

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – APRIL 2025



Cllr Stephen Burroughes - Framlingham Division

• 97.5% OF PUPILS RECEIVE PREFERRED SECONDARY SCHOOLS ON NATIONAL OFFER DAY

This year parents and carers of 97.5% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred schools and 91.9% were offered a place at their first preference school. Suffolk County Council received 7831 applications from parents and carers indicating which secondary school they would prefer their child to transfer to in September 2025.

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 on the 3rd of March 2025.

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 Thursday 3 April 2025 with details of how-to opt-in and when.

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

• COUNCIL CONTINUES TO OPPOSE PYLONS IN FINAL ROUND OF CONSULTATIONS

Suffolk County Council maintains that more can, and should, be done to improve National Grid's plans for their Norwich to Tilbury pylon project. A final round of consultation for the project in Suffolk has now been completed (3 March 2025), ahead of an expected Development Consent Order application later this year.

The county council has welcomed a series of changes to the latest set of plans, evidence that National Grid has listened to some of the council's concerns and those of local communities. However fundamental differences remain, with the council clear that offshore and undergrounding solutions should be priorities for the scheme. One particular blow came at the beginning of this latest consultation, with National Grid writing to local leaders in Norfolk and Suffolk saying that there would be no undergrounding in the Waveney Valley.

One of the considerable changes that the county council believes is possible in the current set of plans, is the option to remove some existing powerlines between Bramford and Lawford. The county council believes that National Grid, UK Power Networks and the regulator, Ofgem, should work together to investigate removing this line, which goes through two National Landscapes and passes close by the iconic Willy Lott's cottage at Flatford.

According to National Grid's website, they intend to submit a Development Consent Order application to the Planning Inspectorate for the Norwich to Tilbury project some time in 2025.

• COUNCIL FEARS PACE OF DECISION FOR LARGE SOLAR FARM IN NORTH SUFFOLK

Suffolk County Council is calling on communities impacted by the proposed EcoPower solar farm, to act with urgency, and join the council in opposing the scheme.

- Unprecedented pace of planning application
- Inappropriate proposal which could take out quality farmland
- Serious concerns for welfare of local communities

The 250-megawatt solar farm and battery energy storage system will be spread out over 1,500 acres at multiple sites around Yaxley, Brome, Gislingham, Mellis, Eye and Occold.

EcoPower is proposing the bare minimum of engagement and is likely to submit its application to the Planning Inspectorate in around 12 months from now. This means, unusually, that residents will have just two opportunities in the coming months to have their say. The first of these two is a non-statutory consultation, launched on 10 March. A statutory consultation will follow. The council fears that communities won't have enough time to familiarise themselves with the planning process, understand the potential impacts of the project, do their research, and make their points – unfortunately, it is not enough to simply state opposition to the project in a consultation response. The county council is formally opposed solar farm proposals that remove the top grades of agricultural land.

Independently conducted assessments will be required to provide reassurance that Suffolk's best farmland will not be used, and put food security at risk. The council also has a preference for rooftop-before-rural solar development and expects that solar developers should rule out any links to forced labour in their supply chains. There are also serious concerns for the welfare of those in the communities affected by the proposed scheme. Such projects can change ways of life forever for those living near the proposed sites.

Councillors have seen first-hand, the stress and worry brought by the sudden announcement of a huge infrastructure projects. This is something that should not be underestimated, and should be recognised by a project promoter. Suffolk County Council has created a number of online resources to support communities who are facing planning proposals for these nationally significant infrastructure projects. These are available at www.suffolk.gov.uk

• **SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL CONFIRMS DECISION TO BRING LIBRARY SERVICES BACK IN-HOUSE**

Suffolk County Council has confirmed that it will be bringing all 45 libraries back under its care and control. The decision, made at the Cabinet meeting earlier in March, will ensure continued access to high-quality, community-focused library services across the county. As part of this move, the council plans to:

- **Keep all 45 libraries open**
- **Maintain opening hours**
- **Create job security for all frontline staff**
- **Secure a sustainable future for Suffolk's library services**

In addition to continuing its core library services, the council is investing £200,000 in mobile libraries, with a further £157,000 for new books and to replace public computers in libraries across Suffolk.

Libraries have long been at the heart of Suffolk's communities. They are essential spaces for learning, connection, and support, and the council is committed to ensuring they remain hubs that bring people together. The focus is on building upon the excellent services already provided, strengthening libraries' role as trusted local resources that meet the evolving needs of residents.

Looking to the future, Suffolk County Council envisions libraries becoming even more integrated into the wider community, serving as convenient access points for a range of essential council services. This includes providing information and support around Adult Social Care, offering health and social care services, facilitating Family Hub activities, and promoting digital inclusion. The aim is to make it easier for residents to access vital services and support, all within the welcoming, familiar setting of their local library.

Suffolk County Council would like to express its sincere gratitude to Suffolk Libraries, who have run the library contract for the past 12 years. Their passion and hard work have been integral to the success of library services in the county, and the council appreciates all they have done to support local communities. We look forward to welcoming library staff back into the county council and continuing to support them in delivering outstanding services to the public.

We would also like to thank the 1,250 volunteers whose commitment has been essential in delivering high-quality services to residents across Suffolk. As we transition the library service back under council control, we remain fully committed to working with our volunteers. Their invaluable contributions will continue to play a central role in the future of our libraries, and we are excited to explore new opportunities to expand volunteer involvement. The library service will officially return to Suffolk County Council control on **1st June 2025**.

- **NEW TRAVEL TOOLKIT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO TRAVEL INDEPENDENTLY**

A new Travel Toolkit has been launched to help young people to feel confident to travel independently on public transport. The Independent Travel Toolkit is a website designed to assist young people in learning the skills needed for independent travel, featuring guidance for parents, guardians, carers, schools, and the young travellers themselves. This week marks Neurodiversity Awareness Week (17th-23rd March) which highlights the importance of being inclusive within our schools and communities to people who are neurodivergent - who think and learn a little differently than most people, such as young people with ADHD, Autism or Dyslexia.

Using public transport can often be a challenge for neurodivergent young people. The Independent Travel Toolkit has been designed and developed over the past year, in collaboration with young people and parents and carers. Development of the toolkit has been assisted by Suffolk County Council's Passenger Transport team colleagues from the Essex County Council Suffolk Travel Training team, Suffolk County Council Children's and Young People Services, representatives from the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum, and students and staff from Suffolk New College Rural.

The Travel Toolkit website offers young people a range of useful tools and advice to help them:

- learn about travelling on their own
- prepare for journeys and what to do if things don't go to plan
- feel more confident about using public transport.

There is also useful information to guide parents and carers, and professionals who support a young person.

A short film has been released which forms part of the toolkit, in collaboration with students and staff at Suffolk New College Rural. The video explains in simple steps how to plan and prepare for a bus journey.

The Independent Travel Toolkit has been funded through the Department for Transport's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The toolkit is designed to engage, inform and educate young bus users of the future which aligns with BSIP goals. To find out more, visit: www.independenttraveltoolkit.com

- **ONE NEW COUNCIL IS THE BEST OPTION FOR SUFFOLK**

Suffolk County Council's cabinet has approved an interim plan for local government reorganisation in Suffolk which will be submitted to ministers. A full business case will be submitted in September 2025, following extensive engagement with residents, town and parish councils, businesses and local organisations.

- [Local Government Reorganisation in Suffolk - Interim Plan](#)

The key benefits of one council are:

- **Simpler for residents** – one council would make it easier to understand and contact local government
- **Clearer accountability** – there would be less confusion over who is responsible for what
- **Better use of funding** – a more coherent, strategic, financially sustainable, county-wide approach to budgeting
- **Safer services** - less risk of breaking up critical services like social care and better alignment with other agencies like health and the police
- **Better alignment of services** – since everything is under one roof, services can be more easily coordinated, creating opportunities to improve services for residents

- **More efficient decision-making** – with just one council, decisions can be made more quickly
- **Connected to and empowering residents** - providing both the most straightforward and accountable democratic leadership with enhanced neighbourhood and community engagement
- **Stronger leadership** – a single, visible and accountable body providing a clear strategic voice for Suffolk.

Analysis carried out nationally by the County Council Network has demonstrated that a single unitary council for Suffolk would have a recurring financial benefit of almost £26 million a year – with the net benefit after 5 years being over £103 million. Local analysis of data suggests that the national figures are reasonable.

• **200 NEW SPECIALIST SEND PLACES FOR SUFFOLK**

The creation of 200 new specialist places across the county for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is set to be considered by Suffolk County Council’s cabinet.

An extra 100 places could open this year, and another 100 new places by September 2026, with future plans being drawn up. These places will be spread across Suffolk and tailored to meet need and demand.

The plan to be presented to cabinet outlines how £18.6million could best be spent to support the growing population of SEND children and young people who need specialist education. Over the last five years, Suffolk pupils accessing special schools and units attached to mainstream schools has increased by over 40%.

The proposal includes £3million to be spent on small groups and units in mainstream schools from September 2025 and £12million to be spent on developing satellite units linked to existing special schools across Suffolk from September 2026. The remaining £3.6million is earmarked for further SEND provision.

In the past five years, 1,025 new specialist SEND places across Suffolk have been agreed.

On top of these new 200 places, future plans will continue to be drawn up. Using the recently published Joint SEND Needs Assessment report, work is underway to create a Joint SEND Sufficiency Plan, written in conjunction with health, social care, inclusion and transport. This will establish how future Department for Education SEND capital money should be spent.

• **SUFFOLK ARCHIVES EXHIBITION IN THE RUNNING FOR INTERNATIONAL AWARD**

The Arrivals: Celebrating Migration to Suffolk exhibition, curated by Suffolk Archives, had been nominated for Community Engagement Programme of the Year at the prestigious 23rd annual Museums + Heritage Awards.

The free exhibition was made possible by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, with Suffolk Archives working closely with community groups to bring it to life. It explored historical and contemporary migration experiences to Suffolk since the end of World War II. This included oral history recordings, stories of migrant entrepreneurs, and archive materials from the Ipswich and Suffolk Council for Racial Equality. Visitors learned about Jewish refugees, Polish soldier Marion Laskowski, the Windrush generation, and saw examples of traditional clothing from around the world.

The exhibition also featured a community art installation, The Journey, created in collaboration with local groups, artists, and schools. The installation consisted of 125 birds, made from sustainably sourced plywood, each decorated to represent a unique migration story. The flock is currently on display at The Hold.

The global awards celebrate the very best in the world of museums, galleries, and cultural and heritage visitor attractions. This year’s shortlist includes entrants from across the UK and 14 other countries ranging from Norway and Egypt to Australia.

- **EXTRA £9 MILLION WILL FUND NEW PLACES FOR PUPILS WITH SEND**

Hundreds of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Suffolk are set to benefit from new government funding. It has been announced that Suffolk will receive £9,441,348 from the Department for Education to invest in new SEND school places. Plans will now be drawn up by the Local Area SEND Partnership. This funding is in addition to the 200 new SEND places that Suffolk County Council's cabinet will discuss on Tuesday 1st of April.

Using the recently published Joint SEND Needs Assessment Report, work is underway to create a Joint SEND Sufficiency Plan, written in conjunction with health, social care, inclusion and transport. This will establish how this new money should be spent. The additional funding, announced on Thursday by the Department for Education, is from the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation and awarded to all local authorities across England. In total, the East of England will receive £126.6 million which will fund around 1,000 places for children with SEND.

The Local Area Partnership, which delivers SEND services in the county, is made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum and education settings.

Cllr Stephen Burroughes

County Councillor for the Framlingham Division

Suffolk County Council