

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – AUGUST 2024



Cllr Stephen Burroughes - Framlingham Division

• FIRE SERVICE URGES PEOPLE TO STAY SAFE THIS SUMMER

With summer well and truly here, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is asking everyone to be fire safety aware. Last summer firefighters from the service responded to more than 200 fires in the open, which includes woodland, heaths, farmland, and fields, between July and September. For the same period in 2022 there were 500 fires due to extreme temperatures which resulted in the service declaring a major incident for the first time in decades.

While such incidents are thankfully rare, Suffolk's senior fire officer is asking people to stay vigilant and play their part in reducing the risk of fires.

During hot and dry weather, people are encouraged to:

- Put litter in the bin when out and about.
- Avoid barbecues and campfires in public open spaces.
- Ensure that any cigarettes are totally put out and disposed of properly.
- Pick up any glass items instead of leaving them lying around after a picnic.
- Report any fires in the countryside immediately by calling 999.

Farmers are also urged to slow the spread of fires by storing hay and straw with a break between stacks and away from other buildings, especially those housing livestock or containing fuels and chemicals. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has been working closely with the National Farmers Union and county-based agricultural machinery manufacturers to ensure effective team working and knowledge sharing. The service also recently provided training and advice at an NFU health and safety event.

The service also offers Home Fire Safety Visits, which involves specialist staff and operational crews visiting Suffolk residents in their homes to provide bespoke fire safety advice, including designing a fire escape plan to help people safely evacuate their property in the event of a fire, and fitting smoke, carbon monoxide and sensory alarms.

The service uses Safelincs – the online Home Fire Safety Check - which helps prioritise the most vulnerable in our communities. More details are available at www.safelincs.co.uk/hfsc/ Guidance is also shared regularly on the service's [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) channels.

• 250 YOUNG PEOPLE TAKE PART IN SUFFOLK YOUTH CLIMATE CONFERENCE

250 local schoolchildren have pledged to write to their local Member of Parliament about climate change having been inspired by guest speaker, Chris Packham. This year's Suffolk Youth Climate Conference, held on 3 July 2024 at Suffolk One Sixth Form College, was organised by the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership.

It is just one way that the partnership is engaging with schools, charities, and community groups to bring about positive change, not just for the environment, but also for the health and wellbeing of Suffolk residents. Speakers such as Chris Packham, Lord Deben, Kids Against Plastic and Scarlett Westbrook inspired the students with messages of urgency and hope. Chris Packham's talk looked at the power young people have to shape the future.

A range of workshops allowed the children to discuss topics such as electric vehicles, nature-based solutions, the global food system, coastal adaptation, plastic pollution, flood and water management, sustainable fashion and climate anxiety.

Students also had the opportunity to engage with 30 charities and organisations, that are all working to improve the natural environment in Suffolk.

- **SUFFOLK AND NORFOLK AWARDED JOINT LOCAL VISITOR ECONOMY PARTNERSHIP STATUS**

Suffolk and Norfolk have joined the new national framework of VisitEngland-accredited Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEP) after a successful bid by Visit East of England supported by Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils. Developed and administered by VisitEngland, the national portfolio of strategic and high-performing LVEPs support collaborative working locally and nationally on shared priorities and targets to grow the local visitor economy.

The creation of LVEPs was part of the UK Government's response to the recommendations of The de Bois Review: an independent review of DMOs in England, to reshape destination management across England, reducing fragmentation and bringing coherence to its DMO landscape.

As well as a nationally recognised official status, LVEPs have access to resources and guidance from VisitBritain/VisitEngland in areas including expert advice, dedicated toolkits and training programmes in areas ranging from product distribution, accessibility and sustainability to business support and marketing. An important strand of support will be highlighting available Government funding streams as well as developing and providing a 'toolkit' to help LVEPs with bids to those streams.

The new Suffolk-Norfolk LVEP joins the likes of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, the Peak District, Kent, Cumbria, the Cotswolds and Yorkshire as well as cities including London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool.

VisitEngland welcomed the first three LVEPs, NewcastleGateshead Initiative (NGI), Visit County Durham and Visit Northumberland, into the programme in 2023. They form the pilot Destination Development Partnership (DDP) in the North East of England, led by NGI, first announced by the UK Government in November 2022. The pilot is a valuable opportunity to prove the DDP concept and the impact the model can have on growing the visitor economy, strengthening the case for future funding.

To reinforce its application for LVEP accreditation, VEE received many letters of support from stakeholders including Lord Leicester of Holkham, the Broads Authority, Stansted Airport, Norwich International Airport, Greater Anglia, National Trust East, English Heritage, Transport East, the VENI Skills Group, Norfolk and Suffolk Tourist Attractions group, Gt Yarmouth Tourism and Business Improvement Area, Bury St Edmunds BID, Discover Newmarket, local authorities and businesses such as English Distillery and Maids Head Hotel Norwich.

- **£4 MILLION FUNDING PROPOSED TO CREATE NEW INDOOR SPORTS FACILITIES FOR NEWMARKET**

Residents in Newmarket look set to benefit from a £4 million investment in new sports facilities. West Suffolk Council and Suffolk County Council are leading the project, which includes talking to local sports and community groups in Newmarket about how to best use the funding to improve sports facilities. The investment could see new facilities built on land owned by Suffolk County Council at the rear of the former St Felix Middle School site - adjacent to the George Lambton Playing Fields – creating a hub for sporting activity in the community.

Any plans would be subject to formal agreement reached by both councils and any necessary planning permission and consents being sought and granted. While plans have not been finalised, the investment would make it possible to create facilities such as new badminton and basketball courts, space for gymnastics and other sports as well as community facilities. This would be in addition to the creation of two new floodlight tennis courts on the St Felix site which have already been agreed - replacing tennis facilities that were lost

when the school site closed in 2012. Under the proposal, each council would plan to contribute £2 million towards the scheme. Once finally agreed, the financial commitment will mean staff at both councils can start working together urgently to develop the project in full. West Suffolk Council will now liaise with local sports groups to understand their needs.

- **SEA LINK PROJECT RAISES NEW CONCERNS FOR SUFFOLK**

Concerns have been raised by Suffolk County Council about the latest updates to National Grid's Sea Link project, in particular plans for constructing a permanent bridge across the River Fromus. The bridge would be used during the construction of the scheme, as part of a private access route to the converter station site at Saxmundham. These plans have come to light in details published by National Grid (8 July 2024). Included are refinements made to its original project proposal, following a public consultation last year – however it says that although some changes have been made, plans remain largely the same.

Officers from Suffolk County Council will now review these latest revisions in detail and respond accordingly. However, a preliminary assessment has raised significant concerns, particularly in relation to the bridge, which could have a total height of around 20 feet and have a total span, including the embankments, of over 500 feet. Sea Link is a proposal for a new 2 gigawatt subsea high voltage direct current electricity connection, developed by National Grid Electricity Transmission. It is approximately 140km in length and predominately offshore.

It proposes a converter station near Saxmundham which will be up to 26 metres high, the cable landfall from offshore will be between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness, with around 12km of underground cabling connecting the sites, including a substation at Friston.

Local residents and communities were encouraged to share their views, and give feedback on the latest changes, and the proposals in general. National Grid expects to submit its application for development consent in early 2025.

- **SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL BACKS YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN TO FOCUS ON KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER**

Suffolk County Council has backed the Youth Justice Plan 2024/25 at a meeting of the Full Council on the 11th of July 2024. The plan has a focus on supporting young people into education, training and employment and reducing the numbers of young people offending, supporting the council's ambition to keep more families together and to keep Suffolk safe.

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

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

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

As well as helping to prevent re-offending we know this approach improves outcomes for victims. This year the service is aiming to deliver more restorative approaches including within families where relationships have been fractured by the child's contact with the youth system. The plan also outlines how the service will be looking in detail into the reasons why some groups of children are more likely to enter into the youth justice system, to inform interventions which aim to reduce the number of young offenders in Suffolk.

Outcomes will be measured against four national key performance indicators:

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

• **COUNCIL'S SHOCK AT SOLAR FARM GO-AHEAD**

Suffolk County Council has expressed its extreme disappointment that a huge solar farm has been approved in West Suffolk. The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, Ed Miliband MP, announced that approval had been granted for the Development Consent Order, as proposed by Sunnica.

The project will see 2,792 acres of solar panels and battery storage, installed across parts of West Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. Suffolk County Council supports national aims to adapt to climate change and provide low carbon energy for the country, which often bring benefits to support the local economy. However, it also has an ambition to protect and enhance Suffolk's communities and environment.

The council had many issues with the application, including:

- The geographic scale of the proposal which will permanently transform the landscape
- The impact on local communities of the 24 month construction period
- Sunnica's serious shortcomings in terms of both evidence and methodology
- Sunnica's presentation of proposal which made it, and impacts on local communities, unclear
- Mitigation proposals did not appear to be tailored to the local context

Time will now be spent reviewing the final decision and engaging with the local community.

• **COUNCILLORS RECOMMENDED TO APPROVE AN EXTRA £9.1 MILLION FOR SEND SERVICES**

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

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

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

This investment is in addition to the £11.2 million over three years agreed by Cabinet in February 2024, which is being used to grow the SEND team by 15% or around 60 members of staff. In total, the council is proposing to commit more than £20 million over the next three years to bolster SEND services.

Of the £9.1 million, £2.6 million will be spent in 2024/25. This investment in permanent staff will recur in subsequent years as they continue to support children and young people with SEND. In 2025/26, £500,000

will be added to the SEND budget and in 2026/27, a further £500,000 will be added – both of which will be recurrent in subsequent years.

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

• **NEW ALL-AGE AUTISM STRATEGY LAUNCHED IN SUFFOLK**

A joint strategy and action plan has been launched today to help support autistic people of any age and their families. Produced by Suffolk County Council, Suffolk and North-East Essex and Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Boards, the vision of the new strategy is that all autistic people in Suffolk, their parents, friends and carers are able to live fulfilling and rewarding lives in a county that accepts and understands them.

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

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

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

• **MAJOR FLOOD INVESTIGATION REPORT PUBLISHED IN RESPONSE TO STORM BABET**

Suffolk County Council has today published a detailed report into one of the worst-hit communities during Storm Babet. A detailed investigation into the flooding which occurred in Framlingham during October 2023 has taken place to understand what caused these events and recommend what could be done to alleviate flooding here in future.

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

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

For short term measures, key highlights include the implementation of community flood plans, maximising Property Flood Resilience (PFR) grants, removal of blockages within watercourses and drainage infrastructure, as well as improvements to flood warning systems and the sensitive management of land – some of these measures have already been taken. For medium to longer term recommendations, there is emphasis on potential improvements to drainage infrastructure and the creation of new natural flood management features, to reduce flood risk within the catchment. These longer-term recommendations would require external funding and collaboration with landowners and communities to implement.

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

- **COUNCIL REMAINS OPPOSED TO NORWICH TO TILBURY PYLONS**

Suffolk County Council has formally objected to National Grid’s current proposals for pylons between Norwich and Tilbury, as it submits its response to the project’s statutory consultation. Various reports support the council’s position of objecting to the scheme and the council has reiterated the scope for the project to be delayed. This, in turn, opens up the opportunity for a full assessment of other viable alternatives, such as an offshore solution or the undergrounding of cables.

The scale of the proposed project will affect 10 different electoral divisions in Suffolk, and have a considerable impact on their communities. These impacts go beyond the aesthetics of the project, including harm to National Landscapes, the consequences of HGV construction traffic on rural roads, serious implications on nine airfields, and the cumulative effects of other energy projects, in particular solar farms.

Notwithstanding the council’s overall objection to the scheme, it has also put forward comprehensive and detailed proposals to reduce the damage done to Suffolk’s communities and environment, should it be consented by the Secretary of State following an examination in public next year. Recent reports help to support the council’s position:

The [ESO East Anglia Network Study](#) by The National Grid Electricity System Operator, explored better ways to connect offshore wind in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. The council previously stated that it was critical for National Grid to take these findings into consideration as they continue planning their Great Grid Upgrade, including the Norwich to Tilbury project.

The “[Valued Landscape Assessment](#)” of the Waveney Valley, commissioned by Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, acts as a timely reminder to National Grid, of the need to respond effectively and robustly to the sensitivities of Suffolk’s landscapes and communities.

The [Hiorns Smart Energy Networks report](#), commissioned by Essex County Council in close collaboration with Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, suggested that it is possible for the Norwich to Tilbury project to be paused in order to consider alternatives.

The statutory consultation for the Norwich to Tilbury project closed on 26 July, with an application submission expected to the Planning Inspectorate in 2025.

Cllr Stephen Burroughes

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Suffolk County Council*