



In the Spring of 2021 and Suffolk County Council was looking towards the future. A long way from "business as usual", but firmly focused on "building back better" after the previous year of lockdowns and restrictions.

The following is a quick snapshot of a few of the year's events.

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

In March 2021, Suffolk County Council together with Suffolk's Police & Crime Commissioner and Suffolk Constabulary launched the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras. The cameras are being used to help detect and deter speeding offences that have been highlighted in Suffolk villages, and educate drivers on the importance of road safety. An ANPR camera will be installed at a site where it has been identified by a town or parish council, with support from their county councillor, there is a problem with speeding and/or rat running on roads with a 20 or 30mph speed limit.

100,000 trees planted as part of ambitious council scheme

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

Lowestoft's Gull Wing officially marks the start of construction

The start of construction work on Lowestoft's Gull Wing was formally marked in March 2021, despite officials not being able to host a traditional ground-breaking ceremony at the site, due to Covid lockdown restrictions. Instead, a video featuring a range of people involved with the scheme was released, including Jack and Hayden, former Somerleyton Primary School pupils who won the schools competition to give the Gull Wing its name.

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

At the beginning of March 2022, the first major steel section of the Gull Wing bridge in Lowestoft arrived. The North Approach Viaduct (NAV1) section arrived at the construction site on Lake Lothing on Tuesday March 1 on a barge, following a 32-hour crossing from Ghent in Belgium. Fabricated by Victor Buyck Steel Construction, NAV1 is approximately 55m long. On delivery it weighed 380 tonnes and, when ready to move into its final position spanning the East Suffolk railway line, it will weigh approximately 1,450 tonnes.

Keep Moving Suffolk

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

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

National Offer Day

In April 2021, 99.15% of children were offered a place at one of their parents' three preferred schools and 95% were offered a place at their first preference school. Suffolk County Council received 7207 applications from parents indicating which primary school they would prefer their child to join in September 2021.

Schools across Suffolk recognised for their efforts in encouraging active travel

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

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

Katch electric taxi-bus service

A new sustainable electric taxi-bus service launched in East Suffolk in May 2021 when Suffolk County Council launched Katch. Katch provides a travel solution for local residents and visitors in Wickham Market and Framlingham, as well as for those who need to meet their rail connections at Wickham Market train station in Campsea Ashe. The service has since been extended from Wickham Market station in the opposite direction, to additionally serve Snape Maltings.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service's fleet

In May 2021, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service unveiled three new vehicles, packed with the latest technology, to support firefighters at emergency incidents with state-of-the-art vehicles. These Command Support Vehicles will typically be used as a hub at large, complex incidents, from which officers can manage operations and work with other emergency services.

Cassius service

Suffolk County Council launched the new Cassius service in early June 2021, partnering with Alcove, Rethink Partners and Provide CIC to deliver their innovative care technology service to people in Suffolk over the next 3 years. Since July 2021, the Cassius service has been giving the County's social work practitioners, occupational therapists and other front line professionals, new ways to support people to live better and independent lives.

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

Highways Service procurement

Suffolk County Council began the procurement process for next Highways Service contract - focusing on developing local skills and talent - in July 2021. The council is looking for a partner to deliver key operational projects after the current contract ends on 30 September 2023.

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

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

The whole contract development process will take just over two years to complete. Following the preparation of appropriate tender documents outlining the council’s requirements, initial advertisements were posted in December 2021. Discussions with interested prospective contractors began in early 2022. Following a rigorous tendering process, the council hopes to be able to award its chosen contract in early 2023 with the new service provider beginning in October 2023.

Suffolk says thanks campaign

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

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

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

Healing woods

Suffolk’s first ‘healing woods’ locations were announced in September 2021 when four locations were announced by Suffolk County Council as ‘healing woods and spaces’. They will offer people better access to nature and provide a positive legacy to the pandemic. The healing woods and spaces will be located in:

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

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

Suffolk recycling

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

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

Boost to community schemes

In November 2021 two Suffolk community schemes received Government funding totalling more than £940,000. “Enabling Self-Employment in Suffolk” and the “Suffolk Road to Net Zero business support programme” are among 477 schemes across the country to receive backing from the Community Renewal Fund.

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

Support for community well being

The Annual Public Health Report focuses on Mental Health impact of Covid-19 Suffolk County Council. The report, launched in December 2021, endorsed far-reaching recommendations to improve Suffolk people’s mental health and wellbeing.

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

Improving Footpaths and drainage

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

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

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

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

New Streetlights

It was announced in December 2021 that Suffolk’s LED replacement programme reached a new milestone, with over 10,000 streetlights upgraded with new, sustainable LEDs.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Warm Homes Suffolk fund

It was announced in late January 2022 that residents can cut energy costs and reduce their carbon footprint through the new Warm Homes Suffolk scheme. Suffolk residents who are struggling to keep their homes warm, can contact the new project which offers funding and free advice at www.warmhomessuffolk.org.

Suffolk cements commitment to keeping its communities safe

A new strategy was published in February 2022 outlining how Suffolk will address Violence Against Women and Girls. The strategy has been prepared collaboratively by the Safer Stronger Communities Board (SSCB), which consists of representatives from Suffolk County Council, district and borough councils, the police, Suffolk's Police & Crime Commissioner, community safety partnerships, health and probation services, the Norfolk & Suffolk Criminal Justice Board and Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership.