

@SuffolkTories

For more information on all stories visit:
[Suffolk County Council | Conservative Group \(suffolkconservatives.org.uk\)](http://suffolkconservatives.org.uk)

2021/22 Annual Town and Parish Newsletter



March 2021

Automatic number plate recognition cameras to be installed in villages across Suffolk

In March 2021, Suffolk County Council and Suffolk's Police and Crime Commissioner and Suffolk Constabulary, launched the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras.

The Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras are being used to help detect and deter speeding offences that have been highlighted in Suffolk villages, and educate drivers on the importance of road safety.

An ANPR camera will be installed at a site where it has been identified by a parish council, with support from their county councillor, there is a problem with speeding and / or rat running on roads with a 20 or 30mph speed limit.

An ANPR camera will identify a speeding vehicle by capturing an image of the number plate of the vehicle. Data will then be shared with the Police and the County Council. The County Council will write to the owner of the vehicle on behalf of both parties explaining that their vehicle has been registered as speeding. Repeat offences at a particular location could prompt the deployment of speed enforcement vans and subsequent fines to those who breach the speed limit.

Ten ANPR cameras will be purchased and each one will remain in situ for up to one week per site. There is the option of extending this period if needed.

The project received funding from the Suffolk 2020 Fund, which is a programme of work all about investing in community projects and improving Suffolk for all residents now and in years to come. The funding secures the ANPR project for a two-year pilot where its impact to reduce speeding will be monitored before it receives a further financial commitment.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs and Chair of the Suffolk Roadsafe Partnership, said:

"The use of ANPR technology is both innovative and necessary in our quest to educate drivers by detecting and deterring speeding in key hot spots across the county.

"I'm pleased that the Suffolk 2020 Fund was able to support this project. It will bring improvements to many Suffolk communities. I look forward to seeing the project develop."

100,000 trees planted as part of ambitious council scheme

It was announced in March 2021 that 100,000 trees had been planted in just five months, since Suffolk County Council committed £228,000 from its Suffolk 2020 Fund to protect biodiversity.

Located in the Little and Great Waldingfield area, the 100,000th tree, a field maple, is part of 6.4 miles of new hedgerow which the council has planted across a number of its farm holdings.

The council has been working closely with the farm tenants, The Woodland Trust, Giles Landscapes, The Suffolk Tree Warden Initiative and local communities to ensure that a total of 102,586 saplings have been distributed and planted in the best possible places available over this last winter.

Councillor Richard Rout, Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection at Suffolk County Council, said:

"Planting trees and restoring hedgerows on this scale, in such a short time period is an incredible achievement, particularly with the COVID-19 restrictions. The planting has taken place at a rate of nearly 4,500 each week.

"As part of this project, we are working with partners to ensure that these new plantings are managed and supported so that they can thrive for years to come. My genuine thanks go out to all who have been involved in making this happen – it's been a real team effort and shows how nature can be given a chance to flourish when we work together.

"I hope that communities of insects, animals and birds will benefit from all this activity, which in turn will benefit our local communities. Although this will contribute to offsetting some of the council's carbon emissions, our aim is still to eliminate emissions completely where we can as part of our commitment to our climate emergency declaration."

Lowestoft's Gull Wing officially marks the start of construction

The start of construction work on Lowestoft's Gull Wing was formally marked in March 2021.

The start of construction work on Lowestoft's Gull Wing was formally marked today (22 March 2021), despite officials not being able to host a traditional groundbreaking ceremony at the site, due to Covid lockdown restrictions.

Instead, a video featuring a range of people involved with the scheme has been released, including Jack and Hayden, former Somerleyton Primary School pupils who won the schools competition to give the Gull Wing its name.

In the video, a number of facts about the Gull Wing are revealed, such as how long it will take to open when ships need to pass underneath, and how many tonnes of concrete will be used during construction.

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

"We have achieved many milestones in recent months, and I'm delighted that we can now formally recognise the beginning of the construction works for the Gull Wing. The last couple of months have seen lots of preparation work going on behind the scenes, but contractors are now beginning to work on site and hoardings are going up.

"Of course, building such a large and complex structure will require us to temporarily close some roads and alter how people are used to moving around the town, at various points in the next couple of years. But I ask local residents and businesses to be patient and work with us, and to look towards the end result which will bring so many benefits and much improved access around the town."

April 2021

Reflections on a year of the Keep Moving Suffolk Campaign

Thursday 1 April 2021 marked the first anniversary of the Keep Moving Suffolk Campaign.

Just nine days after the Prime Minister announced the first lockdown on the 23rd March 2020, Suffolk's Most Active County Partnership launched the Keep Moving Suffolk campaign. The ambition was to help people stay active or become active during the pandemic.

Stuart Keeble, Suffolk County Council's Director of Public Health said:

"We knew that keeping active during lockdown was going to be hugely important. These were unprecedented times, with people having to spend more time in doors, along with the impact of the situation on mental wellbeing. Physical activity is an important antidote and it was important that we did as much as possible to encourage, support and inspire people to be active.

"In response, we gave birth to the Keep Moving Suffolk campaign. The campaign highlighted many of the ways we can all stay active at home for little or no cost, and as the weather got warmer, one of the real positives was rediscovering the outdoors with the many nature walks and cycling routes Suffolk has to offer.

"Twelve months on, and with restrictions still in place, we continue to do all we can to help the people of Suffolk to keep moving."

In the last year, 20,000 'Active at Home' booklets were distributed to help older adults undertake physical activity at home and 12,000 'Movement and Mental Health' cards circulated to support young people's mental health.

Over 1,600 age-appropriate sports activity packs were provided to looked-after children, 3,500 activity packs given to digitally isolated older people to help them stay active and resources supplied to support more than 25,000 primary school children walk to school.

In just one month (September) of the new 14-month Love to Ride programme, participants cycled over 50,000 miles whilst our **Dance with Millie tutorials**, to help children stay active whilst home-schooling, received thousands of hits. Numbers, however, don't tell the whole story. More importantly are the reasons why people have needed help.

"I'm 78 and lost my husband to Covid in November so been here in the four walls 'til we are allowed out again" and "I have been shut in since last March and only have a small house and can't move that well" were typical responses from the recipients of Keep Moving Suffolk activity packs for older people.

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

In April 2021, 99.15% of children were offered a place at one of their parents' three preferred schools and 95% were offered a place at their first preference school.

99.15% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their parents' three preferred schools and 95% were offered a place at their first preference school.

Suffolk County Council received 7207 applications from parents indicating which primary school they would prefer their child to join in September 2021.

Allan Cadzow, Corporate Director for Children and Young People said:

"We are delighted that so many children have been offered a place at one of their parents' preferred schools and particularly with the high number of those offered a place at a first choice school."

"We do understand that not all families will have received a place at their preferred school. If a parents' preference for a Suffolk school is refused, we will automatically add their child's name to the waiting list for that school. We will also advise them about how to lodge an appeal should they wish to do so."

May 2021

Schools across Suffolk recognised for their efforts in encouraging active travel

In May 2021, pupils from Great Barton Primary Academy and Stowupland High School were recognised for their efforts in encouraging active and sustainable travel.

The Pupils received Bronze Modeshift STARS accreditations for their efforts. Exning Primary School who first received a Bronze accreditation in 2019, became the first primary school in Suffolk to receive a Silver Modeshift STARS accreditation for their ongoing commitment and hard work.

- Great Barton Primary Academy – encouraging road safety, by working with local councils to relocate and promote the puffin crossing near the school. This includes designing new street signs and a Park & Stride campaign
- Stowupland High School – encouraging active and sustainable travel and road safety. A group of sixth form students set up a walking bus to help new Year 7 students build confidence walking to a new school
- Exning Primary School – received their silver accreditation for their ongoing hard work promoting sustainable travel, road safety and improving air quality outside the school gates by running an anti-idling campaign.

The Modeshift STARS Accreditation scheme encourages schools across England to implement their own travel plans to increase levels of sustainable and active travel in order to improve the health and well-being of children and young people. More information on Modeshift STARS can be found at – www.suffolk.gov.uk/adviceontravel as well as top tips and advice on travelling to school.

The accreditations further support the county council's Let's make a change for the future campaign which is encouraging residents to consider more active and sustainable travel options during the COVID-19 pandemic to avoid overcrowding the county's transport network, and longer term to experience the benefits of improved health and wellbeing, less congestion and cleaner air.

A new electric taxi-bus service launches in East Suffolk

In May 2021, Suffolk County Council launched Katch, a new sustainable, electric taxi-bus service in the East of the county.

Katch provides a travel solution for local residents and visitors in Wickham Market and Framlingham, as well as for those who need to meet their rail connections at Wickham Market train station in Campsea Ashe.

With support from East Suffolk Council, Framlingham Town Council, Community Rail Network, East Suffolk Lines Community Rail Partnership, Greater Anglia and CarsSmart, Katch delivers on the commitment Suffolk councils have made to grow the region's passenger transport in a sustainable way. It also plays a part in cutting carbon to help reach the Government's ambition of zero emissions by 2050 and Suffolk County Council's own target of being carbon neutral by 2030.

The Rail Network Development Fund from the Department of Transport provided a grant for the vehicles electric charging points at the train station at Campsea Ashe.

Katch started on **Monday 17 May 2021** and ran as a trial for 12 months.

The service will be available seven days a week from:

- 6.30am to 10.30pm on Monday to Saturday
- 9am to 7pm on Sunday

If successful and is regularly used by commuters and rail passengers, Suffolk County Council is keen to facilitate further schemes across the county.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council:

“Suffolk County Council is delighted to be able to offer the new sustainable, electric taxi-bus service in the East of the county. The service will provide a travel solution for local residents and visitors in Wickham Market and Framlingham as well as for those who need to meet their train connections at Wickham Market train station in Campsea Ashe.

“It is also hoped the service will encourage more people to consider using public transport rather than relying on the car. “Following a successful trial, there is an opportunity for this type of flexible and green alternative travel to be considered across other communities in Suffolk.”

State-of-the-art vehicles join Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service’s fleet

In May 2021, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service unveiled three new vehicles, packed with the latest technology, to support firefighters at emergency incidents.

State-of-the-art vehicles join Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service’s fleet

The Command Support Vehicles will typically be used as a hub at large, complex incidents, from which officers can manage operations and work with other emergency services.

Some of the new features on the vehicles include:

- Dedicated WiFi, enabling officers at the scene to quickly stream and share data, images, footage and plans with colleagues who are based remotely, for example at the Combined Fire Control Room
- LCD display built into the side of the vehicle, allowing officers to share content with other agencies attending an incident, such as live drone footage and plans
- Latest communications and computer technology with access to live information, weather reports, data on substances and chemicals, and direct contact with other agencies and services

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has invested £360,000 in the new units, which replace the three existing Command Support Vehicles.

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

“With these new, more advanced vehicles in the fleet, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has even better tools at its disposal to take command of incidents.

“It’s important that the service continues to invest in such equipment, so that staff and crews can carry out their jobs to the best of their abilities, and are safe whilst doing so. In turn, this helps us to protect Suffolk’s residents.

“In the last couple of years, our firefighters have been kitted out in new uniforms and we’ve introduced three new appliances to the fleet. We are currently refurbishing Princes Street station in Ipswich and planning the construction of a brand new blue light station in Stowmarket. Our next projects include bringing in four new appliances which have enhanced tools to support at road traffic collisions, as well as updating breathing apparatus sets, handheld radios and IT.”

Suffolk County Council leader vows to “build back better, stronger and greener” after COVID

In May 2021, SCC further committed to protecting vulnerable residents, strengthening Suffolk’s economy and a strong focus on the environment are at the heart of council’s new priorities.

Protecting and supporting vulnerable residents, strengthening Suffolk’s economy, a strong focus on the environment and delivering value for money for the taxpayer is at the heart of priorities outlined by Suffolk County Council’s leader today.

Councillor Matthew Hicks said that in the next 4 years, Suffolk County Council will:

- Drive up educational standards through a project led by the National Literacy Trust.
- Maintain the Outstanding rating for Children’s Services from OFSTED
- Launch a £20m programme to spend £10m tackling highways flooding and a further £10m improving and upgrading 500 miles of pavements and footpaths.
- £14.5m in upgrading or building new waste recycling centres.
- Continue investing £45m building over 800 new school places for children with Special Educational Needs

On education and children’s services he said:

“We are already investing £45m building over 800 new school places for children with Special Educational Needs. Working with our partners, we will drive up educational standards through a project led by the National Literacy Trust and we will create a network of Family Hubs.”

On adult social care and supporting vulnerable people he said:

“The reality is by 2031, a fifth of Suffolk’s residents will be aged over 70, and we must be prepared for that. We will harness new technology, like we did when we supported the Digital Care Phone project last year. We will also continue our unwavering support for our

fantastic care workers, who do so much to make sure people get the care and support they need.

“Since 2017 we have spent over £1bn on caring for vulnerable residents. This huge level of support will continue.”

“On the post pandemic economic landscape in Suffolk, He outlined his vision for an economic recovery looking to build an economy fit for the next 30 years, describing an economy that “embraces new greener technology, that invites investment in the right training and skills and benefits everyone equally.”

Councillor Hicks said:

“In 2019 this council [declared a climate emergency](#) – and since then we have been working hard to meet our responsibilities to become a carbon neutral authority by 2030.

“£3m to improve heating systems in council offices, fire stations and schools. And we are investing £14.5m in upgraded or new waste recycling centres and we are promoting greater biodiversity.”

He also celebrated the increase diversity of the county council, noting that 39% of councillors were now women and the election of one of the youngest county councillors in the country. He confirmed his new cabinet and noted significant changes to some portfolios.

These were:

- Combining Finance and Environment into a single portfolio
- The creation of a new Cabinet member for Education, SEND and Skills
- A new portfolio focusing on Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding; and separately a portfolio that links Transport Strategy with Economic Development and Waste
- Bringing together Public Health, Public Protection and Communities into a single portfolio

In explaining these changes, Councillor Hicks said that placing Finance and Environment together reflects the fact the council now publishes a carbon budget alongside the financial budget. He also hoped that by splitting Operational Highways from Transport Strategy, more focus could be given to addressing issues with highways maintenance.

Find out more

- [Read Councillor Matthew Hicks speech in full](#) (PDF, 31KB)
- [Watch Councillor Matthew Hicks speech on County Council's YouTube channel](#)

June 2021

Suffolk County Council launches the new Cassius service

In early June 2021, it was announced that SCC are partnering with Alcove, Rethink Partners and Provide CIC to deliver their innovative care technology service to people in Suffolk over the next 3 years.

From July 2021, the Cassius service will give our social work practitioners, occupational therapists and other front line professionals, new ways to support people to live better and independent lives.

Initially the service will launch with a high impact, targeted range of technology that will continue to grow into the full Cassius collection. This means that the technology can be customised to meet people's needs and to address individual challenges which will help them live independently at home for longer.

Cllr Beccy Hopfensberger, cabinet member for Adult Social Care at Suffolk County Council said:

"We're really excited to launch this new service with our partners. It will offer a simple, accessible, seamless and flexible approach which will help people to embrace the benefits of care technology and provide better outcomes.

"Our teams have worked hard over the last couple of years to create a vision of how we would like our digital care model to be – setting us aside from other local authorities. As we move away from the

traditional analogue approach, we are embracing this opportunity to provide a pioneering and intelligent service that will evolve and adapt alongside societal needs."

Cassius will focus on technology that promotes independence and provides monitoring and assessment in the first instance, but that is data driven to provide impactful insights into people's needs – this will help inform more targeted care and support where it is needed, and give people, loved ones and care providers peace of mind, real-time information and back-up support if it is needed.

Independent review of aspects of Suffolk's SEND services to be carried out

It was announced in June 2021 that A multi-agency team from Lincolnshire will carry out an independent review into SEND provision.

The SEND (special educational needs and disability) review will focus on the processes, communication protocols and family-facing elements of SEND services within Suffolk County Council. It will not look at specific cases or the provision given to specific children.

The review will start next week and will be completed within six weeks. The report, with any recommendations, will be published on Suffolk County Council's website, shared with those who contributed to it and also scrutinised, in public, by the council's Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

The review team from Lincolnshire will consist of two senior officers from Lincolnshire County Council, performance analysts and the chair of the county's parent carer network.

Councillor Rachel Hood, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for education, SEND and skills, said:

“Lincolnshire has excellent SEND provision and the team has kindly agreed to review certain elements of our service and will make recommendations based on their findings which will be of great value to us.

“Families with experience of Suffolk’s SEND may share their feedback of the communication process for the review, but we ask that this is relevant to the scope of the review. We have set up an email account for families to feed in their comments. It is important that a range of stakeholders are heard so we can fully understand our strengths and weaknesses and identify next steps. Ofsted have confirmed that we have made significant improvement in this area, and the findings of this review will enable this improvement to continue.”

SEND services in Suffolk are delivered in partnership by Suffolk County Council, Suffolk’s NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups and education settings.

The review looked at:

- The effective flow of cases
- Communication with young people and families
- Processes for dealing with incoming enquiries from young people and families in a timely manner
- A focus on the family-facing elements of the service
- The allocation of provision and, where appropriate, placement in a timely way for children

Suffolk County Council is eager to work collaboratively and productively with the Campaign for Change group, and parents and carers not involved or represented by the group, to make improvements in SEND services.

Leaders earmark major investment as part of Suffolk taking its first steps on road to Covid recovery

It was announced in late June 2021 that a significant investment of £6.238m was approved to support Suffolk’s long-term recovery beyond the Covid-19 pandemic.

Suffolk Public Sector Leaders (SPSL) approved a significant investment of £6.238m towards a range of strategic, community focussed projects and programmes that support efforts in Suffolk’s long-term recovery beyond the Covid-19 pandemic. This money will be used to increase the offer for young people and families, to improve access to housing, to help local businesses get back on track, to address the climate emergency commitment and to drive future public engagement plans.

Combined with investments previously made last September, this means SPSL has invested a total of £9.788m to support Suffolk’s longer-term recovery from Covid-19 in the key areas of economic growth, supporting communities, community safety, tackling climate change, housing and in listening to local people.

The role of SPSL is to continue to seek to maximise opportunities to benefit Suffolk’s communities, identifying and providing additional resourcing and financial contributions on top of what has already been put in place, to build upon the existing commitment and funding designated by local public services across the county.

As part of the discussion surrounding Suffolk's Strategic Recovery Plan, the group agreed to allocate the investment across the following strategic themes:

- **Climate Change** - £1.5m to implement the Suffolk's Climate Emergency Plan agreed and launched by Leaders today
- **Inclusive Growth** - £2.05m towards supporting Suffolk's businesses recovery and the potential Haughley Junction rail upgrade
- **Supporting Communities** - £2.6m to invest in future housing projects, improve literacy levels, identify families most in need of support and strengthen the local care offer for young people
- **Engagement** – £0.139m – to support Youth Healthwatch projects and develop a countywide approach to engaging communities

July 2021

Suffolk County Council begins procurement process for next Highways Service contract focusing on developing local skills and talent

In Early July 2021 Suffolk County Council began the process of finding its next long term Highways Services partner.

The council was looking for a partner to deliver key operational projects after the current contract ends on 30 September 2023.

As part of preparations up to this point, the council has worked with leading industry analysts to understand the different types of arrangements that other local authorities have in place, to look at which specialist providers are in the marketplace and to find out what aspects of contract agreement may work best for Suffolk based on the range of outcomes the council wants to achieve from any new contract process.

The council is looking to develop a contract that utilises a blended 'hybrid' approach, enabling the council to enter into one contract that covers the majority of Highways Service functions and two contracts with specialist providers for streetlighting and traffic signals (ITS). The council will be looking for the new contract to focus on delivering greater social value, utilising local skills and talent, giving young people the opportunity to work in the sector as well as building on the council's commitment to carbon reduction and protecting the environment.

The whole contract development process will take just over two years to complete. Once the appropriate tender documents have been prepared outlining the council's requirements, initial advertisements will go out in December 2021. Discussions will begin with any interested prospective contractors in early 2022. Following such a rigorous tendering process, the council hopes to be able to award its chosen contract in early 2023 with the new service provider beginning in October 2023.

The procurement process needs to begin now to provide enough time to go to the market to seek relevant specialist companies which may be interested in tendering for the contract which is worth in the region of £800m - £1 billion over a projected 20 year period.

Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member responsible for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, Cllr Paul West said:

“This is the beginning of the process today towards finding the right partners to deliver aspects of Suffolk’s Highways Services beyond the end of the current contract in 2023. We want to get the best value for money for Suffolk taxpayers and ensure that the contractors we choose through the hybrid contract approach are the best fit for what we want to achieve and deliver.

“We have learnt a great deal from our existing contract arrangements and going forward I want to ensure this new contract enables more young people across Suffolk to access apprenticeships and relevant work experience opportunities through the Kick Start scheme. We want to find the right partner who shares our ambition and ideas to innovate in improving delivery of services, communicating with customers and sharing our commitment to reducing carbon use as part of the Climate Emergency.

“In preparing for this contract we have rightly spent time considering how other local authorities manage their Highways contracts and which process would be best for Suffolk as we look towards finding the right long term service delivery partner.”

Suffolk says thanks for going the extra mile

In July 2021, residents were thanked for their sacrifices during the pandemic.

Over the last 16 months, countless people in Suffolk have gone the extra mile by helping others, such as volunteering, doing the shopping for a friend or putting a neighbour’s bins out. Saying thank you to people who have helped means a great deal, which is why the latest stage of the ‘Suffolk Says Thanks’ campaign is about celebrating everyday acts of kindness by presenting people with a specially designed pin badge.

Voluntary organisations, local councils and others who are part of the Collaborative Communities Board will be presenting the new Suffolk Says Thanks badges to Suffolk residents who have gone above and beyond during the coronavirus pandemic.

Everyone can get involved by saying thank you to others through the campaign website. By visiting suffolksaysthanks.com, people can thank a friend, a volunteer, neighbour or family member by downloading and sharing one of the free cards, posters or social media graphics.

The Suffolk Says Thanks campaign launched in June 2020, inspiring school children to link up with the county’s care homes, and countless messages of thanks to people across Suffolk for the little – and often big – things they do that make a difference to others’ lives.

Chrissie Geeson, Chair of the Suffolk Collaborative Communities Board, said:

“Saying thank you can make a huge difference, both to the recipient and to the person who is sharing their appreciation. Here in Suffolk, we have many reasons to be thankful to those who have played their part in stopping the spread of coronavirus, and for helping others. The Suffolk Says Thanks campaign is a great way to encourage people to say thank you for

acts of selflessness, and I am delighted to see that the new pin badges will provide an extra token of appreciation.”

The campaign is based on the five ways to wellbeing: a simple framework for looking after our mental health. A bit like eating five fruit and vegetables each day is good for our physical health, the five ways to wellbeing are the equivalent for mental wellbeing. Giving to others – including saying thank you – is an ideal way of meeting your five ways to wellbeing.

August 2021

Suffolk’s new Chief Fire Officer appointed

In August 2021 Jon Lacey was appointed to the post of Suffolk’s Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director for Fire and Public Safety.

Jon will lead Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service and its staff, as well as having responsibility for Suffolk County Council’s Trading Standards and emergency planning services and being a member of the corporate leadership team.

Jon will bring a wealth of experience to Suffolk, gained from a 24 year career with fire and rescue services. He began in 1993 as an on-call firefighter with West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, before becoming a wholetime firefighter.

He was Assistant Chief Fire Officer at West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service and has responsibility for Prevention, Protection and Response, as well as the county council’s Resilience and Emergency Team, a service like Suffolk’s Joint Emergency Planning Unit.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Public Protection and Communities at Suffolk County council, said:

“I welcome Jon’s appointment, he will bring great experience and knowledge to Suffolk. The role is a very important one to keeping Suffolk safe - of course he will lead our Fire and Rescue Service, but also has responsibilities across the council, including Trading Standards and emergency planning. It is an exciting time for him to be joining us, following the Service’s ‘Good’ rating by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate and the investment we are putting into operational equipment and new fire stations.”

Suffolk homeowners can cut carbon emissions as successful solar panel buying scheme returns

It was announced in August 2021 that Suffolk residents can come together to invest in renewables through a group-buying scheme for solar panels and battery storage.

Solar Together Suffolk, in conjunction with Suffolk County Council, helps homeowners feel confident that they are paying the right price for a high-quality installation from pre-approved installers.

This innovative scheme builds on three years of the highly successful Solar Together programme run in Suffolk. Since 2018, the scheme has installed solar panel systems in 1,028 households across the county. On average, homeowners have saved 33% on installation costs, £263 on energy bills in year one, and stopped harmful carbon emissions entering the atmosphere.

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

“I’m delighted that we’re able to run Solar Together Suffolk for another year, as we have seen a real appetite amongst residents to play their part and invest in ways to reduce their carbon emissions. This is one of the many schemes we are offering, as Suffolk County Council aims to make the county net zero by 2030.

“The council itself has had solar panel installations for many years, which are located on around 100 of our properties. We have also been trialling battery storage too. This means that we rely less on the grid for our energy, by harnessing energy from the sun. Suffolk’s councils have worked together for many years to reduce carbon emissions and slow climate change. We now do this through the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan, and with COP26 on the horizon we will all need to focus on how we can all lower our carbon footprint and help make Suffolk a carbon neutral county.”

Suffolk County Council brings [Solar Together Suffolk](#) to residents as part of the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership, on behalf of all of Suffolk’s local authorities. This is in partnership with independent experts iChoosr to make the transition to clean energy as cost effective and hassle-free as possible. Across the UK, iChoosr has delivered almost 5,000 installations to date and over 80,000 tonnes of avoided lifetime carbon emissions.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service adds four new enhanced appliances to its fleet, fitted with solar panels

In August 2021, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service unveiled state-of-the-art rescue vehicles and equipment to provide firefighters with the latest technology for rescues.

Four new “enhanced rescue tenders” will be based at Bury St Edmunds, Lowestoft, Newmarket and Princes Street (Ipswich), giving cover across the county and strengthening the emergency response across Suffolk’s communities.

The new equipment and vehicles are also the latest innovations in green technology, supporting Suffolk County Council’s climate emergency declaration and ambitions to be net zero by 2030. The fire appliances are the first in Suffolk to be fitted with solar panels, have more fuel-efficient engines and also carry battery powered hydraulic rescue equipment.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Public Health, Public Protection, & Communities, said:

“The vehicles are strategically placed across the county to deliver the fastest response to the community of Suffolk. I’m delighted that we’ve been able to add this next-generation

equipment to our growing fleet. We have also recently introduced three new command support vehicles and we have further investment in the pipeline.

“Suffolk County Council aims to be a net zero authority by 2030, and I applaud the Service for setting an excellent example by embedding this ambition in its procurement.”

September 2021

Suffolk’s first ‘healing woods’ locations announced

In September 2021, four locations were announced by Suffolk County Council as ‘healing woods and spaces’.

They will offer people better access to nature and provide a positive legacy to the pandemic.

The healing woods and spaces will be located in:

- Bury St Edmunds
- Combs and Little Finborough
- Eye
- Hopton

The council’s healing woods project connects with the motion unanimously passed by the county’s councillors earlier this year, to commit to developing mental health support in Suffolk, in response to the impacts of the pandemic.

Research, such as that recently published by the University of Essex with The Green Light Trust, demonstrated that access to woodlands and green space can significantly improve people’s wellbeing.

The four sites will develop unused spaces and existing green areas, to make them more accessible and offer dedicated places for peaceful reflection and a positive focus.

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

“I’m delighted that we’ve been able to identify four suitable locations, the first of many I hope. We will be providing advice, technical support and some funding to help develop these areas.

“I’ve been extremely impressed by the vision and thoughtfulness of each of these projects. Across them we will see things like new seating areas, sensory gardens, vegetable growing plots, better connections between existing green areas, hedge planting and opportunities for community activities.

“The site in Hopton is particularly exciting as it will look to establish a community woodland on an area which was formerly used as a village tip and whilst rural, has fantastic accessibility. It is also a brilliant example of the expertise we have in our communities and the opportunities of partnership working.

“I’m really grateful to the parish councils, local councillors, and volunteers for all they have done to make these projects a reality - demonstrating the fantastic community ethos we have here in Suffolk.

“The inspiration for healing woods was as a memorial to those we have lost during the pandemic. These spaces will offer that opportunity for reflection, whilst also showing that nature is accessible to everyone and our mental health can benefit from being in touch with these outdoor spaces.

“Thank you to everyone who has contacted us with suggestions for sites. We’re still hoping to create more sites, and would very much welcome suggestions for Ipswich, East Suffolk, and anywhere else in the county that may be interested. Not every location can be suitable, but we will look into every site, and I hope to be able to announce more soon.”

Youth Focus Suffolk puts young people at the heart

It was announced in September 2021 that 18 youth projects from across the county had been awarded a share of just under £240,000.

This is in response to the gaps faced after Covid-19 for activities and services for young people.

Almost 2.5 times over-subscribed, the Youth Intervention Fund, hosted by Suffolk Community Foundation, attracted an array of bids and has successfully granted both rural and urban projects from Lowestoft to Newmarket, Hadleigh to Eye.

It is expected that an additional 1,900 young people will benefit from these activities offered through the voluntary and community sector over the next 12 months and the schemes include performing arts to increase confidence, mentoring programmes to support mental health, forest schools and construction skills.

Cllr Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Public Health & Public Protection at Suffolk County Council said,

“We are thrilled to be supporting such a diverse range of projects which give young people opportunities after such a challenging period presented by the pandemic. This work will kickstart activities to grow confidence in our future generation, developing opportunities to upskill and to have the safe spaces they need to thrive.”

Suffolk Community Foundation successfully levered in additional contributions of £79,350 through philanthropic donations and will be supporting the groups as they deliver their work over the year ahead.

The Youth Intervention Fund this year has formed part of a wider programme, called Youth Focus Suffolk, which is funded through the county council’s Suffolk 2020 fund. The project supports both the voluntary sector and communities to become more resilient in supporting their young people through a range of measures. This includes a fully funded programme of

training, which is open for all adults to access, and ranges from youth mental health awareness, accredited youth work as well as themed support around drug and alcohol awareness, gambling and exploitation.

The project has also mapped out current youth provision to help people find out about the opportunities in their local area for young people to take part in and provides a peer mentor space online for professionals and volunteers alike to share experiences and learn from others.

More information about the project, and resources to support those working with young people, can be found at the new online platform www.youthfocus.suffolk.gov.uk

HRH The Duke of Gloucester officially opens The Hold

On September 15th 2021, His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester officially opened The Hold, a new archives and heritage centre on Ipswich's Waterfront.

The Duke was given a tour of the £20million building, a partnership between Suffolk County Council and the University of Suffolk, which is home to more than nine centuries of history safely preserved by Suffolk Archives.

His Royal Highness was greeted by Suffolk's Lord Lieutenant, Clare, Countess of Euston, as well as a line-up of civic guests, and was then shown round by Kate Chantry, Strategic Manager of Suffolk Archives.

During the visit The Duke met Tim Greenacre, Chief Operating Officer at the University of Suffolk, Dr Harvey Osborne, Course Leader for BA (Hons) History and students, and saw the state-of-the-art teaching facilities including a 200-seat auditorium and seminar rooms.

Lord Lieutenant, Clare, Countess of Euston then gave a short history of the Suffolk Medal, including showing a replica which is on display in the building's main street.

Representatives from local history groups were introduced to The Duke in the John Blatchly Local Studies Library, named in honour of the esteemed local educator, author and historian.

The Duke was shown treasures from the Suffolk Archives collections spanning 900 years of Suffolk's history, including the oldest document - a Charter of King Henry I granting churches and property to the monks of Eye Priory from around 1119 - and the newest contemporary collections of Black Lives Matter protest placards.

His Royal Highness also met representatives from organisations which contributed to The Hold, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund which awarded nearly £11million to make the project possible, as well as those involved in the design and construction of the building.

To complete the visit to The Hold, His Royal Highness unveiled a plaque to declare the building officially open and signed a book which will be added to the archive as a record of the visit.

Cllr Graham Newman, Chairman of Suffolk County Council, said:

"We are honoured that His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester has officially opened The Hold. This is recognition of a project lasting more than 10 years to deliver a Suffolk Archives service for the 21st Century, and it has been a great occasion to show off this wonderful building, the work we do and some of the treasures in our archives.

“It has also been an opportunity to recognise the Suffolk Archives staff and volunteers who have worked so hard to make this possible, through many challenges including a global pandemic, as well as those supporters and funders that have backed the project along the way.”

New Suffolk Recycling Centres online booking system improvements to deliver greater customer experience

It was announced in September 2021 that Suffolk County Council has developed a new, more user-friendly booking system which enables residents to book slots for recycling.

For bookings from 27 September, people can view all available time slots in real time, to see which booking slots are free at any given moment. The system allows you to book up to seven days in advance. If circumstances change, you can easily cancel your slot up to one hour beforehand or equally, you can click to amend your booking if required.

The system is also able to advise customers on which sites accept specific materials, such as plasterboard to ensure the correct type of booking is made to save customers’ time, and it can also be used to share real time messages with customers, for example if any site needs to close due to adverse weather or emergency situations. The new booking system is connected to automated numberplate recognition to allow for a trial of automatic entry gates.

Customer survey results show overwhelming support for the use of a booking system and the Council has gathered feedback from customers and site staff on how the booking system can be further improved, which have shaped the design of this new system. Through the use of bookings the council can avoid the frustration of long queues at peak times and increase the overall throughput and efficiency of the service for residents.

Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Transport Strategy and Waste, Councillor Richard Smith said:

“During the last 16 months through the pandemic, it was important that we managed access to Suffolk’s Recycling Centres in a safe and organised fashion to ensure the safety of residents visiting to recycle their waste as well as that of our staff and contractors working on site. I am very pleased that sites are now back to full capacity and the new booking system will allow us to make adjustments to the system to make best use of all available slots at every site.

“The system has been developed with our customers in mind, with staff taking on board the views and comments received through regular customer feedback and interactions over the past year. Our site teams have done a great job in maintaining high levels of customer service during such difficult circumstances and as we begin to recover from Covid as a county. I am pleased to launch this new online service to help people access the services they need, when and how they want to.”

To make your booking, visit suffolkrecycling.org.uk.

Rachel Hood, Cabinet Member for Education, SEND and Skills at Suffolk County Council

Published in September 2021:

I want to dedicate this column today to the situation with Suffolk's special educational needs and disabilities (known as SEND) provision.

I was newly elected in May to this Cabinet position and SEND became my first priority.

You will have seen coverage in today's paper about an Independent Report into our services. This report follows a review carried out by a team from Lincolnshire, including Lincolnshire County Council and a parent carer network, and was commissioned by ourselves after a significant increase in correspondents from concerned parents and carers earlier this year.

This wasn't a review of everything we do, but focussed on the processes, communication protocols and family-facing elements of our SEND services. I would like to share with you the outcomes and actions we are taking following publication of the review yesterday. The review has found that we must change what we are doing in a number of areas.

I would like to say sorry for the difficulties that some families have experienced as a result of how we have been doing things. We recognise that we have let down some children and young people as certain aspects of our services have simply not been good enough.

Our priority now is to implement wide-scale improvements, and to do this with pace, impact and efficiency. We have already started to make improvements to the way we do things and whilst, wide-scale improvement will take time, we are determined to make things better. There have been many positive changes to the way we deliver SEND services in the past 18 months and we are proud of these, but clearly there is some way to go.

The review made nine recommendations and we have used these to draft an action plan, which can be read online. One of the recommendations made in the review was to work with a third-party organisation to deliver improvements. The council has since secured Impower as a strategic partner, who will bring capacity and extensive experience of working on SEND systems across the country. This partnership work began yesterday. Other recommendations include staff training, reviewing the process for allocating specialist placements and working with education leaders and parents and carers to understand the demand for specialist provision and use of data and local intelligence to inform sufficient planning.

We have already made significant longer-term improvements within SEND, which we continue to build upon. We have agreed a £45.1m capital programme to create an additional 870 specialist education places over a 5-year period to 2024. Two hundred and ten places opened last year with a further 310 opening this academic year and includes new specialist schools in Bungay, Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds. We have also improved the time in which it takes us to issue Education Health and Care Plans from 18% in 2016 to 95% in 2021. £1million has also been invested into speech and language therapies by Ipswich & East

Suffolk and West Suffolk CCGs.

At the moment, more than 6,000 children in Suffolk currently have a health and care plan to identify what support they need to help with their special educational needs. The number has nearly doubled from 3,000 in 2014. A further 12,000 pupils have special educational needs and do not require a health and care plan. Currently, there are 2,000 places at either special schools or specialist units for those with more complex needs. We continue to increase the number of places.

Your children's education and welfare is fundamental – I fully recognise this as a parent myself. We want to work together to give your children and young people the very best chance in life.

We accept without reservation the findings of the review and are grateful to the Lincolnshire team for their attention to detail, professionalism and advice. We have learnt very valuable lessons from this review, and we will act on these recommendations in the best and quickest way.

You can [read the report and action plan here](#).

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the report or action plan please contact us via email at SendReview@suffolk.gov.uk

October 2021

MPs from Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex and County Councillors, unite to protect the countryside and communities from the worst impacts of new pylons and cables

In October 2021, the Offshore Electricity Grid Task Force (OffSET) was set up to review and respond to the Government's Offshore Network Transmission Review (OTNR).

A new group of MPs from across the region, under the chairmanship of Sir Bernard Jenkin, and including County Councillors from the region, has been set up to ensure that the emerging proposals of the Government's Offshore Network Transmission Review (OTNR), and proposals to change the Nationally Significant infrastructure Planning regime, are effectively scrutinised.

The Offshore Electricity Grid Task Force (OffSET) supports the government's commitment to meet the target of Net Zero by 2050, and the aspiration to deliver 40GW of Offshore Wind, by 2030. However, this will result in a succession of electricity generation and connection projects in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex, over the coming decades, which will have significant impacts on the environment and communities of the region.

The group believes that these ambitions and targets cannot be met, on an "at any cost" basis. Therefore, the further development of the onshore transmission system, and the

connection of offshore wind farms, and interconnectors, will require a new deal for communities and the environment. It remains a key priority that we speed up the Government's timetable to transition to the offshore transmission system, in order to protect our communities from the damaging effects of multiple cable corridors.

As well as scrutinising and responding to new policies and initiatives, the group will be a contact point for Ministers and senior officials, as well as for the National Grid, Crown Estate, and Ofgem, to engage with Regional Leaders. The group will also be inviting key stakeholders and community groups to meet with them, to better understand the impacts, and opportunities, of Net Zero transmission and generation infrastructure in the region.

OffSET's mission statement:

"OffSET exists to promote strategic leadership of the development of a coordinated offshore electricity grid, to address the need for increased grid capacity which off-shore wind, coastal new nuclear, and international interconnectors will demand, while standing up for the countryside of East Anglia so that the welcome transition to net zero electricity generation does not do unnecessary damage to our communities or the environment."

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

"The County Council has long stated its support for renewable energy generation and the Government has quite rightly set ambitious targets in this area. However, to deliver on these it is essential that public support is maintained for the necessary transformation of the energy system. This means a much more coordinated approach is needed, with more transmission being delivered offshore. We must also see full engagement with our communities so that they and our unique natural environment are protected."

Suffolk continues to create the greenest county with £150,000 for new trees

It was announced in October 2021 that a joint bid by a number of Suffolk's authorities secured funding from the Forestry Commission to plant around 3,000 trees this coming planting season.

Suffolk County Council submitted the bid on behalf of itself, Ipswich Borough Council, Babergh District Council, Mid Suffolk District Council and West Suffolk District Council. The successful bid will see £149,712.55 come into the county for new trees, from the Local Authority Treescapes Fund.

The fund targets treescapes that have been neglected or suffered damage in the past, including disused and vacant community spaces and those affected by tree diseases such as ash dieback. The locations are chosen where they are likely to be experienced directly by people, as well as on improving the age structure of trees in all the project areas.

One of the interesting methods being adopted to re-establish woodland as part of this project, is the Miyawaki method.

It is regarded as one of the most effective tree planting methods for creating cover quickly on neglected land, or land that has previously been used for construction or agriculture. It

uses natural principles, such as using trees already native to the area and replicating natural regeneration processes, and is particularly effective in the urban environment.

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

“I’m delighted to have secured this funding, as it means Suffolk will benefit from even more tree planting this coming season and we can make more progress towards the county’s joint ambition of Net Zero by 2030. We are also supporting our wildlife and biodiversity, and offering more green spaces for people to get in touch with nature and support their health and wellbeing.

“Last year, the county council committed £228,000 to treeplanting and hedgerows, with 100,000 planted already and the same amount to be planted this coming season. With the Suffolk Tree Warden Network, we are following the ‘right tree, right place’ policy, to be sure that the planting is effective and has the best chance of establishing itself.”

The planting will also contribute to Suffolk’s commitment to support the Queen’s Green Canopy project. Suffolk is working towards linking up existing woodland with the planting of new trees and hedges to connect communities and encourage natural corridors for biodiversity, aiming to plant a tree for every resident.

November 2021

Government funding boost for Suffolk community schemes

In November 2021 two Suffolk schemes received Government funding totalling more than £940,000

Enabling Self-Employment in Suffolk and the Suffolk Road to Net Zero business support programme are among 477 schemes across the country to receive backing from the Community Renewal Fund.

This is a £200 million pot set up by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities aimed at boosting skills training for the unemployed and investing in businesses developing low-carbon technology.

The two Suffolk schemes, which are both being led by New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) and which were put forward by Suffolk County Council, receive a total of £945,974.

Enabling Self-Employment, which receives £412,208, delivers self-employment support across Suffolk, particularly amongst disadvantaged communities in East Suffolk.

Building on the established programme of Business Start-Up support in Norfolk and Suffolk, it works with employed and unemployed people – including those who were on furlough or who are under-employed and economically vulnerable – from deprived groups and communities.

Suffolk Road to Net Zero receives £533,766.

This is a scheme offering grants to support businesses in developing low-carbon projects and which contribute to the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan's key theme of reducing industrial and commercial emissions, informs a model for place-based Net Zero strategies, and generates benefits for nature-based solutions.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, the leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

"I am delighted that these two excellent schemes will receive funding that will enable them to carry on their good work in Suffolk.

"Low carbon initiatives in industry have a crucial part to play in the national and global economy and the work of Suffolk Road to Net Zero is key in our commitment locally towards addressing the climate emergency that we declared in 2019.

"Similarly, Enabling Self-Employment is helping people who want to work for themselves. They deserve our support, particularly as our economy continues to recover from the effects of COVID-19."

Suffolk County Council investing £12.8m to decarbonise its buildings

It was announced in November 2021 that properties, including fire stations and libraries, will receive investment as the council continues to drive its ambition to be Net Zero by 2030.

Suffolk County Council will be committing £12.8m towards reducing the carbon produced by buildings in its corporate estate.

Cabinet members today (9 November 2021) approved a report to commit to this investment, as well as implementing the SCC Energy Management Strategy, as recommended by the Climate Emergency Policy Development Panel.

Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment at Suffolk County Council, explains:

"The report that we have approved today outlines an implementation plan for how we approach reducing the carbon emitted by the hundreds of buildings we own. It is a considerable milestone in our journey to Net Zero.

"The detail of the plan can now be developed and our corporate property team will work with central government, partners, industry experts and our own in-house professionals. They will now develop more detailed plans to ensure we are delivering effective projects with a clear focus on value for money.

"We know that significant, urgent investment is needed to fund carbon reduction projects within our estate and this multi-million pound investment is an indication of our commitment."

The council already has a history of providing dedicated investment to improve the energy efficiency of its buildings and services, which has led to reductions in carbon emissions in recent years. Previous projects have included replacing fossil fuel boilers with bio-mass units, installing solar panels and solar hot water systems, rainwater harvesting and updating lighting.

This latest investment will also work towards reducing energy consumption across the council's buildings to mitigate the effects of increasing energy prices and associated costs.

Through the Energy Management Strategy, the council will target how it can be 'smarter' with its buildings by reducing electricity consumption, reviewing the heating and cooling of its buildings, continuing its LED lighting rollout, replacing older fossil fuel boilers and generating its own energy.

Suffolk's Greenest County Awards Winners Announced

In November 2021, Suffolk celebrated the people and organisations making the biggest environmental difference in the county.

As COP26 came to a close, Suffolk celebrated the people and organisations making the biggest environmental difference in the county. An innovative food recycling company, a nature reserve and the county's Tree Warden Network are among those collecting awards at The Hold in Ipswich today (Friday 12 November 2021).

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

"Once again, our Greenest County Award winners demonstrate that Suffolk has some of the most innovative, passionate and forward thinking people and organisations in the UK. We hope these stories inspire everyone to think hard about how they can help, as they not only address the climate emergency here in Suffolk, but set a standard for all organisations and industry, leading the way to a greener country and more sustainable world."

Full details of the winners can be found here:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/show/suffolks-greenest-county-awards-winners-announced>

December 2021

Annual Public Health Report focuses on Mental Health impact of Covid-19

Suffolk County Council, in December 2021, endorsed far-reaching recommendations to improve Suffolk people's mental health and wellbeing.

This includes the creation of a dedicated fund of £2.5m and the development of a cross-system group to support community wellbeing in Suffolk.

Each year, the Director of Public Health in Suffolk produces an independent report, which explores a topic or area of strategic focus that is of importance to Suffolk. This year's report titled "Better, together: Public Mental Health in Suffolk", focuses on the actions that need to be taken to support and enable good mental health and wellbeing in the community, following the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The strains of the Covid-19 pandemic have meant that the issue of mental health has been in the public consciousness like never before. The unprecedented measures required to reduce the spread of the virus, have placed extraordinary pressures, and demands on the whole population, with around 1 in 5 adults in Britain experiencing some form of depression in the first three months of 2021 – more than double the figure prior to the pandemic. Almost half of adults have reported that their emotional and mental wellbeing has been affected.

The report highlights that those impacts may be as damaging and long-lasting as the physical effects of the virus. It focuses on actions which can be taken by communities, public and private sector organisations to try and mitigate these effects and protect and promote good public mental health in Suffolk now and for the future.

The report makes six recommendations, which have today been endorsed by Suffolk County Council. Among the recommendations is the development of a cross system group focused on public mental health, which will report into the Health and Wellbeing Board, and a dedicated Suffolk Public Mental Health Fund to support good public mental health in Suffolk communities.

The £2.5m funding, comes from the Government's Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), in recognition of the need to support Public Mental Health, which in turn both supports behaviours which continue to reduce the spread of the virus as well as supporting longer term recovery. The Health and Wellbeing Board will oversee this and will be discussing principles for how to deliver the recommendations at its next meeting in January.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council and Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board, said:

“It is clear that the time to focus on improving public mental health is now.

“Mental wellbeing continues to be a priority for the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the County Council, as we recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Keeping mentally well is not only vital for individuals and families, but also for communities and the economy. The people of Suffolk stand the strongest chance of getting Better, Together.”

The 2021 Annual Public Health Report for Suffolk, 'Better, Together: Public Mental Health in Suffolk' [can be viewed online here](#).

Suffolk County Council approves extra £20m investment in highway drainage and footpaths

In December 2021, Cabinet members committed an extra £20 million over the next three years into further improving Suffolk's highway drainage systems and footpaths.

In recognition of the increasing maintenance demand on these areas, councillors approved the use of £10 million to specifically deliver an increasing number of drainage schemes that deal with problems that affect larger numbers of people, and a further £10 million to improve footpath quality and access.

Suffolk Highways will use the drainage investment alongside funding from the Department for Transport to increase the number of highway flooding sites which are resolved, providing a highway network that is more resilient and accessible during heavy rain and severe weather events.

The footpath investment will be focused on urban areas and busy footpaths in rural areas - providing a safer and more accessible network that supports people accessing local bus services, health care services and local shopping precincts.

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

"Committing this extra funding is a very welcome boost to our already significant improvement programmes in highways.

"The integrity of our county's drainage systems and footpaths are incredibly important to our livelihoods; functioning drainage systems and well-paved paths support us all to safely travel for work, social or leisure purposes or to access essential services.

"£20m divided across drainage and footpath services will enable our highways teams to resolve more drainage issues, where there may be significant highway or property flooding; and footpath improvements to provide a safer and more accessible network in urban and busy rural areas.

"I look forward to working closely with the teams to ensure that the additional funding is used appropriately; targeting areas that require essential improvements, on a priority basis. I will continue to keep Suffolk's residents informed on how any additional funding is going to be used."

Over 10,000 new LED streetlights installed across Suffolk

It was announced on December 17th that Suffolk's LED replacement programme reached a new milestone, with over 10,000 streetlights upgraded with new, sustainable LEDs.

Bouygues Energies & Services, the contractor leading the programme has successfully installed 10,799 new lanterns and counting as part of the project to replace all 43,400 streetlights in the county. These lanterns use less energy and produce a more natural and focused light than the traditional orange glow of streetlights.

The project, which is due to complete by the end of 2022 will also allow opportunity for other streetlight owners within Suffolk such as Parish and District Councils to upgrade their streetlights as part of this process.

This upgrade supports Suffolk County Council's ambitions for becoming a carbon-neutral organisation by 2030. The benefits include; supporting a reduction in carbon emissions by saving energy and reducing light pollution, as well as providing clearer images on CCTV, traffic cameras and dashcam footage for the benefit of public safety.

The teams have been working their way through the west of the county and are making progress in Stowmarket and Sudbury.

Aside from the reduction in energy usage and minimising light pollution, the project will also bring down ongoing maintenance costs for the authority. The County Council expects to

reduce its annual electricity costs on the streetlights by around 76%, saving more than £1.7 million a year.

By upgrading the lighting system with smart technology, this will increase the control the County Council has over its power consumption which will further reduce costs.

Prior to commencing in towns or parishes, Suffolk Highways is contacting those councils in case they wish to upgrade their parish-council owned street-lighting at the same time. All heritage-style lanterns which have been identified will be upgraded towards the end of the programme.

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

"Despite the obvious challenges we have faced since the start of this project, I am extremely happy with the progress being made to replace all county council streetlights in Suffolk.

"The project brings many positive changes, with the main one being the reduction in energy use. This will go towards Suffolk County Council's ambitions to become a carbon-neutral organisation by 2030. I congratulate the teams involved for their hard work and determination during trying times and look forward to seeing more of the county benefiting from these upgrades."

Children's services and adult care at the heart of Suffolk County Council's new budget plans

In December 2021, Suffolk County Council outlined how it plans to spend money on public services in 2022/23.

- More money to support children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Extra resources for adults in need of care
- Additional funds to prevent flooding and fix footpaths

Under the proposals, the council's budget for 2022-23 would rise by 4.5% (from £598.2 to £625.4m). This additional money is generated by a 2.99% increase in Council Tax, and an increase in grants received from the Government.

The proposals will be presented at a scrutiny meeting in January, then put forward for approval by councillors in February.

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

"I've worked with my colleagues to propose a budget which will not see any reductions in our services, and invests further where it is most needed. Our aim is always to provide the best possible services for everyone in Suffolk and provide value for money.

"This has been a difficult budget to consider, particularly as Covid continues to make life challenging on every level, including our finances.

“We also continue to face rising costs and hugely increasing demands on our services year on year, particularly our adult care and children’s services.

“But this is a budget which helps us to respond to these demands, and meets our priorities for next year. For example increasing our family services budget by £1.1m from next year, to specifically to address the recommendations made by the recent independent SEND review – this is in addition to our previous commitment of £45m to develop SEND provision.”

The council’s priorities are to:

- promote and support the health and wellbeing of all people in Suffolk
- strengthen the local economy
- protect and enhance the environment
- provide value for money for the Suffolk taxpayer

Some of the detail of the budget proposals, includes:

- £1.1m increase for the family services budget, specifically to address recommendations made by the recent independent SEND review
- £1m additional funding for Suffolk Highways over the next four years, for example to fund road signs and responsible verge cutting
- £10m to specifically deliver an increasing number of drainage schemes (over the next three years)
- £10m to improve footpath quality and access (over the next three years)
- £12.8m to decarbonise the buildings that we own (by 2030)
- Investments this year to set up future borrowing for bigger schemes, such as SEND and carbon reduction

Regarding Council Tax, the proposed 2.99% increase would be made up of a 1.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 1.00% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

This means costs for a household would look like:

- Band D property: £27.60 per week (80 pence per week increase from 2021-22)
- Band B property: £21.47 per week (62 pence per week increase from 2021-22) (Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)

Councillor Rout continued:

“Proposing an increase in council tax is not a decision we take lightly, particularly when our costs of living are going up too.

“However, I think there is increasing recognition of the pressure our services are under. In our public consultation, there were more people who agreed that council tax would need to go up next year, compared to those that didn’t. This was especially true for funding adult care.

“By paying this extra each week, we are all helping the council to provide its key services, and helping support those who need it most.

“If anyone does have concerns about paying their council tax, they may be eligible for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which is managed by our borough and district councils. You could receive help if you are on a low income, even if you are working.”

The budget proposals will be presented at a Scrutiny Meeting on Tuesday 11 January 2022, with the final budget discussed at a Full Council meeting on 17 February 2022.

The Scrutiny 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

January 2022

Council prepares budgets for its finances and the environment Suffolk County Council waives fees for Platinum Jubilee events

To mark the celebration of Her Majesty the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee, Suffolk County Council will be waiving street party road closure fees.

On Sunday 6 February 2022, Her Majesty the Queen celebrated her Platinum Jubilee, marking 70 years of service. To celebrate this milestone, events will be taking place across the Country, particularly over the four-day Bank Holiday weekend, between 2 and 5 June 2022. This bank holiday gives communities and people throughout the UK the opportunity to come together and celebrate with their neighbours.

For all events on Sunday 5 June 2022, which is being referred to nationally as the ‘Big Jubilee Lunch’, Suffolk County Council will not be charging fees normally associated with road closures.

The following website has been set up for those who are looking to organise a street party as a group of residents, or as a local authority, for an event in a large public space, such as a park:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/PlatinumJubileeEvent>.

If any applications are received after 11pm on Sunday 27 March 2022, these may still be processed. However, Suffolk County Council cannot cover the costs of traffic management for the event, nor will Suffolk County Council be able to provide any form of traffic management equipment. This is due to possible supply chain constraints and other operational demands.

For full details, including street party event criteria, information on insurance and licences, please ensure you visit this link <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/PlatinumJubileeEvent>

If you have any queries, please contact Suffolk County Councils Customer Services team on 0345 606 6171 or email customer.services@suffolk.gov.uk

Find more information on how to get involved in celebrating Her Majesty's historic reign, at platinumjubilee.gov.uk.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member responsible for Operational Highways, said:

“This is a prestigious achievement for Her Majesty the Queen. To help celebrations get underway, I am glad to announce that we will be waiving fees for the events on Sunday 5 June, allowing communities to come together across Suffolk, whether it be a small gathering in a local street, or a larger event, organised by town or parish councils.

“I would like to offer my thanks to the teams involved in bringing this together, whether it be from the planning, to the delivery and collection of traffic management equipment.

“I look forward to seeing such events take place, and we welcome your photos or videos to be posted to Twitter via [@SuffolkCC](#) or [@Suff_highways](#)”

Council’s Net Zero ambitions aim high with first-ever full carbon budget and biodiversity commitment

In January 2021, Suffolk County Council published proposals for its first-ever full carbon budget, as it strives to be a Net Zero organisation by 2030.

- Inaugural full carbon budget to be presented alongside financial budget
- Policy to enhance biodiversity across 30% of Suffolk County Council’s estate

The Net Zero Carbon Budget will allow the council to measure its carbon emissions, and monitor and evaluate the impact of decisions it makes. This will mean it can report each year on its progress, tracking its ambitions towards Net Zero.

There are many activities which the council will monitor, from the energy used powering its buildings to the miles travelled by council workers, from the waste it disposes to the fuel used to run buses and gritters.

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

“This is an historic budget – the first full budget of its kind that the council has ever produced. Becoming a Net Zero organisation by 2030 is incredibly ambitious, but I’m committed to doing everything we can to realise that vision.

“It’s incredibly challenging to have an exact figure for every last gram of CO2 that the council emits. But our officers have worked incredibly hard to collate data so far, giving us a baseline against which we can measure our future emissions. We’ll continue to improve how we gather this data so that we can see our progress to Net Zero by 2030.

“The pandemic has also changed many of our routines, not least around travel and working from home. During 2021/22 we estimate that council workers saw a reduction of about 1.5 million miles commuting in their own vehicles, and around 1,800 working weeks of driving. We will continue to learn as we look to new ways of working at the council.”

Suffolk County Council recently announced a £12.8 million investment to begin decarbonising the buildings that it owns, reducing emissions and making them cheaper to run. We have a history of providing dedicated investment to improve the energy efficiency of our buildings and services. This has led to reductions in carbon emissions in recent years, through projects such as replacing fossil fuel boilers with bio-mass units, installing solar panels and solar hot water systems, rainwater harvesting, updating lighting and improving insulation.

Growing Suffolk's Biodiversity

Proposals have also been published which would see Suffolk County Council enhance the biodiversity value of at least 30% of its land and assets by 2030.

It would also see the council working with partners, communities and landowners to help substantially reverse the decline of biodiversity across Suffolk.

The proposed policy is a result of the work undertaken by the Policy Development Panel (PDP) which was set up in July 2021.

Councillor Rout said:

“We want to grow Suffolk’s biodiversity, using our role as a significant landowner and as the highway authority to help wildlife to thrive and to support nature’s recovery. We want to extend the great work already going on through our protected landscapes and projects, such as our Roadside Nature Reserves, to increase habitats and species across the county.

“We will ensure we manage our highway verges for biodiversity wherever we can and support our county farm tenants to enhance biodiversity across our farm estate, as we have done through planting around twenty kilometres of mixed species hedgerows over the last two years. We will also deliver twice the biodiversity net gain required through our housing programme and work with our partners and local communities to enhance biodiversity on our properties.

“There is a clear link with our Net Zero ambitions for the county, with Suffolk’s nature being an integral part of the carbon cycle. I want to ensure that the council is doing everything it can to support nature in the fight to slow climate change, and to show leadership in Suffolk in the way that we look after our natural environment.”

The policy proposal includes ambitions which stretch across the whole organisation, from looking at how it manages highway trees to the impact of street lighting, from how it procures goods and services to the potential nature-based flood management solutions.

The Net Zero Carbon Budget proposal will be presented at the Cabinet meeting on 1 February 2022 and discussed at the Full Council meeting on 17 February 2022. The Biodiversity PDP proposal will be presented at the Cabinet meeting on 1 February 2022 and can be immediately implemented if agreed.

Warm Homes Suffolk Fund to heat up cold homes this winter

It was announced in late January 2022 that residents can cut energy costs and reduce their carbon through a new scheme.

Suffolk residents who are struggling to keep their homes warm, can contact a new project which offers funding and free advice at www.warmhomessuffolk.org.

Suffolk's councils have joined together to establish Warm Homes Suffolk, which launches today. The team will be on hand to offer expert advice on reducing energy bills, energy usage and identify benefits that residents may be entitled to, to help keep their homes warm.

The work of Warm Homes Suffolk will also help the county towards its target of Net Zero by 2030, as the project aims to better insulate homes and provide more efficient heating, meaning less carbon is released into the atmosphere.

A successful bid was made to the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) for £2.7 million pounds of funding to run Warm Homes Suffolk - The Warm Feeling Fund. This is part of the Government's (Local Authority Delivery phase two) LAD2 Scheme, designed to improve the energy efficiency of Britain's homes.

The bid was led by Suffolk County Council, on behalf of all councils in the county.

Councillor Andy Drummond, Chair of the Suffolk Environment Cabinet Members group, said:

"With an imminent spike in energy costs for all households, Suffolk's authorities have joined together to offer valuable support and advice to residents. We want to assure people that help is out there, so that you don't have to live in a cold house, or become unwell, by worrying about your energy bills.

"If you, or anyone you know is having difficulty heating their home, or is concerned about their energy bills, please get in touch with Warm Homes Suffolk."

For eligible residents, the scheme can offer a range of home upgrades, including cavity, loft and external insulation, installation of solar photovoltaic systems and switching central heating to more efficient low carbon heat pumps.

The scheme is available to homeowners, those renting and landlords. There are some conditions to meet before being able to access funding, which is aimed at residents who are:

- earning under £30,000 per annum
- currently receiving benefits (or think you may be eligible)
- living in homes with a low energy rating

If you are a landlord with tenants and property that meet the above criteria, then you could receive a subsidy of up to two-thirds for work which improves the energy efficiency of your property, up to the value of £5,000.

More details and further information about eligibility can be found in the on the Warm Home Suffolk website www.warmhomessuffolk.org, or by calling **03456 037 686**. Lines are open Monday to Friday between 9am and 4pm.

February 2022

Council's commitment to further enhancing Suffolk's natural environment

It was announced in February 2022 that Suffolk County Council will be doing even more for the county's natural environment.

Suffolk County Council will be doing even more for the county's natural environment, as it confirms plans to enhance the biodiversity of at least 30% of its land and assets, by 2030.

This means it will be progressing its work around managing highway trees, planting more hedgerow, nature-based flood management solutions, roadside nature reserves, and much more.

The council already planted 100,000 trees last year, and is on course to plant another 100,000 this year. It has also put in around 20 kilometres of mixed species hedgerow.

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

"Biodiversity is in decline nationally, and across the globe. These plans are not just about stopping its decline here in Suffolk, but reversing it. By 2030 we want to see much more biodiversity on our estate than there is now.

"The council can have great influence on the natural environment, as we are a significant landowner, we are the highway authority and we build new housing.

"We have made a lot of progress in recent years, not least with our tree planting, having committed to £400,000 from our Suffolk 2020 Fund. Just a few months ago we secured more funding from the Forestry Commission, on behalf of our borough and district councils, to plant trees in neglected and disused community spaces, bringing them back to life.

"We will ensure we manage our highway verges for biodiversity wherever we can; we will support our county farm tenants to enhance biodiversity across our farm estate; we will deliver twice the biodiversity net gain required through our housing programme.

"By working with our partners and local communities, we can help wildlife to thrive, increase habitats and species across the county, and reverse the decline we've seen."

The plans will also help work towards the council's ambitions of being a Net Zero organisation by 2030, with Suffolk's nature being an integral part of the carbon cycle.

The policy's ambitions stretch across the whole organisation, from looking at the impact of street lighting, to how it procures goods and services.

One example of the positive changes that the council will make, is to stop using Glyphosate in all highway maintenance operations. This will happen as soon as it is able to deploy a suitable alternative, and at the latest by 2023 for routine weed treatment programmes. The council will work with other local authorities, both locally and through the Local Government Association, in reaching this goal as soon as possible.

The proposals were agreed at Suffolk County Council's Cabinet meeting on 1 February 2022, following the work undertaken by the Policy Development Panel which was set up in July 2021.

Suffolk cements commitment to keeping its communities safe

A new strategy was published in February 2022 outlining how Suffolk will address Violence Against Women and Girls has been published today.

The strategy has been prepared collaboratively by the Safer Stronger Communities Board (SSCB) – consisting of representatives from Suffolk County Council, district and borough councils, the police, Suffolk’s Police & Crime Commissioner, community safety partnerships, health and probation services, the Norfolk & Suffolk Criminal Justice Board and Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership.

All board members hold a shared ambition to tackle the incredibly important issue of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) which includes, but is not limited to, domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking, coercive and controlling behaviour, and revenge porn – all of which have a devastating impact on victim-survivors, families, and communities.

Much work has been done on preventing VAWG since the launch of the county’s first strategy in 2018, which led to the establishment of Suffolk’s 24/7 domestic abuse helpline, additional accommodation for survivors and the creation of a Domestic Abuse Perpetrators Unit to help offenders address and alter their behaviour.

However, with recent figures showing an increase in sexual offences and domestic violence nationally, the board recognises the need to continue to drive forward positive change through effective partnership working.

Suffolk’s new VAWG Strategy outlines how this will be achieved in the county, with four key objectives – prevention, supporting victims, pursuing perpetrators, and strengthening the system – forming the basis for its approach.

Relevant strategies, policies, and legislation, including the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the police and Government’s response to VAWG, have also been reflected to enable Suffolk to complement the national effort.

In addition, the strategy will be accompanied by an action plan for 2022 – 2025 to help ensure meaningful activity. This has been informed by members of the board, local charities, and domestic abuse survivors – who praised the system for enabling them to co-create proposals and have their say.

To support the board in implementing both the strategy and action plan, Suffolk County Council has contributed £350,000 towards this.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Chair of the Safer Stronger Communities Board and Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Public Health, Public Protection and Communities, commented:

“Although Suffolk remains a safe place to live and work for many, crimes against women and girls are still happening daily, with these often underpinned by outdated attitudes and prejudice.

“Whilst much work has already been done to tackle this horrific behaviour, we will not stop until every woman and girl in Suffolk feels safe in their community or at home.

“I welcome the new Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy to help achieve this aim and would like to thank all those who have been involved in its creation, especially the survivors who have been instrumental in helping us to shape proposals to stop others from being victims of this devastating abuse in future.

“It’s great news that the strategy will also be supported by significant funding from our council – cementing our continued commitment to protecting our communities.”

Whilst the strategy is focused primarily on preventing VAWG, due to these crimes often disproportionately affecting this gender, work will still be undertaken to support men and boys, as well as those that are transgender, non-binary or gender non-conforming.

The strategy is available to [view online here](#).

Good news for Suffolk as Government gives the green light to negotiate a County Deal

Published in February 2022, Leader of the Council, Matthew Hicks, reflected on the news that Suffolk County Council was given the go ahead to negotiate a County Deal

Leader of Suffolk County Council, Councillor Matthew Hicks, explains why a new county deal is good for Suffolk, and why we don’t need a new Mayor.

In August last year, I wrote about the efforts of Suffolk’s Public Sector Leaders in working to secure from the Government a devolution deal for Suffolk. Last week, at the same time as the publication of the Levelling Up White Paper, we heard the news that Suffolk was successfully chosen as one of nine areas across the country to have been given the opportunity of negotiating a new County Deal.

This is fantastic news for Suffolk, and I am delighted about it.

One of the questions I’ve heard a lot since the announcement is, what would a deal mean for Suffolk? To clarify we do not have a deal yet, and we have many more months of negotiations and discussions with Government ahead of us before we can look to finalise an actual deal.

Some of the areas we included in our initial discussion centred around the development and roll out of Oyster style travel cards to increase the attractiveness and effectiveness of public transport and longer term funding for major transport infrastructure upgrades, not just one-off funding.

We also discussed with Government the opportunity of keeping all the apprenticeship levy funding raised in Suffolk in Suffolk, benefiting more people here. This could create the opportunity to work with the University, colleges, business and others to explore how this money could be better used.

Negotiating the devolution of the powers necessary to develop more innovative projects to help deliver further action on Climate Change and make good on our promises around net

zero by 2030 are also possible. Whilst I was delighted to read the other day that in a recent study Suffolk County Council was ranked as the third-best county council nationally for our response to the climate crisis, our ambitions in this area could be taken further still via a County Deal.

What I can promise you, however, is that during the negotiations I will be pushing the Government for the maximum amount of benefit for the people of Suffolk.

Finally, one of the areas related to this announcement which gained a lot of attention, especially from the media, was the potential for a directly elected Mayor of Suffolk, like the Metropolitan Mayors across the country in areas like the West Midlands. Let me say here and now, this is not something which Suffolk has asked for and importantly not something we need to secure a deal with Government.

Whilst of course we recognise the work of such Mayors like Andy Street and Ben Houchen, this additional level of oversight is not needed for our deal given the strong levels of co-operation and leadership already found here in Suffolk. Do not forget, this opportunity is the result of an ongoing dialogue to promote Suffolk to central Government strongly supported by our MPs and the partnership working with district and borough councils. Going forward this partnership working will continue alongside health partners, emergency services, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chamber of Commerce.

I have always been ambitious for Suffolk, and I believe the opportunities within a County Deal would help unlock more potential in Suffolk and help us level up across the county; especially as we start to slowly escape the clutches of COVID. We will negotiate hard for a deal that will give us the tools we need to build back better, build back stronger and build back greener.

Halfway mark reached as over 20,000 Suffolk streetlights replaced

In February 2022 Suffolk County Council's programme to replace 43,400 streetlights with new energy-efficient LEDs reached the halfway mark.

Contractor, Bouygues Energies & Services begins work in Ipswich.

To date, the teams have replaced 21,215 new streetlights with the new lanterns and are well on the way to successfully delivering the project on budget and to programme timescales.

These LED lanterns use less energy and produce a more natural and focused light than the traditional orange glow of streetlights. They are extremely long-lasting products and have an expected lifetime of up to 100,000 hours. This is approximately two times longer than a typical conventional street lighting lamp. As a result, Suffolk County Council is expecting to reduce its annual electricity costs on the streetlights by around 76%, saving more than £1.7 million a year. This is 16% more than what was originally anticipated.

The programme is on schedule to be completed by the end of May 2022, with all heritage-style lanterns being upgraded towards the end of the programme. Prior to commencing in towns or parishes, Suffolk Highways is contacting those councils in case they wish to upgrade their parish-council owned street-lighting at the end of the project.

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

“I recently visited the team working in Ipswich and am very impressed to see the speed at which they are moving across the county to get this work completed. This is one of the many pieces of work we’re doing to become a carbon-neutral organisation by 2030.

“The project will see a reduction in carbon emissions by saving energy, reducing light pollution as well as providing clearer images on CCTV, traffic cameras and dashcam footage for the benefit of public safety. A big thank you to all involved so far, and I wish the team continued success as the project progresses towards completion.”

Iain Blackmore, Strategic Director at Bouygues Energies & Services, said:

“As we continue to support Suffolk County Council’s ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030, we are proud to have now completed 20,000 street lighting upgrades. Switching to LED street lighting should reduce the electrical energy cost for the local authority by at least 76% and more than double the lighting’s lifespan. It’s a real pleasure to work in partnership with such a forward thinking authority.”

Keep a look out for signs in your area to see where the teams are working next and follow [@Suff_highways](#) on Twitter for regular updates.

March 2022

First section of Gull Wing bridge in Lowestoft arrives

At the beginning of March 2022, the first major steel section of the Gull Wing bridge in Lowestoft arrived.

The North Approach Viaduct (NAV1) section arrived at the construction site on Lake Lothing on Tuesday March 1 on a barge following a 32-hour crossing from Ghent in Belgium.

Leading building and civil engineering contractor Farrans is constructing the bridge for Suffolk County Council.

Fabricated by Victor Buyck Steel Construction, NAV1 is approximately 55m long.

On delivery it weighed 380 tonnes and, when ready to move into its final position spanning the East Suffolk railway line, it will weigh approximately 1,450 tonnes.

The complex process of navigating the barge into the inner harbour and then transferring the steel structure from the barge on to the site was overseen by a team of experienced civil engineers, port masters and marine experts.

In the coming days it will be moved to a special platform where a concrete slab deck will be cast in situ before the entire span is moved and placed in its final position during a weekend long railway possession.

NAV 1's arrival was dependent on weather conditions remaining favourable and it needed to arrive during a slack tide to travel into the inner harbour.

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

"I am delighted to welcome the arrival of the first section of a bridge that will make a huge difference to people and businesses in Lowestoft for many years to come.

"It will remove a major impediment to growth by reducing congestion and improving connectivity, something that is central to the regeneration of not just Lowestoft but the wider Suffolk and Norfolk region."

Peter Aldous, MP for Waveney, said:

"This is an exciting development as people can now begin seeing for themselves the bridge taking shape.

"Once complete it will transform the way we move around and do business in Lowestoft and will be a landmark of which we can all be proud."

Suffolk County Council's leaving care service receives high praise from Ofsted

In March 2022, Suffolk County Council's leaving care service received high praise from Ofsted.

Ofsted inspectors assessed the local authority's arrangement for care leavers as part of a focused visit to the service. The visit follows on from the Outstanding rating received by SCC's Children's Services department in 2019. The services for children in care and care leavers was the only area at the time to be rated 'Good' and therefore was an area of priority for the council.

At the recent visit inspectors concluded that care leavers are successfully helped to transition to independence and reach their full potential. The service was seen to have a culture that is "determined, ambitious and creative" with practitioners who build trusting relationships with care leavers. Practitioners were seen accessing a wide range of specialist expertise to provide services to care leavers that are individualised and responsive.

Inspectors also said that "Many care leavers achieve well, exceeding their own expectations. All are valued and their achievements are celebrated. Persistent efforts are made to reach out to those who are difficult to engage."

James Reeder, Cabinet member for Children and Young People's Services said:

"I am absolutely delighted to receive such high praise from Ofsted. This report really demonstrates the hard work that staff in the leaving care service deliver day in, day out. I would like to thank them for the great work that they do for our care leavers.

"We are committed to delivering the highest quality service for our care leavers in Suffolk. All young people have the right to the appropriate level of support they need to aspire and achieve. I am committed to ensuring that this is the reality for all of Suffolk's young people, including our most vulnerable."

The full report can be found here: <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50178373>

Equality and communities to get higher profile in Suffolk County Council cabinet changes

A new cabinet role was established in March 2022.

Equality and support for local communities are to get greater focus among Suffolk County Council's Cabinet team when a new cabinet member starts on 7 March.

Councillor Bobby Bennett will join Suffolk County Council's cabinet as cabinet member for equality and communities, where she will take specific responsibility for the authority's policy decisions on safer and stronger communities, community safety (including domestic abuse, prevent and violence against women and girls), equality, libraries, the voluntary sector, arts and heritage, coroner services, customer services, Citizens Advice, gypsy and traveller services and human resources.

Responding to her appointment, Councillor Bennett said:

"COVID-19 has impacted on everyone, but it's clear that this has been the case for some communities more than others. Now is a critical time to focus on improving the health and wellbeing of Suffolk residents - redressing the inequalities that have been exacerbated in the last two years.

"We know that the pandemic has shown just how inspirational and impactful local people, voluntary groups and community organisations can be at supporting one another in times of need. My ambition is for the county council to support and work even closer with our communities - so that we can harness that energy and influence.

"I'm thrilled to be appointed into this role."

At the same time, Councillor Philip Faircloth-Mutton will become deputy cabinet member for transformation – supporting Councillor Richard Rout and helping to oversee the council's major service improvement and development programmes. He also starts his new role on Monday 7 March.

Councillor Faircloth-Mutton said:

"Suffolk County Council has been transforming services and the way it works for many years – making significant budget savings and, by doing so, improving value for money for residents. But that work never stops in local government.

"Working with my colleagues, I'm focused on ensuring our next phase of transformation programmes fully deliver the benefits we are seeking, including looking after our health and wellbeing, strengthening our local economy, protecting and enhancing our environment and, at all times, providing value for money for residents.

"This is an exciting opportunity and I look forward to working with councillors, staff and partners to make a success of it."

Both appointments were made by the leader of Suffolk County Council, Councillor Matthew Hicks, in line with the council's constitution.

Councillor Hicks said:

“My way of working has always been inclusive – utilising the strengths and ideas of a wide range of people to deliver the best possible results. I am therefore delighted to welcome Councillors Bennett and Faircloth-Mutton into their new roles and look forward to working with them, my group and others to deliver our policy objectives in the coming years.”

The changes mean Councillor Andrew Reid’s previously very large portfolio will effectively be divided - with him becoming cabinet member for public health and public protection. He will be responsible for public health, trading standards, emergency planning, Suffolk Fire and Rescue, health and safety and rural affairs.