

March 2024 Town and Parish Newsletter

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

Contents

[Page 4 - 98% of pupils receive a place at one of their preferred Secondary Schools on National Offer Day](#)

This year parents and carers of 98% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred schools and 93% were offered a place at their first preference school.

[Page 4 - New Suffolk campaign urges drivers to switch their engines off](#)

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

[Page 5 - Parents can now opt-in for Suffolk County Council funded school travel for 2024/2025](#)

Families of children starting secondary school in September 2024 will receive an e-mail by the end of March if they are eligible for SCC-funded school travel.

[Page 6 - Final bascule span arrives for Gull Wing bridge](#)

The final section of the Gull Wing Bridge in Lowestoft has arrived bringing the completion of this significant infrastructure project one step closer.

[Page 7 - Suffolk County Council considers LionLink proposals unacceptable and unfair](#)

Suffolk County Council believes that the failure of two National Grid offshore projects to coordinate with each other, will cause irreversible damage to important landscapes in the county.

[Page 8 - Foxhall Recycling Centre officially opens](#)

The Lord-Lieutenant of Suffolk, Clare, Countess of Euston officially opened the new and improved Foxhall Recycling Centre today to herald a new era of reuse and recycling in Ipswich.

[Page 9 - Funding boost for new and existing bus services across Suffolk](#)

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

[Page 10 - Largest and longest-running walking festival kicks off its 16th instalment in Suffolk](#)

The Suffolk Walking Festival which kicks off on Saturday 11 May, takes place over two weeks and boasts a plethora of walks to suit all ages and backgrounds.

[Page 11 - Council objects to pylons between Bramford and Twinstead](#)

Suffolk County Council has formally objected to National Grid's plans for 29 km of electricity pylons and cabling between Bramford and Twinstead.

[Page 12 - Empowering Suffolk's Future: Have your say on proposed devolution deal for Suffolk](#)

People across Suffolk are being asked for their views on a proposed, in principle, devolution deal that would hand Suffolk greater decision-making powers and control of more than half a billion pounds of public funding.

[Page 12 - Suffolk to benefit from huge £7.3 million EV investment](#)

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

[Page 14 - Suffolk becomes a Good Journey county](#)

Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Growth partnership launch new Initiative to promote car-free travel to county visitor attractions.

[Page 15 - 500th business receives Carbon Charter award](#)

A business near Sudbury has been presented with a special award for their carbon reduction and environmental work.

[Page 17 - Recognising our social workers and how they support others to live well](#)

Column by Councillor Beccy Hopfensperger, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Adult Care.

[Page 18 - Communities deserve transparency and fairness with all energy plans, demands Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment](#)

Suffolk County Council is today calling for greater transparency and fairness for communities following the release of new plans for a 750-acre solar farm in Mid Suffolk.

[Page 19 - Even more potholes filled as Roadmender trial hits Suffolk](#)

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

[Page 20 - Council welcomes £11 million new investment into SEND services](#)

Suffolk County Council is set to receive an additional £ 10.9 million to create new specialist places for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

[Page 21 - Suffolk Business Board appoints interim chair](#)

Mark Pendlington, local business leader and former High Sheriff of Suffolk, has been appointed interim chair of the new Suffolk Business Board.

98% of pupils receive a place at one of their preferred Secondary Schools on National Offer Day

This year parents and carers of 98% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred schools and 93% were offered a place at their first preference school.

Suffolk County Council received 7,867 applications from parents and carers indicating which secondary school they would prefer their child to transfer to in September 2024.

Families who applied online can log in to the online service from today to see the school their child has been offered. They will also receive an email to confirm this offer, unless they have indicated that they do not wish to. Letters will be sent to parents who made a paper application by second class post today (1 March 2024).

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

It is great to see that the majority of families have been offered a place at one of their preferred secondary schools. We do appreciate that not all families will have received a place at their preferred school. If this is the case and a parent or carer's preference for a Suffolk school has been refused, their child's name will automatically be added to the waiting list for that school. Parents and carers will also be advised how to lodge an appeal should they wish to do so.

Published criteria were used to decide which children had priority for school places to ensure that the process was fair and clear.

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

Further information on secondary school admissions can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions.

New Suffolk campaign urges drivers to switch their engines off

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parents can now opt-in for Suffolk County Council funded school travel for 2024/2025

If parents have a child who is already receiving SCC funded school travel, they must opt-in by 31 May 2024 to continue to receive it.

Families of children starting secondary school in September 2024 will receive an e-mail by the end of March if they are eligible for SCC funded school travel.

If parents have a child starting primary school in September 2024, they should not opt-in until they receive the offer of a school place. If they are eligible for SCC funded school travel they will be contacted by 10 May 2024.

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

It is important that parents opt-in for SCC funded school travel by 31 May 2024 to ensure that transport is in place for the start of the new school year. If your child is starting secondary school in September, we will contact you by the end of March to let you know if they are

eligible. If your child already receives SCC funded school travel, you must opt in every year to continue to receive it.

If a child is not eligible for SCC funded school travel but their parents wish to purchase a spare seat, they may do so from 1 July 2024.

To opt-in or for more information on the SCC school travel policy please visit: www.suffolkonboard.com/opt-in

Final bascule span arrives for Gull Wing bridge

The final section of the Gull Wing Bridge in Lowestoft has arrived bringing the completion of this significant infrastructure project one step closer.

Subject to favourable weather conditions, Lake Lothing will now be closed to marine traffic for three weeks from Friday 8 March while the main bascule span is installed.

The bascule span is 39.5m long, 22m wide and 35m tall and will weigh approx. 1120 tonnes when delivered to site and positioned. This is made up of 750 tonnes of permanent structural steelwork and an additional 370 tonnes of temporary ballast to ensure the bridge stability during installation.

An additional counterweight of heavyweight concrete will be placed within the J-beams during the installation and commissioning phase of approx. 380 tonnes resulting in the total weight of the bridge during operation being approx. 1100 tonnes.

The bridge, when installed, will sit clear of the highest tide by 12m, meaning that the tips of the J-beams will usually be well over 50m above the sea below. When the bridge is rolled back in the open position, the end of the bridge span that carries the road will be over 60m above the tide below.

The completed bascule bridge will be the largest rolling bascule bridge in the world lifted using hydraulic cylinders.

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

“The arrival of the bascule span into Lowestoft signals that we are in the home stretch of this significant project. The long-awaited Gull Wing bridge will make travel between north and south Lowestoft easier, reduce traffic congestion, and be a catalyst for regeneration. It is a promise delivered for the people of Lowestoft and Suffolk.”

Simon Bretherton, Project Director at Suffolk County Council, said:

“As well as the most challenging, this is the most impressive of all the Gull Wing deliveries and the huge J beams will transform Lowestoft’s skyline. Over the coming days, we will begin positioning the bascule span ready for its installation. There are still challenges and risks to

overcome, but, once installed, we will enter into the final commissioning phase and begin making preparations for opening the bridge to the public.”

Suffolk County Council considers LionLink proposals unacceptable and unfair

Suffolk County Council believes that the failure of two National Grid offshore projects to coordinate with each other, will cause irreversible damage to important landscapes in the county.

The council considers that the proposed LionLink and Sea Link projects could share infrastructure where cabling is already proposed to come onshore at Aldeburgh, by the Sea Link project which is at a more advanced planning stage.

LionLink is an interconnector being proposed by National Grid Ventures. Sea Link is an electrical cabling and infrastructure project being proposed by National Grid Electricity Transmission – a different member of the National Grid family.

However, the LionLink project has today (6 March 2024) published details to say that it has no intention to coordinate with Sea Link at Aldeburgh, instead it is proposing a separate landing point at either Southwold or Walberswick.

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

“The high handed and process driven approach by National Grid Ventures is totally unacceptable. They are showing a complete lack of respect to Suffolk and its coastal communities.

“The absence of coordination between the Sea Link and LionLink projects will, if they are consented, result in over 10 miles of some of the most sensitive and important landscapes in the UK being dug up to create more trenches for more cabling.

“This additional and unnecessary destruction of the Suffolk countryside and natural environment could be wholly avoided, if there was project coordination – something we have been calling for, for years.

“If LionLink has to make landfall in Suffolk, it must do all it can to minimise harm to our local communities and landscapes.

“The public, the Planning Inspectorate, and ultimately the Secretary of State at the Department of Energy and Net Zero, must have the opportunity to fully consider coordination with the Sea Link project as an alternative to Southwold or Walberswick. This would make for a much fairer process for all, and a better understanding for everyone concerned.”

The council’s submission to the last non-statutory consultation for LionLink [can be read here](#). National Grid Ventures expected to submit a Development Consent Order application in 2025.

Foxhall Recycling Centre officially opens

The Lord-Lieutenant of Suffolk, Clare, Countess of Euston officially opened the new and improved Foxhall Recycling Centre today to herald a new era of reuse and recycling in Ipswich.

Improvements to the site's layout, access and capacity will make it easier than ever before for Suffolk residents to reuse and recycle their rubbish.

Work on the redevelopment commenced in October 2022 and reopened fully to the public, ahead of schedule, in December 2023. **Today** marked the site's official opening.

The new site, designed by Concertus Design and Property Consultants and built by RG Carter, increases capacity for vehicles on site, improves access from Foxhall Road and reduces queuing on the highway.

It also has a new raised level construction, giving better access to containers for users without the need for stairs.

Improvements have also been made to the site's Re-use shop, which sells furniture, sports equipment, kitchen supplies, books, toys and bric-a-brac collected at Suffolk's recycling centres and which would otherwise have been disposed of as waste.

The Lord-Lieutenant of Suffolk, Clare, Countess of Euston, who officiated at the event and declared the facility to be open, said:

"I'm delighted to have been able to open the new, improved Foxhall Recycling Centre today. As a keen recycler myself, I know the importance of recycling and re-using items to prolong their life. I took great pleasure in visiting the Re-use shop; the Benjamin Foundation do a fantastic job keeping items in circulation and it supports the great charity work they do for young people and families across Suffolk and Norfolk."

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

"Moving waste up the hierarchy is one of our main priorities when it comes to managing waste and Foxhall Recycling Centre is designed to do just that. The Re-use shop is at the start of the journey into the recycling centre, prompting site users to see if their items could be used again by someone else. The layout of the new site makes recycling easier for the public and helps to future-proof the recycling service for years to come."

The redevelopment was supported by East Suffolk Council, who contributed £958,914 through the Community Infrastructure Levy on development schemes.

Funding boost for new and existing bus services across Suffolk

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

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

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

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

Schemes awarded funding include:

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

A full list of the successful schemes can be found [here](#).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Largest and longest-running walking festival kicks off its 16th instalment in Suffolk

The Suffolk Walking Festival which kicks off on Saturday 11 May, takes place over two weeks and boasts a plethora of walks to suit all ages and backgrounds.

Now in its 16th year, the festival is one of the largest and longest running walking festivals in the country. The 2024 festival brings many new walks to try but also sees the return of some all-time favourites such as Orford Ness on the Suffolk coast, revealing its fascinating secrets, mindfulness moments in an ancient woodland and relaxed river trips before gentle ambles.

New for 2024 are ventures into the Broads National Park; practicing the ancient Japanese art of Haiku poetry; and a gentle guided walk at Snape with the Ambling African Women, a newly established walking group based in Ipswich, amongst many others.

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

“The much-loved, increasingly popular Suffolk Walking Festival returns more diverse than ever. Now in its 16th year, the festival holds its title as one of the largest and longest-running festivals of its kind in the UK.

“We see the festival grow in popularity year after year, so don’t delay in grabbing your tickets for the 55 walk events on offer.

“The festival highlights some of Suffolk’s most beautiful locations so it’s a great way to explore, get active and meet others doing the same.”

Tickets for this year’s walk are now on sale, visit the [Suffolk Walking Festival website](#) for more details on the programme, to sign up to newsletters, and to buy tickets.

Council objects to pylons between Bramford and Twinstead

Suffolk County Council has formally objected to National Grid’s plans for 29 km of electricity pylons and cabling between Bramford and Twinstead.

The Planning Inspectorate has just concluded its Examination period for the proposal (12 March), where the county council concluded that National Grid has failed to adequately safeguard Suffolk’s environment and communities affected by the scheme.

The council says that proposals do not go far enough to mitigate the impact of the scheme, and that supervision of construction would be inadequate.

The project would see 18 km of overhead lines and around 11 km of underground cable through the Dedham Vale National Landscape and in the Stour Valley.

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

“National Grid’s approach to the building of this project is unacceptable and disappointing, particularly given that we have been working closely with them since 2008 to develop the best possible outcome.

“We and the other local authorities have been clear throughout the development of this scheme regarding its sensitivity, both from the impact of the project itself and from the construction of the project. Therefore, the request for appropriate oversight and safeguards should be no surprise to the applicant.

“We are very concerned about the shortcomings of the proposal. It does not provide us, or other local authorities, with adequate powers to protect the interests of our communities or environment during the construction of the project. This sets a wholly unacceptable precedent for other National Grid projects in Suffolk.

“We all recognise the need to deliver this project at pace, but we are seeking to secure safeguards and control mechanisms that are necessary and reasonable, and that have been agreed to by multiple energy project promoters in Suffolk, and elsewhere - we have been left with no choice but to object.”

Inspectors will now prepare a report for the Secretary of State at the Department of Energy and Net Zero, with a decision expected later in six months’ time.

Empowering Suffolk's Future: Have your say on proposed devolution deal for Suffolk

People across Suffolk are being asked for their views on a proposed, in principle, devolution deal that would hand Suffolk greater decision-making powers and control of more than half a billion pounds of public funding.

In December 2022, Suffolk County Council and the Government signed an in-principle deal to transfer certain powers and funding from London to Suffolk.

Residents and businesses can now share their views about important aspects of the deal, including:

- Control of a new investment fund worth £480m over the next thirty years
- Local control of the Adult Education Budget each year (worth £9.4m in 2025/26)
- £5.8m one-off funding to prepare brownfield sites for development
- Multi-year transport funding plus an additional £500,000 over two years to finalise Suffolk's Local Transport Plan.

If agreed, the proposed deal would also mean that, for the first time, the leader of Suffolk County Council would be directly elected by the people of Suffolk – rather than by county councillors. Once every four years, residents would vote to elect both their local county councillor (as they do now) and the leader of the county council.

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

“This is an important and empowering decision about the future we want for Suffolk. A decision of this significance deserves considered input from the broadest range of people possible, which is why the consultation is open for 10 weeks. I urge everyone to take time to read the details of the deal and then complete to have their say in this consultation.”

Supporting information and details on how to respond are available at www.suffolk.gov.uk/devolution. The consultation opens at 2pm today.

Once the consultation has closed, Suffolk county councillors and Government ministers will consider a report on findings as part of the decision-making process on whether or not to proceed with Suffolk's devolution deal. A decision is expected in July 2024.

Suffolk to benefit from huge £7.3 million EV investment

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

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

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

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

However, the funding will start to provide solutions to some of these issues, with opportunities to develop:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Technology and Decarbonisation Minister Anthony Browne, said:

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

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

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

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

Cllr Rout continues:

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

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

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

Suffolk becomes a Good Journey county

Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Growth Partnership have today launched a new, two-year initiative to encourage visitors to explore more of the county's cultural and leisure destinations on foot, by bike or using public transport.

Working in collaboration with Good Journey, the UK experts in car-free leisure, the initiative will offer incentives and discounts to residents and visitors who leave the car at home and travel sustainably to the county's visitor attractions including museums, theatres, wildlife/nature parks and galleries such as Christchurch Manor in Ipswich, the Gainsborough Museum in Sudbury and RSPB Minsmere.

All of the participating destinations and associated discounts will be featured prominently on the Good Journey website which also includes a selection of curated itineraries suitable for all ages and tastes including:

- ***Exploring the Suffolk coast without a car***: from Lowestoft in the north to the Shotley peninsula in the south.
- ***Car-free accessible Suffolk***: visiting the county's access-friendly attractions.
- ***Film and tv Suffolk locations***: from David Copperfield to Harry Potter, Masters of the Air to Magpie Murders, fascinating locations which can be reached without a car.

The website and journey planning pages for each attraction also feature an easy-to-use journey planning tool.

The new initiative is part of Suffolk’s Greenest County ambition and demonstrates the county’s commitment to having a carbon net zero visitor economy by 2030.

Cllr Alexander Nicoll, Deputy Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy at Suffolk County Council, said:

“I welcome the launch of this new initiative in time for the Easter holidays, just as many of our visitor attractions open their doors for the first time this year. By creating easier access to local attractions by foot, bicycle and public transport, we are strengthening and supporting our local visitor economy, helping residents to live independent and healthy lives, and helping Suffolk on its journey to creating the Greenest County.”

Nat Taplin, CEO of Good Journey, said:

“Suffolk is a wonderful county to explore car-free - whether you’re spotting birds at Minsmere, uncovering treasure at Sutton Hoo or following in the footsteps of Gainsborough. When you leave the car behind you can step right into the landscape, history and nature of Suffolk. You’ll meet people along the way and discover villages and hidden gems instead of speeding past on the main road. Enjoy the view, a picnic, a snooze and a pint in a country pub, without having to worry about driving. Exploring by train, bus, bike and foot turns a day out into a real adventure. And with most single bus tickets costing just £2 however far you travel, plus discounts at top attractions, it’s a great value day out too.”

Richard Hunt, Strategic Lead at Suffolk Growth Partnership, said:

“Car travel emissions are the largest part of Suffolk’s visitor economy carbon footprint and we want to demonstrate to visitors and businesses that there are sustainable car-free travel opportunities that can enhance a visit and experience. Car-free travellers also tend to spend more on their visits, so ‘Suffolk – Good Journey County’ will support business and develop Suffolk’s sustainable tourism ambition. Working with our visitor attractions and transport network we know we can develop some really attractive experiences.”

500th business receives Carbon Charter award

A business near Sudbury has been presented with a special award for their carbon reduction and environmental work.

CEO of Assington Autos Ltd, Frederick Cook (left) is presented with the Carbon Charter Award by Peter Frost (right), Suffolk County Council Environment Strategy Officer. Assington Autos is the 500th local business to be presented with a Carbon Charter Award, from Suffolk County Council. They are one of the biggest ‘End of Life’ vehicle recycling centres in East Anglia, established in 2017 by Frederick Cook - although vehicles have been recycled at the same site for approximately 80 years.

The Carbon Charter is an accreditation for businesses who are committed to reducing their impact on the environment, by cutting their carbon emissions, supporting their local community and developing green spaces.

Frederick Cook, CEO of Assington Autos Ltd, said:

“We focus on how much of a vehicle can be repurposed and recycled, rather than simply being crushed and sold on.

“Vehicles are carefully stripped down, and we’re one of the first in the UK to use quieter lithium battery-powered disc cutters, rather than traditional fossil fuel powered machinery. Each component is inspected for re-use, and liquids such as oil and coolant are removed and dealt with, rather than being allowed to contaminate the natural environment.

“We’re proud of what we’re achieving to reduce our impacts on the environment, particularly being connected with the automobile industry which many might view as a significant contributor to carbon emissions. We’re delighted with the Carbon Charter award, as it shows we’re heading in the right direction and will hopefully inspire others.”

The panel from the Carbon Charter was particularly impressed that despite significant growth in the business, Assington Autos fuel usage has remained the same and has achieved an emissions reduction of 37% in the last two years.

Assington Autos was also praised for its biodiversity efforts onsite and in the wider community, as well as activity in the local community, supporting NHS workers, the local fire and rescue service, food banks and other local community groups.

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

“Assington Autos are doing great things and are an inspiration to other businesses about what can be achieved. Customers are now much more active in their search for suppliers which are reducing their impact on the environment.

“We know many businesses want to reduce emissions, and it can be really daunting to know where to start, particularly for small businesses. But the Carbon Charter is here to help businesses of all sizes, whether they are just starting out on their carbon reduction journey, or looking to refine what they do.”

The Carbon Charter was set up in 2010 by Suffolk County Council and the Environment Agency. Since then, it has given 738 Carbon Charter awards to 500 companies.

For businesses wanting to start on their carbon reduction journey, more information on the Carbon Charter can be found at www.carboncharter.org

Recognising our social workers and how they support others to live well

Column by Councillor Beccy Hopfensperger, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Adult Care.

One of the best parts of my role as Cabinet Member for Adult Care, is getting to meet and speak with some of the amazing Social Care staff we have in Suffolk. This week is Social Work Week, where we recognise our fantastic Social Work teams and the life changing work they do. To celebrate I have decided to take this opportunity to invite Amanda Takavarasha, our Principal Social Worker here in Suffolk, to tell us why this week is important to her, and her colleagues.

"I'm Amanda and I am the Principal Social Worker for Adult Social Care here at Suffolk County Council. This year, the theme of World Social Work Day 'Buen Vivir' is one that is close to my heart. Buen vivir, which directly translated from Spanish means "living well" or "good life", is based on the principle that true wellbeing is realised as part of a community.

Social Work is a global profession and while our work is underpinned by national policies and legislation, we sometimes forget that the work itself is rooted in a globally shared ambition: To help people to live well. The theme this year goes further and reinforces the importance of community-led approaches to Social Work. This approach recognises that people themselves, along with their families, and communities all hold the valuable local wisdom and knowledge about what is important to them, and how that contributes to what they need to achieve to live a good life. These community-led approaches are based on basic principles of Social Work practice including the promotion of personal relationships and upholding human rights in inclusive and respectful ways which encourage and build upon a person's own strengths and abilities.

Amanda Takavarasha, Principal Social Worker for Adult Social Care at Suffolk County Council Social Workers champion the reality that people are experts of their own lived experience, and this chimes with Suffolk County Council's Adult Social Care ambition called 'People at the heart of Care' which sets out how we work with people to live fulfilling and independent lives. We do this by striving to put independence, quality, sustainability and most importantly people's voices at the heart of all we do. Our Social Workers are trained to listen to people's expert understanding of their own circumstances and goals and to maximise every opportunity for people to shape plans for their own support where this is needed.

As Principal Social Worker, I have the privilege of meeting or speaking to people with great stories to tell about the impact that our Social Workers have made on their lives or those of their loved ones. I have spoken to a family carer who described how the digital care solution suggested by her son's Social Worker had been a 'game changer' in enabling him to live independently. Similarly, two young men I recently met shared how their care and support enabled them to "live a normal life" and more importantly, is flexible enough to encourage private family arrangements that work harmoniously alongside their formal care provision.

I was also energised by a recent visit to a local charity called Genesis Orwell in Ipswich, which provides a range of activities for people of all abilities, including carpentry, art, gardening, cookery and repairing second hand bicycles for sale. Another important principle of 'Buen Vivir' is our coexistence with nature, and this came to my mind on my visit to Genesis Orwell. I spent time exploring their service and witnessing how this principle was evident in each activity they provide, as well as in their nature themed décor within the sensory rooms and the materials used to construct their buildings. It was a delight to see happy, fulfilled people living a good life supported by this innovative organisation which our Social Workers can support them to access.

I love being a Social Worker, it is so rewarding to be in a position to help people to live a good life. Social Work isn't always easy, but it is always varied - with every day bringing new challenges, lighter moments of laughter and joy, and opportunities to learn new skills. Social Work is a key part of our society, and I am honoured to be a part of that."

I want to thank Amanda for agreeing to share her thoughts for Social Work Week, I also want to thank her, and all the Social Workers, Occupational Therapists, Care Workers, Carers and others for all the work they do every day to support people to live good, independent lives in Suffolk.

For more information on becoming a social worker, visit www.suffolk.gov.uk/socialwork.

Communities deserve transparency and fairness with all energy plans, demands Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment

Suffolk County Council is today calling for greater transparency and fairness for communities following the release of new plans for a 750-acre solar farm in Mid Suffolk.

Although not published yet, Elmya Energy UK plans to build the White Elm Solar Farm, which covers a 750-acre site in the Mendlesham, Wickham Skeith and Thwaite area. The solar farm would produce 200MW of electricity, include battery storage, and take up land the equivalent of 425 football pitches.

The proposed solar farm will be a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, therefore the decision will be determined by the Secretary of State at the Department of Energy and Net Zero, and not Suffolk County Council, who will only be a statutory consultee.

Plans by Elmya Energy UK are expected shortly.

Councillor Richard Rout, Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

"New solar projects are coming in by the back door, and greater transparency and fairness for our communities is essential.

"The motion to Suffolk County Council that I'm proposing today includes an action to write to the National Energy System Operator, who grants connections to new energy projects like this one,

to ensure that before their new system of regional energy planning works fully, there is proper interim arrangements for communication and coordination with councils and others.

“The County Council will continue to press government and National Grid for coordination, communication and fairness, on behalf of the communities of Suffolk.”

Suffolk County Council is an experienced consultee on large scale solar farm plans, taking a leading role on the scrutiny of the SUNNICA project in West Suffolk.

Councillor Rout added: “The Council’s experience with SUNNICA shows what a bad project looks like, a repeat of this type of approach is just not acceptable. An exemplary project, with exemplary engagement for the Council and communities, is essential.”

Even more potholes filled as Roadmender trial hits Suffolk

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

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

Suffolk Highways welcomed ‘Highway Workforce’ with their Roadmender Elastomac solution - a repair method which results in sealed, longer-lasting pothole repairs; which are quicker to carry out.

The trial which began on 11 March, is eco-friendly and lowers the carbon footprint of repairs by 80% is effectively supporting Suffolk Highways in its fight against the rising number of potholes on the county’s roads.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Council appoints new Executive Director for Children and Young People

Sarah-Jane Smedmor, currently Director of Children’s Services at Central Bedfordshire Council, will be joining the council in July. This newly created senior position holds significant responsibility including children in care, education and SEND, safeguarding, youth justice and fostering and adoption.

Sarah-Jane started her career as a social worker and worked her way to Head of Safeguarding and Standards at Cambridgeshire County Council and then Corporate Director Care and Protection for Children’s Services at Dorset Council before moving to Central Bedfordshire.

Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

“This role carries huge responsibility, including the safeguarding of our most vulnerable children and young people, and demands exceptional skill and expertise, leadership and compassion.

“For a post of such significance, it is right that we went through a thorough and exhaustive national recruitment process to find the right person.

“Sarah-Jane has had an impressive career with children and young people and has a wealth of experience which will hugely benefit the services we deliver to families in Suffolk, including the effective engagement of families and partner organisations.”

One of Sarah-Jane’s priorities when she starts will be to oversee the continued improvement of SEND services. This includes the delivery of the Priority Action Plan as agreed by Ofsted following an inspection in November 2023, and the implementation of a new SEND strategy. Sarah-Jane has managed significant improvement within SEND services in Central Bedfordshire under its Accelerated Progress Plan since her appointment.

She must also address a challenging budgetary situation within children and young people’s services, driven in part by significant demand.

Council welcomes £11 million new investment into SEND services

Suffolk County Council is set to receive an additional £ 10.9 million to create new specialist places for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

The money, announced by the Department for Education, will be used to create new places in mainstream and special schools, as well as other specialist settings, and to improve the suitability and accessibility of existing buildings.

This new funding is in addition to the £55million already invested by Suffolk County Council into creating more than 1,000 new places for students with SEND. Nearly 750 of these places are now open and in use.

The Department for Education also announced it was funding a new SEND school in Suffolk. The Unity Schools Partnership has been selected to sponsor the new Unity SLD School which will provide 126 vital new places in Suffolk for pupils aged between three and 16 with severe learning difficulties. Earlier this month, the Chancellor also announced a new Alternative Provision (AP) free school, the SENDAT New AP Suffolk Free School, in West Suffolk.

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

“Overall councils in the East of England will receive a cash injection of over £83million to create new places for young people with special educational needs and disabilities or who require alternative provision.”

Plans for the how the money will be spent will now be drawn up with education partners.

Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, David Johnston said:

“This government has been creating tens of thousands of special school places so that children who can't have their needs met in mainstream schools get the right type of school place to meet their needs.

“This transformative funding will put local authorities in the East of England on track to support all children to reach their potential, and get the right support, in the right place at the right time.”

Suffolk Business Board appoints interim chair

Mark Pendlington, local business leader and former High Sheriff of Suffolk, has been appointed interim chair of the new Suffolk Business Board.

The appointment is on a one-year interim basis to help mobilise the new Board, which has been created following the integration of Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) functions into Suffolk County Council.

The Business Board has been established to represent the local business community, to help steer Suffolk's economic strategy and to help create a stronger and higher-skilled economy for Suffolk.

Mr Pendlington has worked across the public and private sectors in industry, national and regional voluntary organisations, further and higher education, economic development bodies and academia, and also served as the High Sheriff of Suffolk from 2023-24.

Mr Pendlington said:

“The Suffolk economy is full of innovation, ideas and entrepreneurship. Many world-class businesses are located here, together with thousands more with big ambitions for growth. The new Suffolk Business Board will build on the strong legacy of the New Anglia LEP and its programmes and investments that have secured inward investment, improved skills and new jobs. Drawing on senior expertise, including from business, education, local authorities and the voluntary sector, the new Board will help to drive growth and opportunity across the Suffolk economy. I am delighted to have been invited to help get the Board up and running, and to work with the County Council to help make Suffolk a powerhouse of opportunity and one of the best locations in the UK to live, work and learn.”

Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, will serve as deputy chair.

Cllr Hicks said:

“Mark Pendlington’s extensive experience will be invaluable as we launch the new Suffolk Business Board, which will be a strong voice of business in Suffolk. Together we will develop a programme to support business growth and skills in the county and create new economic opportunities for our residents and businesses.”

Recruitment is underway for the rest of the Board, which will include representatives from business, education, and Suffolk’s other local authorities.

The Business Board will be supported by Suffolk County Council’s Economic Development team, which includes officers who have transferred into the council from the LEP.