

February 2025
Parish Newsletter
Cllr Elaine Bryce
Carlford Division

Contents

Page 4 - Stay alert - how to beat the cold callers and scammers

Column by Councillor Steve Wiles, Cabinet Member for Public Protection.

Page 5 - Suffolk County Council Staff cycle more than 900 miles for St Elizabeth Hospice

Suffolk County Council staff have been raising money for St Elizabeth Hospice, as part of their upcoming Wild in Art trail, set to launch in Ipswich this summer.

Page 7 - 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.

Page 8 - 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.

Page 9 - £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.

Page 11 - OPINION: Devolution is a win but myths must be tackled

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

Page 12 - 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.

Page 13 - Suffolk County Council confirms 2025/26 budget

Suffolk County Council has confirmed how it will spend its money in the forthcoming financial year.

Page 14 - 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.

Page 16 - 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.

Page 17 - Suffolk's 45 libraries to remain open and see new investment as Suffolk County Council plans to take service back in house

Suffolk's 45 libraries would remain open, see no change to opening hours and have new

mobile libraries and computers as part of a plan to bring the service back into Suffolk County Council.

Page 19 - Suffolk County Council Cabinet approves Local Transport Plan

The council's vision for how people can move around Suffolk over the next 15 years is set out in the new plan.

Page 20 - Suffolk County Council Cabinet approves £2.7m funding for Benacre flood protection scheme

A vital scheme to protect the A12 and surrounding homes near Lowestoft from being regularly flooded can now proceed.

Page 22 - 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.

Page 23 - Octopus Energy and Suffolk County Council trial 'Zero Bills' upgrade on existing homes

Octopus reveals first 'Zero Bills' green tech upgrade for existing homes, offering no energy bills for at least 5 years.

Stay alert - how to beat the cold callers and scammers

Column by Councillor Steve Wiles, Cabinet Member for Public Protection.

Scammers and cold callers appear to have re-surfaced in Suffolk again.

In the last few days Suffolk Trading Standards has warned of individuals cold calling at properties in Brandon, offering window and conservatory installations.

Trading Standards are reminding people of what to do to avoid falling prey to unscrupulous doorstep traders.

Trading Standards have also learned of an Ipswich resident who was approached by a trader advising their roof needed to be replaced.

A contract for £25,000 was agreed for the roof replacement and a further £2,500 for scaffolding to be erected. The resident paid £2,500 but as the scaffolding was being installed a neighbour, who is a structural engineer inspected the roof and was able to confirm no work was required.

Calls have also been received by residents across Suffolk from a company saying they need to come and inspect solar panels on the property. The trader is very forceful and aggressive, insisting that they will visit.

There are also reports of traders going door to door in Stanton, Bury St Edmunds, offering to clean the guttering of the property.

Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to remind people of what they should do should they be approached.

Trading Standards advice is to never agree to anything, including a home visit, when approached by a cold caller on the phone, at your door or via email. Do your research first and find out if it is a product or service that you want or require.

While it might be tempting to agree to low prices being offered on the doorstep, think twice. It's an old adage but it still applies today – if it looks or sounds too good to be true then it's because it is.

Never agree to have any work done because of a cold call, and don't be pressurised into having the job done immediately

If you think work needs doing to your home, get quotes from two or three traders. Ask friends and family for recommendations of traders who have carried out work for them. You can also check Suffolk Trusted Trader for traders that have been vetted and approved by us at <https://trustedtrader.team/Suffolk/>

Ask for the full name & address from a trader before considering dealing with them, and never rely solely on a mobile phone number

Ask for a written quotation detailing all the proposed work and a final price for the job BEFORE the work is started

Only pay in full once the work is completed to your satisfaction and don't pay cash

Please report all doorstep callers to Trading Standards via Citizens Advice Consumer Service on 0808 223 1133.

In the case of doorstep cold callers, you can protect yourself and your neighbours by nominating your area to become a No Cold Calling Zone.

There are now more than 250 across the county, and while the more brazen cold callers will still try their luck the zones do act as a deterrent - 91% of residents surveyed last year said they had received less or no doorstep visits since the introduction of their zone, with 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.

Or, if you would like to receive a free No Cold Calling sticker for your door, please email your address to trading.standards@suffolk.gov.uk.

Let's be clear. These doorstep traders are ruthless.

They usually target the vulnerable and are very persuasive, delivering poor, shoddy work then all too often just disappear, leaving their victims out of pocket.

Similarly, scammers strike through phone calls, letters, emails, the internet or at your door.

The saddest part of it all is that victims are often left feeling a sense of shame and embarrassment, and they really should not - it can happen to anyone.

But by staying on our guard, for ourselves and for vulnerable family or friends, we can beat the scammers and rogue traders.

Suffolk County Council Staff cycle more than 900 miles for St Elizabeth Hospice

Suffolk County Council staff have been raising money for St Elizabeth Hospice, as part of their upcoming Wild in Art trail, set to launch in Ipswich this summer.

Suffolk Fostering and Adoption Service has sponsored a Hare through St Elizabeth Hospice's Hopscotch Learning & Community programme for the "Hop to it! Suffolk 2025" trail. Organisations on the programme each pledge to raise a minimum of £650 for the charity.

Staff from Suffolk County Council pledged to cycle 20-minutes each, towards a collective goal of 900 miles. They beat this target, cycling more than 1170 miles and raising over £1100 for St Elizabeth Hospice so far.

In the UK a child comes into care every 20 minutes. In Suffolk there are approximately 900 children in care.

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

"I'm so proud of our staff who have stepped up to collectively cycle more than 900 miles, in aid of St Elizabeth Hospice. Suffolk County Council has supported the Hospice with every Wild in Art Trail and we're really looking forward to the trail launching in the summer!

"There are around 900 children currently in the care of Suffolk County Council. We need more people to help us give children safe, everyday lives where they can thrive.

"By fostering for your local council you are supporting the children and families from your own communities. This means you are helping to minimise the disruption to their lives by helping them to stay local; 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."

"If you are interested in Fostering and would like to find out more, please visit our website www.fosterandadopt.suffolk.gov.uk or call us on 01473 264800."

Following the success of previous hospice art trails - Pigs Gone Wild, Elmer's Big Parade Suffolk, and The Big Hoot Ipswich 2022 - this much-anticipated event will once again be hosted in Ipswich. For the first time, it will also extend to satellite locations - Beccles, Felixstowe, Lowestoft, and Woodbridge.

Created in partnership with Wild in Art, the project will see 33 large, ornately decorated hare sculptures take over Ipswich for the summer, each featuring unique designs. Meanwhile, the four satellite locations will collectively host 52 sculptures, with a mix of large and small hares.

All funds raised by Hop to it! Suffolk 2025 will go towards supporting the work of St Elizabeth Hospice, an independent Suffolk charity which every year delivers support to over 4,000 people throughout East & Mid Suffolk, Great Yarmouth and Waveney living with a progressive or life-limiting illness.

Chloe Lock, Community Fundraiser at St Elizabeth Hospice, said:

"A huge well done and thank you to the Suffolk County Council team for taking part in this fantastic challenge. The funds you've raised will make a real difference to our services and the patients in our care.

“We cannot wait for the Hop to it! Suffolk 2025 art trail to arrive this summer, and we are so pleased to have the support of Suffolk County Council, as well as our other presenting partners, and the extremely generous businesses and organisations sponsoring the trail!”

Find out more details about Hop to it! Suffolk 2025 and how you can support the trail by visiting www.stelizabethhospice.org.uk/hoptoitsuffolk/.

Another milestone was marked as the design for Suffolk Fostering and Adoption’s ‘Stargazing Hare’ which will form part of the trail in the summer, has been selected and was painted during the week by local artist Lois Cordelia.

The design for the Hare was picked from five entries, by a panel of judges. The panel included The High Sheriff of Suffolk, along with Glynn Smith, the head of Corporate Parenting at Suffolk County Council and local artist, Lois Cordelia.

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.

Suffolk’s 45 libraries to remain open and see new investment as Suffolk County Council plans to take service back in house

Suffolk’s 45 libraries would remain open, see no change to opening hours and have new mobile libraries and computers as part of a plan to bring the service back into Suffolk County Council.

Subject to a formal Cabinet decision on 18th March 2025, staff running Suffolk’s library service – along with their years of experience and love for libraries - will transition to the direct employment of the council on 1st June 2025.

The county council would invest £200,000 in replacing Suffolk’s aging mobile libraries with a further £157,000 for new books and to replace public computers in libraries across Suffolk. This is in addition to the £6.6 million a year budget available for Suffolk’s libraries.

It follows an attempt to secure an external provider for a new six-year contract (with the option to extend for up to a further six years) which had to be abandoned due to difficulties in aligning submissions with the service requirements and budgets.

Following the end of the procurement process, Suffolk County Council entered negotiations with Suffolk Libraries (the current provider) to reach agreement on a shorter-term contract. The intention was to secure the immediate future of the library service from 1 June 2025, while the longer-term future was considered. However, Suffolk Libraries were unwilling to accept those terms and proposed different terms which were not acceptable to Suffolk County Council and would have breached procurement law.

In addition, serious concerns about the viability of Suffolk Libraries also surfaced. The concerns included their proposal to reduce opening hours by 30% and issues with the financial stability of the organisation. There is also concern about the cost of their head office, including senior managers, which equates to 33% of their annual staffing costs. Suffolk County Council believes that more of the library budget should be invested in frontline services.

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

"The future of Suffolk's 45 libraries will be in safe hands as part of our plans to protect and enhance the service.

"With these proposals, there will be no library closures, no reduction in library opening hours, and certainty and security for our most important asset - library staff and volunteers.

"Additionally, we propose new investment to buy new mobile library vehicles and upgrade computers across library sites.

"We know how important library services are to residents, particularly those who rely on them for education, access to information, support and, of course, books.

"A 30% cut to opening hours and the current management costs are unacceptable to Suffolk County Council. This is why we're taking action. We are responsible for libraries in Suffolk and this is the right thing to do to protect them and the services they provide to residents."

Background

- Suffolk's library services have been delivered by Suffolk Libraries IPS since 2012, with the current contract ending on **31st May 2025**.
- Suffolk County Council is the main funder of the service, with an agreed budget of £5.9 million a year. In 2023/24, Suffolk County Council increased the annual budget by £720,000 to £6.6 million a year.

- The contract to operate libraries in Suffolk had to be put out for competitive tender in 2024 as it had reached its maximum legal length.
- The procurement was abandoned due to difficulties in aligning submissions with the service requirements and budgets.
- Following the end of the procurement process, Suffolk County Council entered negotiations with Suffolk Libraries (the current provider) to reach agreement on a shorter-term contract. The intention was to secure the immediate future of the library service from 1st June 2025, while the longer-term future was considered. However, Suffolk Libraries were unwilling to accept those terms and proposed different terms which were not acceptable to Suffolk County Council and would have breached procurement law.
- In addition, serious concerns about the viability of Suffolk Libraries also surfaced. The concerns included their proposal to reduce opening hours by 30% and issues with the financial stability of the organisation. There is also concern about the cost of their head office, including senior managers, which equates to 33% of their annual staffing costs. Suffolk County Council believes that more of the library budget should be invested in frontline services.

Suffolk County Council published two open letters explaining its proposal, one to Suffolk residents and the other to Suffolk Libraries staff, volunteers and supporters.

Suffolk County Council Cabinet approves Local Transport Plan

The council's vision for how people can move around Suffolk over the next 15 years is set out in the new plan.

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet has today (25th February) approved a Local Transport Plan to improve how people travel round Suffolk.

The plan has been updated to set out the council's vision for the transport network from 2025 to 2040.

It provides the context, policy and objectives to improve travel options for Suffolk's residents and visitors.

As part of this county-wide plan, 15 area transport plans and a Suffolk local cycling and walking infrastructure plan have also approved.

These outline how the local transport plan's vision and objectives will be delivered, in some cases funded, in key locations across the county.

Schemes within the 15 areas include walking and cycling improvements and road junction capacity improvements.

Every local highway authority is required by law to produce and keep current a Local Transport Plan.

The Suffolk plan was developed following a public consultation during February 2024.

More than 1,000 responses revealed good support for the four themes of the Local Transport Plan – decarbonisation of transport, a strong sustainable and fair economy, health, wellbeing and social inclusion, and creating better places.

Following further public consultation during October and November 2024, the previous Local Transport Plan and its associated schemes were reviewed and updated to provide the new plan which was approved by the Cabinet today.

The plan underpins Suffolk County Council’s commitment to working towards achieving a net zero Suffolk by 2030, something in which travel infrastructure has an important part to play.

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

“An efficient and reliable transport network is an important driver of the economy and increasing active travel and environmentally sustainable transport solutions are also critical for protecting and enhancing our environmental objectives.

“Sustainable transport improves air quality, which contributes to and supports the good health and wellbeing of Suffolk’s communities.

“Also, the cost of travel has increased during the cost-of-living crisis, so planning for convenient low-cost and inclusive travel solutions is essential to enable people to access employment and education opportunities, essential services, and retail and leisure facilities.”

Suffolk is one of only six areas in the country chosen by the government to be fast-tracked for devolution and local government reform and the LTP would become the responsibility of the new Strategic Authority.

Further details of the plan can be found on [the Suffolk County Council website](#).

Suffolk County Council Cabinet approves £2.7m funding for Benacre flood protection scheme

A vital scheme to protect the A12 and surrounding homes near Lowestoft from being regularly flooded can now proceed.

Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet has approved a plan to underwrite a £2.7 million funding gap in a major flood management scheme to protect the A12.

The council had already pledged £2m to the Benacre flood relief scheme, but the extra £2.7m will ensure it can now go ahead.

The scheme will see 82 hectares of grazing land transformed into saltmarsh, along with construction of clay embankments and two new pumping stations.

The new habitat will absorb the energy of the sea during storms and ensure the A12, homes, businesses, farmland, freshwater resources, and wildlife are protected against a 1 in 200 year storm for the next 50 years.

Were the scheme not to go ahead it could cost an estimated £235m over the next 50 years and compromise not only the A12, but also 200 domestic and commercial properties, and 450 hectares of farmland.

In October 2024 the Council agreed to the £2m contribution alongside £25m from Sizewell C and £32.1m from the Environment Agency, which funded the planned-for project costs of £59.1m.

In late December 2024, the final total project costs became known and exceeded the planned-for value by £5m.

Alternative funding sources and cost savings found £2.3m, but there was still a £2.7m funding gap.

The Cabinet today agreed to underwrite the project up to £2.7m during the construction period up to 2029.

The money will be used to cover existing risks identified in the project and will only be used if they materialise.

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

“This scheme is incredibly important, doing nothing was not an option.

“If this scheme were not to proceed we would be facing regular and prolonged closures caused by flooding of the A12, with all the cost and disruption that would entail.

“Our further financial contribution presents council taxpayers with excellent value for money and secures this section of the A12 for the future.”

The A12 at Benacre is low-lying and identified as being at significant flood risk from both the sea and the river.

Water flowing down the Hundred River valley is currently pumped out to sea over the beach at Kessingland via an aging Environment Agency pumping station.

The pumping station and the whole valley is at significant risk due to coastal erosion that will result in the sea breaching the current sand ridge and beach.

Rock defences currently protecting the beach cannot be maintained in the long term due to the ongoing natural erosion and breaches are expected to occur in the next couple of years.

The project is being promoted and constructed by the Waveney, Lower Yare and Lothingland Internal Drainage Board (IDB) and maintained by the Environment Agency and the landowner.

Now the council has approved funding the IDB can sign the main construction contract at the beginning of next month.

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.

Octopus Energy and Suffolk County Council trial ‘Zero Bills’ upgrade on existing homes

Octopus reveals first ‘Zero Bills’ green tech upgrade for existing homes, offering no energy bills for at least 5 years.

- Kicking off trials in Suffolk, with county council offering £15k interest-free loan for residents to kit out their homes with solar panels and a battery
- Octopus Energy estimates 500,000 UK properties built since 2013 could be eligible to be upgraded to ‘Zero Bills’ standards

Octopus Energy, the UK's largest energy supplier, is taking its world-first 'Zero Bills' initiative to the next level by trialling an upgrade offer for existing homes, allowing more householders across the UK to eliminate their energy bills.

Octopus's upgrade trials will transform existing homes by installing cutting-edge green tech - a heat pump, a battery and solar panels - bringing them up to Octopus' 'Zero Bills' standard, where customers receive no energy bills for at least 5 years, guaranteed.

The energy supplier is kicking off a series of trials in new homes in Suffolk. The company is teaming up with Suffolk County Council to help more local people benefit from low-carbon tech through the County Council's £15,000 interest-free Warm Homes Loan.

The loan covers the upfront costs of installing solar panels and a battery, allowing Suffolk homeowners who already have a heat pump to embrace low-carbon living while unlocking major savings on their energy bills.

Octopus is reaching out to local Suffolk customers with homes built since 2015, offering them a chance to join the revolutionary trial and take advantage of the council's funding.

The energy supplier estimates 500,000 UK properties built since 2013 could be eligible to be upgraded to a 'Zero Bills' home. Octopus Energy aims to deliver 100,000 'Zero Bills' homes by 2030, and has already rolled out the initiative in Germany and New Zealand, as well as the UK.

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

"Suffolk County Council prides itself in bringing pioneering net zero projects to our residents, and we're excited to be the first local authority working with Octopus Energy on 'Zero Bills'.

"We appreciate the role we have as local authority to be able to lead, influence and support local residents in as many ways possible to help reduce both their energy bills and their impact on the environment."

Octopus has already accredited well over 1,200 'Zero Bills' homes through contracts with a number of prominent developers. Accredited homes span affordable and private rent, as well as private and shared ownership.

For more information on Suffolk County Council's Warm Home Loan, please visit: <https://www.warmhomessuffolk.org/warm-homes-loans>

More information on 'Zero Bills' can be found [here](#).