

## SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – MARCH 2026



### *Cllr Stephen Burroughes - Framlingham Division*

#### • APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR NEW SUFFOLK BUSINESS BOARD MEMBERS

Suffolk County Council invited applications from experienced and influential local business people to join the Suffolk Business Board, which was established in 2024 to help drive economic growth across the county.

The board meets 6 times a year to help shape economic strategy and priorities for Suffolk, oversee delivery of funded programmes such as business support and skills training, and work closely with partners such as district councils, neighbouring counties and national economic and trade bodies.

Existing [Suffolk Business Board members](#) include a strong core of local business leaders alongside representatives from education and key strategic partners. New members will be joining a dynamic and proactive group, with the opportunity to immediately begin contributing to Suffolk's economic development. The recruitment comes at a key time, as the Business Board moves into its next phase of delivery, focusing on the investment and long-term economic priorities that will shape Suffolk for years to come.

Expressions of interest were received by Monday 23 February which required a short biography or CV and a brief cover letter outlining applicants interests in the opportunity and what area(s) of expertise they felt they could bring.

Board membership is a voluntary position, and terms are for up to three years from the date of appointment. The Business Board is supported by a dedicated team of council officers.

Applications would be welcome from candidates with backgrounds in the key sectors as identified in the Local Growth Plan, including Agrifood, Clean Energy, Visitor Economy and Advanced Manufacturing.

The new members will fill two vacancies that result from existing board members coming to the end of their terms.

#### • PUBLIC'S CHANCE TO TRY THE ADASTRA TRIAL DRIVERLESS SHUTTLE

Residents across Suffolk were invited to see for themselves how self-driving shuttle technology could shape the future of local travel — and to have their say on how it should work for their communities. Suffolk County Council held two events where the public could ride on the ADASTRA prototype, ask questions and share their views. The council wants to understand not just whether autonomous shuttles are acceptable, but how they could best serve local needs as part of the wider transport system.

The events took place at:

- Mildenhall Hub, Sheldrick Way, Mildenhall IP28 7JX  
9.30am–2pm, Saturday 7 February 2026
- East Point Pavilion, Royal Plain, Lowestoft NR33 0AP  
10am–2pm, Saturday 28 February 2026

The council has been working with design experts [Smart City Consultancy](#) to assess the technical, operational, and regulatory requirements of incorporating autonomous shuttle services into a potential future network of mobility hubs across the county. Shuttles could potentially link future residential developments with strategic bus routes, improve accessibility, and support sustainable transport especially in rural areas.

Shuttles could travel shorter routes to feed main bus and train service corridors where the frequency of buses and trains could be increased, and journey times can be shorter.

In May 2025, Suffolk County Council secured a £75,000 government grant through the Connected and Automated Mobility (CAM) Pathfinder 1 programme, administered by the Innovation Funding Service. The funding supports feasibility studies aligned with the government's ambition to establish a £40 billion connected autonomous mobility sector by 2040. ADASTRAL is one of 14 initiatives selected nationally.

Working with partners Smart City Consultancy Limited and Ohmio UK, the council is delivering a £325,000 feasibility study exploring how autonomous shuttles could be used alongside other transport options. This would be via mobility hubs — transport interchanges that bring together walking, wheeling, cycling, buses, trains and shared mobility such as e-scooters, e-bikes and car clubs, alongside private cars.

The ADASTRAL prototype is an Ohmio Lift shuttle, built in New Zealand. It is designed as a fully autonomous vehicle, with no steering wheel or driver's seat. It can carry up to 14 passengers at speeds of up to 40mph; however, during the trial it is limited to eight seated passengers with a safety operator, travelling at up to 15mph. The shuttle is operated by Smart City Consultancy and based at BT Adastral Park near Ipswich.

The project team has already showcased the shuttle to the public, business leaders and industry at EVEX 2025 and The Big Bus Show 2025.

#### • **SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL'S CHIEF EXECUTIVE TO STEP DOWN**

Nicola will leave at the end of March 2026 and the process to appoint a new chief executive will begin shortly.

#### **Reflecting on her decision, Nicola said:**

"Serving the people of Suffolk has been a great privilege and I am immensely proud of what has been achieved together over the last eight years. "Leaving this job has not been an easy decision, and I have thought long and hard about it. However, I believe this is the right time to hand over leadership to those who can steer and support colleagues through local government reorganisation over the next two years, whatever option the Government decides to implement.

"I would like to thank all of my colleagues, Matthew and his Cabinet and all councillors for their support and I wish them the very best for the future. I do not have another role lined up – I am simply looking forward to a new change of pace and lifestyle, enjoying this wonderful county and taking time to travel and see family and friends."

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

"Nicola has led the council through an important period of change and achievement. She is very well-regarded, hardworking and has an exceptional knowledge of the complexity of public service, plus an unfaltering desire to deliver the best services for the people of Suffolk – the county that she loves.

"Under her tenure and with strong political leadership, Suffolk County Council is well positioned to rise to the challenge and opportunity of local government reorganisation. Her legacy will be enduring and deeply felt. I want to thank her for her outstanding leadership and dedication, and I wish her all the best for the future."

Amongst her achievements, Nicola has:

- Managed a budget of £850 million and led the authority's 6,294 staff, significantly improving the council's culture
- Negotiated local government reorganisation and created the legacy for lasting stability during the next phase
- Transformed adult social care and ensured the improvement in children's and young people's services
- Led the council and partnership response through the Covid pandemic
- Opened Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service's new control room and ongoing improvements across the service
- Strengthened emergency planning and response, particularly during Storm Babet
- Opened the £146 million Gull Wing bridge in Lowestoft
- Brought the library service back in house

Nicola joined Suffolk County Council in May 2018 from Essex County Council, where she was director of infrastructure and environment. Previously she was chief executive of Braintree District Council.

Nicola's last day will be March 31<sup>st</sup> having completed her three months' notice period. She handed her notice in before Christmas, but it was agreed to hold the announcement until some important milestones had passed, including the closure of the LGR consultation.

- **NORWICH TO TILBURY PYLON SCHEME IS 'UN-COORDINATED DECIMATION OF OUR COUNTRY'**

The first Open Floor Hearing took place Tuesday 10 February in Ipswich, as an opportunity for interested parties to present their views in person to the Examination panel. Councillor Richard Rout spoke on behalf of Suffolk County Council, citing a number of long-standing and unresolved objections as to why the council believes the current project proposal should not go ahead. These include:

- The lack of alternative proposals provided by National Grid
- Insufficient clarity on the need for a connection date of 2031
- Concern over working hours to include weekends and bank holidays
- Extensive tree loss and environmental impacts
- The need to protect and enhance the Dedham Vale national landscape
- The need for compensation measures in the Waveney Valley
- Higher quality and more robust outline management plans

The Examination stage is expected to take up to six months.

- **COUNTY COUNCIL CONTINUES TO BACK NEWMARKET SPORTS HUB**

This is despite West Suffolk Council – responsible for providing such sports facilities – branding the site as unsuitable, which was met with shock and disappointment by county councillors and officers. This is not the position of the county council, which is still prepared to support the sports facility at the St Felix site, and contribute a promised £2 million towards the project, as well as including the value of the land for the facility.

During the planning of the new homes at the Edmundham Developments 'Astley Place' site, works were tailored with a new sports facility in mind. Electrical and foul water pumping infrastructure was oversized, to accommodate the needs of such a resource. The building compound was designed to be re-used during construction of the sports facility, and top soil and aggregates from the housing development could also be used during the new construction.

- **COUNCIL BUDGET PROTECTS FRONTLINE SERVICES AMID RISING COSTS AND DEMAND**

Demand pressures, particularly in adult and children's social care, are expected to add £32.2 million to the council's costs next year. As a result, around 77 pence of every £1 the council spends will go directly towards

services for people, including public health. The remaining 23 pence in every £1 will fund all other services, such as fire and rescue, highways and waste management, alongside the staff, infrastructure and technology that support service delivery across the council.

To deliver a balanced budget, councillors approved £46.5 million of savings. These will be achieved through service improvements, more efficient ways of working, and a reduction in employer pension contributions, made possible by the strong performance of the council's pension fund. This reduction in employer contributions will not reduce employees' pension benefits. Councillors also agreed a 4.99% increase in the county council's share of Council Tax, comprising a 2.99% general increase for county-wide services and a further 2% Adult Social Care Precept to help meet rising care costs.

For households, this means weekly Council Tax bills will increase by £1.23 to £25.90 for a Band B property – the most common in Suffolk – and by £1.58 to £33.30 for a Band D property.

Combined with a forecast 1% increase in the taxbase, the Council Tax changes will generate an additional £27.4 million for the council in 2026/27.

Alongside day-to-day spending, councillors approved a revised three-year capital programme, reduced from four years to reflect local government reorganisation planned for 2028. The programme will continue to fund essential projects such as school expansions and infrastructure improvements, while also investing in improvements to bus services, public rights of way, and cycling and walking infrastructure.

Councillors approved the budget at their meeting on Thursday 12 February 2026, following Scrutiny's examination of the proposals on 13 January and Cabinet's decision on 27 January to bring them to Full Council for approval.

#### • **NEW SUFFOLK EXHIBITION SHINES A LIGHT ON DISABILITY**

Beyond Labels explores themes of visibility, independent living, discrimination, and making change happen. Understand how national campaigns, and social and political changes have impacted lives in Suffolk. As well as discovering the histories of organisations, schools, and charities that work with and support local disabled people.

Made possible by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, this exhibition is co-curated by local community groups and Suffolk Archives and has enabled communities to share and celebrate their lived experience. Beyond Labels celebrates disability while sparking conversations about accessibility, equality, and the work that's still needed.

The exhibition will explore local stories such as the actions taken by parents after their children were labelled "uneducable" following the Education Act 1944. Parents like Jean Thompson set up the Lowestoft and District Society for Mentally Handicapped Children, which appointed a home visitor, opened a special care unit and occupation centre thus providing essential support and opportunities that the state system had denied.

Lived experience of disability is more and less visible in the historical record at different points in time. Wartime experiences are highlighted in a range of archival records, covering topics such as shell shock, or PTSD, long term health conditions, and individual stories such as that of Frederick Pigeon. Frederick was wounded during World War One, had his right leg amputated and was later fitted for an artificial limb. After the war he settled in Blythburgh where he married Ellen.

Coming up to present day the exhibition will explore hidden disabilities which are not always visible but have an impact on an individual's day-to-day life, promoting awareness and understanding.

As part of Beyond Labels, Suffolk Archives, a Suffolk County Council service, has been working with more than 30 local community groups and schools on an impressive community art illustration called 'Unlabelled'. 'Unlabelled', is created from 150 giant labels made from sustainably sourced plywood, which have been decorated to represent lived experience of disability, and themes of access, visibility, and representation. The artwork will be displayed in the foyer of The Hold as part of the 'Beyond Labels' exhibition.

The project has been made possible with a grant of £139,107 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Beyond Labels: Celebrating Disability in Suffolk runs from 27 February to 30 May at The Hold in Ipswich, home of Suffolk Archives. Exhibition pre-bookers get 15% off in Suffolk Archives' café.

- **NEW SEND SCHOOL AND CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE TO BE BUILT IN BURY ST EDMUNDS**

Run by Eastern Education Group and funded by the Department for Education, the school in Glastonbury Road will provide 90 places for students aged 14 to 19-years-old with special educational needs and disabilities. In a first for Suffolk, the new school will also become a centre of excellence and hub for SEND guidance, offering expertise to mainstream schools. Examples of this approach include providing outreach staff to work with mainstream schools and offering specialist expertise and training opportunities.

This hub model is increasingly encouraged by the Department for Education and is reflected in guidance from Ofsted around inclusive practice and system leadership. It launches Suffolk County Council's ambition to implement this model across the county with a number of other education settings.

This news comes just a week after it was announced that Suffolk County Council and Unity Schools Partnership will open a new SEND school in Saxmundham for 126 students with severe learning difficulties.

Both new provisions have been agreed by Suffolk County Council in line with its SEND sufficiency plans, which outline how specialist provision should be delivered across the county.

This new special school in Bury St Edmunds will share a site with Chalk Hill School special school which is due to open in Easter 2026. Chalk Hill will occupy the former Horringer Middle School building, while the second school will be built by the Department for Education on a field on the site. Eastern Education Group will run both schools.

- **TRIAL SCHEME TO REMOVE VEHICLES BLOCKING ROAD RESURFACING WORK TO BEGIN**

Suffolk County Council is to launch a trial scheme to remove vehicles that are blocking highways resurfacing work. The move comes following repeated issues with vehicles across Suffolk that have been left in roads where works are scheduled, despite advance warnings they were due to take place. This has led to the cancellation of entire resurfacing works or small areas being left where vehicle parking has prevented access for equipment.

Offending vehicles will be either moved to a safe place in line of sight from where they were parked, or to a secure compound in Bury St Edmunds. Any vehicle which is moved to enable works to go ahead will be subject to a £70 Fixed Penalty Charge Notice, reduced to £35 if paid within 14 days.

Vehicles taken to the secure compound, due to there not being a suitable location near the works area to move the vehicle to, will also be subject to additional fees to recover their vehicle. The trial scheme will be introduced in March and will cover the Suffolk Highways resurfacing programme up to May 2026.

The first site where it will be used is scheduled to be in Allington Walk, Haverhill, where two days of works are due to start from Wednesday March 18.

Each abortive visit where works are unable to take place costs in the region of £15,000.

This cost covers items such as wasted material, plant, labour and equipment hire. Abortive works also impacts future programmed work delivery.

Under the removal scheme, the process would see:

- A temporary traffic regulation order (TTRO) advertised six weeks before work starting
- Warning signs erected and letters delivered to nearby residents and businesses clearly detailing whether vehicle removal will be imposed 2 to 3 weeks prior to the works date.
- No parking cones placed in the road and any vehicles parked on the road at the time of visit will have information cards placed on the windscreen two days before works start
- On the day, a District Civil Enforcement Officer will issue PCNs, offending vehicles photographed then relocated safely with the police informed
- Offending vehicles will be either moved to a safe place in line of sight, or if this is not possible to the secure compound in Bury St Edmunds
- Contact numbers and references will be left on site for the owner to call to locate/collect vehicle

- **JOINT CHIEF EXECUTIVES RECOMMENDED FOR APPOINTMENT**

Mark Ash, the council's executive director of organisational change and local government reorganisation, and Andrew Cook, executive director of growth highways and infrastructure, would become Suffolk County Council's first joint chief executives. They will be charged with leading the council through the challenges of delivering local government reorganisation, devolution, maintaining essential public services and financial sustainability in the next two years.

Specifically, Mark would be responsible for local government reorganisation, devolution, transformation and change programmes. Andrew will be responsible for delivering safe, high-quality and reliable services to residents, robust financial controls and ensuring the council meets all its statutory duties and requirements following independent inspections. The joint chief executives would each lead on their own areas of responsibility but work together to ensure focus is maintained across the council's duties and priorities.

The decision, which will be taken formally by all county councillors when they meet on 19 March, follows a recommendation from the council's Staff Appointments Committee which met earlier today.

The county council's chief executive of eight years, Nicola Beach, is to leave her post at the end of March 2026, with Mark and Andrew set to take on their new roles from 1 April 2026 following a structured handover.

Tens of thousands of pounds would be saved because Mark and Andrew's existing posts would not be recruited into. The number of the most senior staff would therefore reduce by one and save up to £92,000 a year. Recruiting internally will therefore save time, money on salaries and recruitment, and make use of existing, well-developed relationships with partner organisations and knowledge of Suffolk.

The council's constitution requires it to have a designated head of paid service, responsible for leading the council's employees as they deliver services to residents. Significant uncertainty in the local authority chief executive recruitment market has led to many county councils, including Leicestershire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Essex and Hampshire all making internal appointments in recent months, having advertised the roles externally.

- **COUNCIL OBJECTS TO LION-LINK SLAMMING LACK OF COORDINATION AND FEARS FOR COMMUNITIES**

At its meeting on 24 February 2026, the county council's cabinet approved a 23,000-word response to National Grid's statutory consultation on LionLink, which closes on 10 March 2026.

**Their selection of Walberswick as a landing site for the project demonstrates staggeringly bad judgement. It is a wholly inappropriate location and the construction impacts on this very special part of our Suffolk coast will be stark.**

Amongst its objections to the current plans are:

- disappointment that onshore cable routeing could not be shared with Sea Link
- the choice of Walberswick as a landing site and the long cable route to Saxmundham
- construction on a continuous basis including night-time working
- construction traffic use of the unsuitable Benhall Bridge
- private haul route which would cross the Fromus river and impact the setting of Hurts Hall
- multiple negative, highly sensitive consequences in terms of built heritage, archaeology, ecology, tourism, highways access, public rights of way, water courses and vegetation loss

An application for a Development Consent Order is expected to be submitted by National Grid Ventures later in 2026.

**Cllr Stephen Burroughes**

*County Councillor for the Framlingham Division*

*Suffolk County Council*