodjourney.org.uk or info@suffolkgrowth.co.uk

Council to propose new funding for arts & heritage in Suffolk

Suffolk County Council is today (26th January) announcing its intention to create a new funding pot open to all arts and heritage organisations in the county.

- Core funding for nine arts and heritage organisations still to cease after 2024/25
- New £500,000 funding pot proposed from 2025/26, open to all arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk
- Proposal to be tabled at Cabinet meeting on 30 January

Following this week's announcement from government that £600 million of further funding will be available to local councils, the council intends to propose a new £500,000 project fund to which all Suffolk's arts and heritage organisations can apply.

However, this does not alter the difficult financial decisions the council is having to make so that it can prioritise spending on services like SEND, home to school transport and children

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in care. An extra £74 million is still needed over the next two years to protect the county's most vulnerable adults and children.

Proposals to end the core funding of £528,000 of nine arts and heritage organisations after the 2024/25 financial year, are still in place. This funding will be replaced with the new £500,000 project funding pot, open to all arts and heritage organisations, from April 2025.

The new £500,000 fund would contribute to delivering on the council's ambitions such as looking after the health and wellbeing of Suffolk's residents, particularly those most in need of extra support to live as safely, independently, and healthily as possible.

The impact of the government announcement for further funding for councils will be discussed at Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Meeting on 30 January 2024, where proposals will be explored.

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February 2024



Public consultation on Suffolk County Council's proposed devolution deal started on 18th March

A 10-week public consultation on our proposed devolution deal with the Government will start on 18th March and run through until 26th May. The consultation will be in two main parts – an open survey, hosted by Suffolk County Council, that any residents can complete and a sample survey of 1000 Suffolk residents conducted independently by Ipsos Mori. The consultation will be available through our website www.suffolk.gov.uk/devolution and social media. There will also be media coverage highlighting the consultation.

Dragon Patcher lands in Suffolk to bolster response to rural potholes

Suffolk Highways has welcomed the new pothole-repairing machine to help fix the growing number of potholes experienced nationally during the winter season, with a trial set to initially target defects in rural Suffolk.

The Dragon Patcher is a machine that releases compressed air which cleans the surface of the road, before heating the surface to a temperature that enables repair material to bond effectively with the road surface, allowing the pothole to be repaired with an aggregate and hot bitumen material.

Compared with the traditional approach of repairing potholes, the Dragon Patcher can work five times faster. This trial is in addition to the potholes being repaired around the clock as part of our routine repair programme, during the past two months Suffolk Highways has repaired 2,851 potholes across Suffolk.

Fuelled by the biodiesel, HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil), the patcher reduces raw material use and creates zero waste and has shown to provide significant carbon savings when compared to traditional patching techniques.

Once the trial ends in Suffolk, a decision will be taken on whether to roll out the technology across the county.

Council budget approved with a focus on protecting the most vulnerable

Suffolk County Council has confirmed its financial budget for 2024-25.

The £752.8m package was approved at the Full Council meeting on Thursday 15 February 2024, with the priority to protect vulnerable adults and children across the county.

Despite the recently announced uplift in government funding and asking residents for the maximum Council Tax contribution, it is still not sufficient to cover the rising costs imposed

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by inflation, or the increasing levels of demand for services - in particular children's care, special educational needs, and disabilities (SEND) and home to school transport.

However, as a direct result of the government's recent intervention to provide further funding, the following proposals were approved:

- £500,000 of project funding will be made available to all arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk from April 2025 – it is intended that this funding will be available every year going forward
- £528,000 of core funding to nine arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk will end in March 2025
- £45,000 will be reinstated to support the County Music Service from April 2024
- £9 million of reserves will be used to balance the 2024-25 budget

To provide care and services for vulnerable children and adults, the next two years will see an additional £42.7 million allocated to children's services, and an additional £29.9 million for adult services. However this means £64.7 million of savings needs to be found at the same time.

These significant savings over the next two years include:

- £11 million of staffing costs through changing the way services are delivered and restructuring across the council
- £30.6 million of additional savings from an extension of the council's hugely successful Adult Social Care Transformation programme

The council's budget will increase by 8.6% (from £693.0 million to £752.8 million), some of which is generated by a 4.99% increase in the council's share of Council Tax, and additional Government funding.

The increase of 4.99% to Council Tax is made up of a 2.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 2.00% increase dedicated to funding adult care. This will see the council's share of a Band B property's bill rise by £1.12 per week, compared to last year.

More of Suffolk's tree cover and orchards to be restored

Suffolk County Council has secured funding of £201,213 from the government's Local Authority Treescapes Fund on behalf of Babergh District Council, East Suffolk Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, Ipswich Borough Council and West Suffolk Council.

The funding will go towards the planting of the trees, many of which are 'standards' around six feet in height when planted. The funding also covers three years of maintenance to help the trees become established.

The Fund aims to restore tree cover in non-woodland areas which may have been impacted by issues such as disease, habitat degradation or ageing tree stock. Many of the proposed projects will involve their local community and pupils from local schools.

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Creating more orchards is one of the themes across the planting projects. Nationally, there has been a decline in the number of orchards because of commercial pressures and increased imports.

This loss of orchards has impacts on the species they support, with less blossom and fruit for food, and less shelter and shading. It also means we are losing some of our heritage varieties and reducing genetic diversity.

One example of this is the creation of a community orchard in Woods Meadow Country Park, near Lowestoft. Local varieties of apple, plum, gage and cherry trees will be sourced from the Suffolk & Apples & Orchards Project. The trees will be cared for by wardens, the Woods Meadow volunteer group, the local primary school, and local residents. The fruit will be available for the local visitors to the park to pick and eat, but also a good source of food for birds and wildlife.

Council to review weed control for roads and pavements

In February 2022, the council agreed to stop using glyphosate in its routine weed treatment programmes, to find more natural alternatives to help protect the local environment.

However, the alternative products proved unable to meet requirements, which was further exacerbated by exceptional growing conditions. Multiple applications were sometimes needed which could introduce other negative environmental impacts.

It has proved a challenge to reduce high-performing treatments, whilst significantly mitigating the environmental impact. Other local authorities locally have experienced a similar situation.

Regular weed treatment on our highway network will continue using a variety of methods, with plans for glyphosate being considered only when appropriate – the ambition still remains to reduce the use of glyphosate as far as possible.

Teams will continue to monitor and research the different approaches being used to remove weeds on our roads and pavements. Where needed, glyphosate would be used responsibly as it is one of the most cost-effective and long-lasting solutions.

£4.4 million to be spent on additional staff to strengthen SEND reform

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet confirmed that 60 new members of staff will be recruited to drive forward important reform to the way special educational needs and disability (SEND) services are delivered in Suffolk.

New Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, Andrew Reid, today reaffirmed Suffolk County Council's commitment to ensuring improvements to the SEND service go further and faster. This includes an increase in permanent SEND staff of nearly 15%.

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These new posts will support the improvement of the quality and timeliness of assessment plans, reviews, and communications with families.

In January, a report by Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) found significant concerns with the way SEND services are delivered by the NHS and Suffolk County Council. In response to this, the Local Area Partnership, made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and Northeast Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, must submit a Priority Action Plan by March 7 outlining the improvement programme.

In order to support this improvement programme, an additional £4.4 million was signed off during the budget discussions at Full Council on February 15. Of this, £3.4million will provide 46 new full-time posts – a increase of 14.76% in current staffing levels. An additional £1million will be spent in 2024/25 to fund 14 temporary posts.

Cabinet today agreed to delegate authority to approve the priority action plan to be submitted to Ofsted and CQC on March 7 to the statutory director of children's services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and SEND. The priority action plan is also being approved at the Suffolk and North-East Essex ICB Executive and the Norfolk and Waveney ICB Executive on 4 March 2024.

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March 2024

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.

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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.

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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.

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.



April 2024

Over 400 Suffolk roads set for upgrade as largest ever surfacing project gets underway

Residents across Suffolk are set to benefit from 421 newly surfaced roads this year - almost doubling the number of roads completed last year, as Suffolk Highways' largest ever resurfacing programmes get underway.

With the start of the surface dressing programme beginning this week, 102 roads will be surface dressed, whilst a further 319 sites will benefit from a full machine resurfacing during the year.

Surface dressing is an efficient, sustainable and cost-effective maintenance treatment that prolongs the life of a road surface – it restores skid resistance and seals the road surface from water, whilst removing potholes and improving level differences of the road.

The surface dressing project sits alongside the programmes for reactively repairing potholes and machine resurfacing roads, all complementing one another. During the past six months, Suffolk Highways has repaired over 9,000 potholes and resurfaced 41 roads, with a further 278 roads planned for resurfacing in this financial year.

New for this year, Suffolk Highways' supply chain partner, Hazell & Jefferies, has invested in new vehicles which allow the new surface to be laid in a safer and more efficient way. For example, the new vehicles eliminate the risk of hitting overhead cables or structures.

- For more information on surface dressing and to view this year's programme, please visit: [Surface dressing](#)
- For more information on machine resurfacing and to view this year's programme, please visit: [Road Resurfacing](#)

99% of pupils receive a preferred primary school on National Offer Day

99.36% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred primary schools and 96.52% were offered a place at their first preference school.

Suffolk County Council received 6,844 applications from parents and carers indicating which primary school they would prefer their child to join in September 2024.

Families who applied online can log in to the online service from today to see the school their child has been offered. They will also receive an email to confirm this offer unless they have indicated that they do not wish to. Letters will be sent to parents who made a paper application by second class post today (16 April 2024)

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Once school places have been confirmed, parents need to consider how their child will get to and from school. If their child is eligible for Suffolk County Council funded school travel they will receive an email by 10 May 2024 with details of how to opt-in.

Any parents or carers with a child born between 1 September 2019 and 31 August 2020 who have not yet applied for a school place should make an application immediately. Information on how to make an application can be found on the [School Admission pages](#) or by contacting Suffolk County Council on **0345 600 0981**.

For further information on how to view your offer online and guidance on what to do if you have not received your preferred offer, please read the [School admissions FAQ page](#).

New Independent Chair appointed to drive forward SEND reform

Suffolk County Council announces that Kathryn Boulton has been appointed as the new independent chair of the Local Area Partnership's SEND Improvement Board.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision is delivered by the Local Area Partnership in Suffolk, which includes Suffolk County Council, NHS Suffolk and North-East Essex Integrated Care Board and NHS Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board.

The SEND Improvement Board was set up in response to the inspection of SEND services in Suffolk in November last year by Ofsted and CQC and is a requirement of the Improvement Notice that will be issued to Suffolk by the Department for Education. Made up of senior leaders from the council and NHS, board members will oversee the implementation and review of plans and services aimed at improving the way SEND services are delivered in Suffolk. It will also ensure the successful delivery of the Priority Action Plan, which was co-produced following the inspection and has been agreed by the Department for Education. [You can read that plan online](#).

The new chair of the board, Kathryn, has 37 years of experience across children's services. With an education background and success in several senior leadership roles, Kathryn has significant experience of transforming SEND services in local authorities and ensuring the voices and experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families are central to the design and delivery of SEND services.

In addition to Kathryn's appointment, the Local Area Partnership will receive an Improvement Notice from the Department for Education. This was an expected outcome after the Ofsted and CQC inspection. It means that advisors from the Department for Education and NHS England will work with the Local Area Partnership to support and monitor improvement plans until further notice.

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Highway 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.

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**Great Blakenham Chairmans Report
Annual Parish Meeting
Thursday 9th May 2024**

Welcome to the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting and thank you for attending.

It's fair to say that the impact of Covid, Brexit and the war in the Ukraine is creating difficulties in the UK. The cost of living is too high for most of the population, so it was a difficult decision to raise our precept for the years 2024 to 2025. It's the first time we've increased it for 6 years. For a Band D home this meant an increase of £61.09 or 3.29%

Our strict financial control and ensuring we get the best value for any projects we undertake. In summary we started the year with £215,610, we finished the year with £202,557 and total outgoings were £73,847, the additional funds came via the precept and CIL monies, more detailed information will be reviewed in the meeting following this one). Whilst this might seem a large amount, it ensures your parish council can remain viable for 6 months with no additional income. Included in that figure are the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies that are assigned to projects (a tentative figure is around £80,000, TBC at the following meeting), the 3 major ones are for 24/25 are, improvements to our Village Hall, the Crown Bowls Club and the playground and picnic site in Barham and hopefully in the near future a new Pre-School serving Great Blakenham, Claydon and Barham.

It may not have hit the news yet but there is a strong commitment from central government to fund and build a new Medical Practice somewhere in between Great Blakenham and Needham Market, at last alleviating the volume that's being carried by the current practice in Needham Market.

I'd like to give my fellow councilors a well-deserved thank you. We couldn't do what we do without willing candidates to stand and help support the parish.

Our County Councillor Chris Chambers has been a stalwart with all matters relating to Suffolk Highways, he continues to get support for the flooding that occurs around the parish, and I'll buy him a pint or two when the area around the rail crossing remains dry after heavy rain. Regarding flooding, I'm aware of a planned works to resurface all of Chapel Lane and improve the drainage, just awaiting a date for the works to begin. District Councilor Adrienne Marriot had settled well into the role in her first year and is very supportive with all district matters.

As of March 2024, there were 1926 names listed on the electoral roll for our parish (obviously we have around 50% more living here). We are now aware of a possible development on the land opposite JT Few. No application has been submitted yet, again there is a cloud over any possible impact on the allotments.

The allotments are doing well, only a couple of vacancies which were awaiting commitment on. If you want an allotment reach out to Karen our clerk and register.

We're still awaiting final confirmation on the "Water Meadows" over the small bridge at the end of Mill Lane. It seems this land has been part of planning chess and the delays have been passed down the line. The main cause was a major delay to Phase 3 of Port 1 planning application by BMSDC.

We still struggle to get traction on open space projects, the north side of Hackneys Corner is looking better with daffodils and tulips and 4 replacement trees planted. Later this year we have a meeting with the bio-diversity officer for BMSDC to discuss further improvements. We are also looking at the land west of Bugden's on Hackneys Corner to see if we can improve the area to benefit wildlife. Of course, you can all do your bit by leaving an area of your garden for wildlife, let the grass grow, sow wildflower seeds, put in a small pond or bird bath. We've ordered and received hedgehog tunnels to promote movement through gardens and green areas, if you fancy helping this declining species, again ask our clerk for

information, they fix on the bottom of a fence panel and form a solid arch.

Suez has hit a new record producing power from waste, in 2023, they processed 294,607 tonnes of waste, this generated 185,144 MWatt hours of electricity which powered 52,243 homes. Which saved 22,142 tonnes of fossil fuel, they also spent £681,135 with Suffolk suppliers. They should be commended for their engagement with the parish and local authorities, they do set the benchmark for local support and engagement. Unfortunately, last year our resident peregrines had a bit of a problem with one of the fledglings didn't survive, hoping this year is a happier one, it demonstrates how nature adapts and wildlife can be supported in modern industrial areas. As well as the falcons, they have a nice wildflower area, beehives, and a large pool of water (for firefighting) which has its own inhabitants, ducks, dragonflies and damselflies. Thanks to Suez for designing its plant with environmental benefits in mind.

We've exhausted sites for Dog Waste bins, but it does sadden me when I see dog waste only feet away from a waste bin. Please can owners of dogs, clear it up and bin it. Our litter pickers can fill 6 large black bins with waste and rubbish from around the village, again please dispose of your rubbish correctly. We've had the new hi-visibility lighting installed at the zebra crossing on Stowmarket Road. The two poles have been installed for the Speed Indication Devices; installation should be imminent.

We saw a change in the village last year with a whole new committee taking over the Village Hall and Playing Field charity. I have to say the drive and commitment shown by the new committee is fabulous, they all have the village at the heart of their plans, pop along to one of the social events for the parishioners and have a chat. Your parish council is very engaged with the improvements and the committee. It was nice

to see the bar at the hall have a revamp and being officially named as "Lockwoods" after the decades of service by Doris & Derek.

There is a new test waste incinerator being installed next to the landfill site, new technology burning waste with no flame, sounds very interesting and has little or no impact to the village or its traffic.

We have continued to maintain a good presence on social media which helps us to get messages out where possible as well as our own website. What we are looking for is how to raise our engagement with the parishioners, any ideas are always welcome.

As always, we are looking for more councilors, we have three vacancies (at time of writing) if you wish to join a friendly team, with a desire to improve the parish think about asking our clerk for details.

Kindest Regards

Steve Plume

Chair for Great Blakenham Parish Council.

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S ANNUAL REPORT MAY 2024

Since winning the Blakenham Ward for the Liberal Democrats in May 2023 I have been on a steep learning curve. All new recruits are required to attend a great deal of training from MSDC, which was very time-consuming. However, the bulk of the training is now finished with the exception of updates with regard to Planning.

I am on the Council's Audit and Standards Committee and a sub-committee related to Councillor conduct; a Clinical Governance Review Working Group (looking at boundary issues) and a Biodiversity Working Group. I took the Overview and Scrutiny training and the Planning Committee training and have on occasion, stood in for my fellow Lib Dem councillors who are on those committees.

I have enjoyed being a member of the Biodiversity Working Group. We have been looking at endangered animals, birds and insects as well as their habitats, discussing ways of preserving them and their habitats. I was interested to learn that the Blakenham/Somersham area has quite a strip of calcareous grassland which could host many scarce wild flowers. The group discussed adopting "mascot" species and we are focussing on hedgehogs, toads, swifts and bumblebees.

I have also enjoyed attending Parish Council meetings and Parish Meetings and hearing about their plans and their obligations and issues. I feel more connected to the parishes through them.

Unfortunately not every issue brought to me by parishioners is instantly solvable. I was pleased early in the year to be able to help a resident of a flat in Great Blakenham. She was disabled and found it difficult to access the bins on the ground floor but when she did so, she found them overflowing and crawling with maggots. I emailed the head of Public Realm and the bins were emptied the next day.

Last summer I went on a ward walk around Blueleighs (mobile home) Park with Sarah-Jane Hatt, community funding officer, Mark Emms, Operations Manager, Kelly Taylor, Food and Safety Technical Officer and two local residents of Blueleighs. The Council had previously been in touch with Wyldecrest homes, owners of the park, regarding breaches of the Caravan sites and control of

development act 1960. After the visit a letter detailing the residents' issues was sent to Wyldecrest Homes.. Soon after a site map appeared on the notice board and bags of rubbish and rubble had disappeared from the entrance. Kelly noted that this was "a marathon and not a sprint" and I am reminded that I should chase up current progress.

Another longstanding issue is that of enforcement at "The Pit" in Flowton. The enforcement order dates from 2012. The owner of the clay pit is continually burning unpleasant substances and dumping rubbish onto his and his neighbour's land. He and his sons have threatened villagers and, on one occasion, dropped tacks across the road. It is only noted that the enforcement officer has made one visit; however, he now tells me that he is working with the county council and the environment agency towards issuing an injunction.

I have had a couple of "neighbour issues" to deal with. One resident of Somersham at Cherrytree Cottages felt very intimidated by her opposite neighbour who shone a CCTV camera right into her bedroom. He was also quite threatening if she or her son tried to park in the layby outside his house. The man's partner was actually the council tenant and the complainant told me that he was known locally as a fraudster.

The complainant had installed a CCTV camera herself as she was worried about the actions of her neighbour. However, this was turned against her when I raised the case with a local policewoman recommended to me by Cllr James Caston. Apparently the neighbour said that he was intimidated by **her** camera.

Another "neighbour" problem relates to owners and tenants of Park Cottages, Somersham. These were originally all council houses but some residents have bought their house. There is a shortage of parking and two residents (one owner, one tenant) were driving along a track designated a "path" to access their homes. However, another owner objected to them driving across a very small corner of her land. I have been working to get the Council to fulfil a covenant created in 1946 allowing them to surface this track. However, the tenancy services manager says that the Asset Management Team whom he reports to, are unwilling to spend money on this. I have copied all correspondence to the Leader of the Council, Andrew Mellen as the objecting owner had contacted him and in the hope that he might raise this issue with his fellow Green councillors.

A third “neighbour” issue related to a resident of Little Blakenham whose garden backed onto a footpath and another garden across the footpath. The owner of the garden had dumped an enormous pile of manure right by the fence, providing an ideal environment for flies and wasps as well as an unpleasant smell. I have emailed two environmental protection officers about this but have received no reply. Now that (hopefully) the weather is changing for the better, I will raise the topic again.

To turn to more pleasant topics I have given out all of my Locality Grant money for 2024:

Outdoor play equipment for Somersham Youth Club – Sarah Freeman – replacing existing, damaged equipment and replacing with new. Over thirty children attend the club.

New L.E.D. lights for Somersham & District Community Shop – Jennie Hutchinson. Groundwork East had carried out an energy review and recommended that the shop lighting should be upgraded from filament light bulbs and fluorescent tubes to reduce energy consumption.

New external signage for Somersham & District Community Shop -Jennie Hutchinson. Current signs were either broken or their lettering had faded. New signs are:

- 2 x free-standing metal signs at either end of the village
- Board to be displayed on the roadside adjacent to the shop
- 1 new sign outside the shop showing shop opening hours.

Gipping Valley Bowls Club, Great Blakenham – Michael Roberts
Ditch rubbers around the bowling green to catch wayward bowls.

Adrienne Marriott
Blakenham District Councillor
1st May 2024