



April 2023

99% of pupils receive a preferred primary school place on National Offer Day

99.18% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred primary schools and 95.78% were offered a place at their first preference school.

Suffolk County Council received 7,056 applications from parents and carers indicating which primary school they would prefer their child to join in September 2023.

May 2023

Revised policy agreed to protect Suffolk's water supplies Suffolk County Council Cabinet (16th May) agreed to a revised infrastructure policy to support water security in the region.

As part of its focus on adapting to a changing climate, Cabinet members agreed a revision to the Energy Infrastructure Policy to cover future projects needed to protect and maintain water resources, including reservoirs, pipelines, and water recycling plants.

This new policy addition lays out how future water infrastructure projects will be managed and the council's role with stakeholders, such as the water companies, Ofwat and the Environment Agency. It also sets out how the council will recover the money it has to spend in the planning process for infrastructure projects.

Library services protected as Suffolk County Council approves additional funding Suffolk County Council (16th May) underlined its commitment to library services in Suffolk.

Suffolk County Council has underlined its commitment to library services in Suffolk, as it approved plans to increase its funding to Suffolk Libraries, to enable the service to continue operating at its current level, until the end of the contract in July 2024.

Suffolk Libraries currently receives £5.9m per year from Suffolk County Council, however the service is forecasting a deficit of £60k per month from April 2023. The service has cited increases in service costs, a reduction in income opportunities following the Coronavirus Pandemic and rising inflation, as causes of the deficit.

This means it is no longer possible for the service to continue operating at its current level of service, within its current contract value.

At Suffolk County Council's Cabinet meeting, the council has approved plans to absorb this cost pressure, funding Suffolk Libraries an additional £720k per year, through to the end of the current contract in July 2024. This additional funding will support Suffolk Libraries to continue delivering its highly valued services to Suffolk Residents.

Spotlight on improving air quality as county-wide strategy launched.

Suffolk County Council set out its plan for improving air quality in Suffolk following results from a recent air quality survey, as its county-wide Air Quality Strategy is published.

Air quality continues to be an important public health issue and a driver of health inequalities which disproportionately affects some of our most vulnerable residents in Suffolk. The county council recently engaged with Suffolk's residents about their thoughts on the impact poor air quality has on their quality of life. The survey received 338 responses and had a particular focus on Ipswich residents, because Ipswich makes up four of Suffolk's eight Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAS). AQMAS are areas where national target levels of Nitrogen Dioxide are being exceeded. Some of the results of the survey showed that there is a need to increase awareness about how residents can reduce pollution by reducing indoor burning of wood and coal, encouraging businesses to replace their fleet with low-emission or electric vehicles, reducing short journeys by car and considering more sustainable forms of transport such as walking, bike or bus. Vehicle idling when stationary is also a contributor to high levels of air pollution, an area the strategy will focus on going forward.

A key element of the Air Quality Strategy is a public engagement plan which is being developed to increase public awareness of the health impacts of air quality in Suffolk, enabling individuals to make choices that protect both their health and the health of others from the harmful effects of pollution. The delivery of the strategy will be closely monitored by the council to ensure it is accomplishing what it has set out to do. The strategy will also feed into the collective work of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

June 2023

Suffolk Fire Service to bring control room back to the County Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has announced plans to create a new fire control centre here in Suffolk.

Since October 2011, Suffolk has shared a control room with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire and Rescue Service in Huntingdon. The joint project has worked well, saving both fire services money and enabling greater cross-border resource sharing.

However, the company behind a project to deliver a new IT system, initiated in 2019, has run into technical and financial problems, causing a significant delay. This, in addition to advancements in technology, has led to the decision to bring fire control back into the county by the end of 2024. Help for Suffolk Pre-payment Meter customers A package of support has been created for pre-payment meter customers in Suffolk who are struggling with their energy bills.

Warm Homes Suffolk is a Suffolk-wide Council partnership service, delivering energy efficiency support to low-income households affected by cost-of-living pressures. Supported by Suffolk's Collaborative Communities Board and funding from Public Health Suffolk's Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), the service is now able to offer specific help for households struggling to pay their energy bills via a pre-payment meter, in addition to its existing support.

The support covers the whole of Suffolk and is available for all residents, whether they are in social housing, council tenants, owner occupiers or private renters.

The Warm Homes Suffolk Service can check eligibility and support applications for grants to increase household energy efficiency, with measures such as loft and wall insulation to air source heat pumps, draught-proofing and more.

It is estimated that more than 24,000 people in Suffolk are pre-payment meter customers. The service will work with each individual to understand the pressures on their finances and the impact this is having on their lives. The service can carry out a home visit, as well as providing advice over the phone and by email.

The COMF funding of £180,000 will enable this project to run for 12 months to provide the following: Income maximisation (through grants and benefits) Budgeting advice Help understanding bills and heating systems Support to reduce energy expenditure (By promoting social tariffs and support to switch suppliers) Improving household energy efficiency (By installing insulation, draught proofing, heating systems and solar panels) Facilitating switch away from prepaid meters if appropriate Ancestry appointed to digitise Suffolk's popular family and local history sources More than 400 years of fascinating historical documents held at Suffolk Archives are to be digitised and made available online, thanks to an agreement between Suffolk County Council and Ancestry.

Suffolk Archives will work alongside the family history website Ancestry to create high-quality, full-colour digital images of millions of baptism, marriage and burial records from parishes within the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

The earliest records being digitised date back to 1538 and include events in the lives of notable historical figures, such as the 1776 baptism of landscape artist John Constable, and the 1846 burial of Thomas Clarkson who devoted his life to the abolition of slavery.

It is hoped that Suffolk's main parish records will be published online in early 2025 with other collections of local interest to follow. Public access will be free of charge in Suffolk Archives branches or at any Suffolk Library. Anyone with an Ancestry subscription will also be able to access the records as part of their research from their own computer or device.

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£100m broadband investment in Suffolk under government's Project Gigabit

Better broadband is on its way for around 80,000 properties across rural Suffolk in a £100 million investment under a £5 billion government infrastructure programme.

CityFibre, the UK's largest independent full-fibre provider, will deliver gigabit-capable infrastructure for around 218,000 homes and businesses having secured £318 million of Project Gigabit funding after a competitive process. The provider will also be making a private investment of £170 million to deliver the project.

Decisions on where broadband infrastructure is installed will be made by BDUK

July 2023

Suffolk receives £1.49m funding for walking and cycling pilot

Suffolk County Council has received more than £1 million from the government to fund participation in a national pilot scheme to promote cycling and walking as part of a more active lifestyle. The county is receiving £1,495,506 over three years as one of 11 local authorities taking part in the £13.9 million Active Travel England social prescribing scheme.

Social prescribing is a national pilot scheme to promote cycling and walking as part of a more active lifestyle. The project, launched in August 2022, is helping councils run trials to evaluate the impact of active travel on an individual's physical and mental health, such as through reduced demand for healthcare appointments and reliance on medication due to more physical activity.

This also includes allowing doctors and health workers to prescribe walking and cycling to improve patients' physical and mental health.

As the scheme progresses, GP surgeries in the pilot areas of Ipswich and Lowestoft will be invited to take part.

Work is already underway with Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board and Suffolk Information Partnership to link some referral systems.

Suffolk will use its funding for projects that will see patients in parts of Ipswich and Lowestoft offered free access to guided walks, cycle training and bike loans.

Introductory walk and cycle groups are taking place now on Friday mornings in Ipswich at Murray Park and Holywells Park. In Lowestoft, they are operating from Normanston Park. These will be available through July and August, with participants offered 1-1 journey planning, 1-1 buddy walking, or cycling and bike maintenance training. From September, walking and cycling groups will take place across Ipswich at Whitton, Chantry, Gainsborough, Wherstead and Central Ipswich. In Lowestoft they will be taking place at the Seafront, Normanston Park, Nicholas Everett Park and Sparrows Nest. Other venues will develop as the pilot progresses.

There will be varying levels of activity depending on health needs, with each activity lasting up to 90 minutes with a rest break and free drink in a local café.

There will be plenty of rest stops based on the needs of the participants. Equipment can be provided to include walking aids, bicycles, or e-bikes.

All activities are led by experienced and qualified cycle and walk leaders.

Later in the year other activities are planned in the form of community events, themed walks, or cycle rides, cycling courses and a digital walking app featuring challenges and treasure hunts focused on the areas of Ipswich and Lowestoft.

August 2023

Formal opening of £1.3 million Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service training centre

The Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Training Centre at Wattisham Flying Station near Stowmarket has recently undergone a £1.3 million upgrade.

It now boasts a tactical firefighting facility, which uses real fire and an LPG-fired facility to simulate incidents firefighters may be faced with.

The most recent addition is the modular office complex, which features additional classrooms and welfare facilities for all delegates and staff.

The centre was formally declared open at the annual base families' day on Thursday August 24 by Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Jon Lacey of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, and Colonel Toby R Moore MBE, Station Commander, Wattisham Flying Station.

The fire service training centre has been at Wattisham since 2011 and occupies a 17-acre site that previously housed the Bloodhound missile system from the Cold War.

The training centre is used throughout the year for a wide range of training requirements which include refresher and ongoing assessments by all staff.

September 2023

Inflation, SEND school transport and care costs contribute to council's predicted overspend Inflation, school transport for children with SEND, and looking after children in care are the main factors for SCC forecasting to spend £22.3m over its £688.1m budget for this year.

This is a similar story for many councils across the country, due to higher demand for their services, inflation remaining higher than expected for longer, and interest rates rising to levels not forecast by financial markets.

Recent research by the County Councils Network suggests that England's largest councils will need to make at least £1bn in savings to balance their current 2023/24 budgets.

A BBC investigation also reported that councils expect to be £5.2bn short of balancing budgets by April 2026, the average council facing a £33m predicted deficit by 2025-26.

Suffolk County Council projects a 4% overspend (£29.3m), to be partially offset by an additional Section 31 grant from Government, and additional income from the pooling of business rates with the district and borough councils in Suffolk, totalling £7m.

Details of the main areas of overspend are:

School transport - forecast to overspend by £11.4m (39% of the overspend), with £8.3m of this being travel costs for children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). This is largely due to more children with SEND needs, transport operators being in limited supply, and rising costs from those operators who are also feeling the impacts of inflation, especially fuel costs.

Children in care - forecast to overspend by £8.2m (28% of the overspend). The council has a responsibility to provide care for children and young people under the age of 18. Some of these have incredibly complex needs requiring 24-hour care from multiple carers. There is currently an unexpectedly higher number of children requiring this support, with this costing an average of £22,700 per week, per child.

Adult care services - forecast to overspend by £3.5m (12% of the overspend) for purchasing care, due to increases in demand, and staffing costs in the sector. The fees paid for residential and nursing placements remain high with 64% of new residential and nursing packages being above the published rate of £806 per week, with some specialist packages being over £1,500 per week.

Inflation - inflation and interest rates have been higher than experienced in a generation, with the legacy of COVID-19 continuing to have a significant impact on various services. As an example, there is an estimated £3.0m (10% of the overspend) pressure as pay settlements continue to be above historical norms as inflation has remained stubbornly high during 2023 so far. High interest rates mean it has been more costly than anticipated to borrow money, which the council does to help fund big projects, such as upgrading highways, maintaining schools or developing household recycling centres.

In addition to the net overspend of £22.3m from this main budget, the council is forecasting an overspend of £15.8m against its £256.5m budget from the Dedicated Schools Grant and Pupil Premium Grant. This is money from Government specifically to fund schools and services for pupils. This overspend comes solely from resources spent on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision, not including school transport. Suffolk, like many other local authorities, is seeing a continuous increase in demand which is not being met by the same level of increase in funding. Despite these challenges, council departments continue to make savings. This year's budget identified £25.1m of savings to be made, and the latest figures show that £20m of this is projected to be achieved.

Councils unite against National Grid pylon proposals

In a joint letter to National Grid, the leaders of the three councils address the extensive impact on landscapes and local communities that the scheme would bring.

They also highlight that an offshore solution has not been sufficiently investigated, and the opportunities that this could bring to co-ordinate with other large-scale energy projects off the region's coast.

The Norwich to Tilbury project would see 114 miles of electricity pylons weave their way through the three counties. Only a small percentage of this cabling would go underground, an issue which the councils also raise, stating that more would be needed particularly in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and near Diss and the Waveney Valley.

October 2023

New highways services arrive in Suffolk as multi-million-pound partnership goes live

The new contract, which is worth in the region of £800 million - £1 billion, will deliver highway projects and improvements across Suffolk for up to 20 years, including maintaining roads, pavements and rights of way, improving drainage, hedge trimming, construction of new road schemes, snow-clearing and gritting and much more.

Milestone Infrastructure, part of M Group Services, was awarded Suffolk's new highways services contract back in February and since then has been working with Suffolk County Council to mobilise the new contract ahead of it commencing on 1 October.

When seeking a new highways partner, the county council wanted a keener focus on delivering greater social value, building on the council's commitment to carbon reduction and protecting the environment, using local skills and talent, and giving young people the opportunity to work in the sector.

With this in mind, the new partnership was built around six key contract objectives, which will form the basis for all that Suffolk Highways delivers going forward. These objectives are:

- Collaboration and Partnership
- Social Value
- Environment and Net Zero Carbon
- Customer Communication and Engagement
- Commercialism and Enterprise
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Statement following funding announcement for Ely and Haughley rail junctions The Government has announced funding for upgrades to Ely and Haughley rail junctions.

New fund delivers digital boost for Suffolk Almost £250,000 of funding was announced at an event today (October 25th), giving a boost to the county's ambitions to reduce the number of people excluded from the benefits of digital technology.

Suffolk County Council has contributed £100,000, with £143,000 coming from District and Borough Council funding, earmarked for digital inclusion projects.

Suffolk's Digital Inclusion Fund will be open to bidders from early November for initiatives that will support people of all ages, but particularly those who are at risk of being disadvantaged by being excluded from accessing digital support and information.

The fund has been created as a collaboration between Suffolk County Council, district and borough councils, voluntary and private sector partners and Suffolk Community Foundation. It is a direct result of Suffolk County Council's Policy Development Panel, held in 2022, which recommended a series of actions to reduce digital poverty and its effects in Suffolk.

The event called on key partners to support the new fund, making a further commitment to playing their part in the ambition for a digitally enabled Suffolk. Prospective bidders are encouraged to apply through Suffolk Community Foundation's website www.suffolkcf.org.uk Evidence suggests that by not having the skills or the means to use online services – everything from online shopping, looking up important information and advice and using transactional services such as applying for bus passes – people are at risk of poorer health, reduced income and even a lower life expectancy.

In 2021, Healthwatch Suffolk, who participated in the event, co-produced principles for digital health and care. These principles provide important guidance for organisations intending to deliver health or social care services using digital to ensure people have a meaningful choice over how and when they access information and it is available to them in the format they need.

November 2023

Cabinet approved £10 million new funding to resurface residential roads

At Suffolk County Council's Cabinet meeting (7th November), Cabinet approved an extra £10 million to repair and resurface local roads in villages and residential areas across Suffolk.

The funding will nearly double Suffolk Highways' £11 million annual road maintenance budget but be targeted at smaller residential streets which are typically maintained less frequently than busier A and B roads.

Over recent years, the county council has recognised the importance of improving roads for residents, this new proposal follows the successful £21 million contribution towards the resurfacing of 1,000 miles of road between 2017 and 2021, and more recently the committed £21 million between 2021 – 2025 to increase pavement maintenance, deliver drainage improvement schemes and repair road signs.

It is hoped that the extra £10 million boost to resurface some local roads, minor rural roads and urban cul-de-sacs would result in a reduction of new potholes, which in turn will reduce the overall financial burden on the council's emergency and reactive repair budgets. Between 2020 and 2023, 2 out of 3 pothole repairs were carried out on local roads, minor rural roads, and urban cul-de-sacs. During that period, more than half of all defects reported by the public were on these types of roads. The extra investment will make use of more sustainable materials such as warm mix asphalts that have a lower CO2 footprint than traditional hot mix asphalts and which include recycled materials to reduce raw material use; resulting in a more positive impact on Suffolk's environment. Government backs A12 road improvements with funding commitment The government has confirmed (on 31st October) funding for a transformative package of improvements as part of Suffolk County Council's A12 Major Road Network scheme.

The scheme will see upgrades to the key roundabouts from the A14 at Seven Hills, east of Ipswich, north to the A1152 at Woods Lane, and a new dual carriageway section replacing the existing single carriageway bottleneck at Seckford Hall between the B1438 and B1079. It will also deliver improvements to bus links and walking and cycling connections to reduce the issue of severance for communities on either side of the A12 – for example, where the A12 separates houses from local employment and retail areas.

The Department for Transport has committed to funding up to £ 54 million of the scheme's estimated £ 64 million total cost. The remainder of the cost will be funded by local development contributions, including from Sizewell C and Brightwell Lakes.

Extra £108 million for Suffolk's roads welcomed Suffolk County Council has welcomed the Government announcement - which is part of a Department for Transport plan to pump £609 million into highway maintenance in the East of England. £107,590,000 has been ringfenced for Suffolk over the next decade, including £3.4 million in this financial year.

The funding is part of the Government's Network North plan, with money redirected from HS2 funding. Transport Secretary Mark Harper MP today set out his £8.3 billion national long-term plan to resurface 5,000 miles of roads across the country.

Other projects in the East of England set to benefit from the Network North money includes the transformation of the Ely Junction to give an extra six freight trains per day access to the Port of Felixstowe and upgrades to key roundabouts on the A12, from Seven Hills to Woods Lane. A new dual-carriageway section will be built to replace the existing single-carriageway bottleneck at Seckford Hall between the B1438 and B1079.

Storm Babet

4.7 million litres of water and 8,412 drains cleared since Storm Babet battered Suffolk one month ago
4.7 million litres of water has been pumped away and 8,412 highways drains cleared of post-storm debris since Storm Babet first hit Suffolk.

The scale of work undertaken since the storm includes:

Clearing and jetting of 8,412 drains

Removing 121 trees blocking roads

Cleared flood water from 198 locations

Repairing 1,200 road and pavement potholes Contacting landowners about blocked private watercourses and roadside ditches, which are generally their responsibility to maintain.

The areas worst hit by the storm, including Debenham, Framlingham, Needham Market and Cavendish have all had their drains blitzed to clear tonnes of silt, leaves and other debris that has been washing into them as flood waters have subsided.

After drains are cleared, water from large tankers is run through them to check they are operating and if they are not, high pressure jets can be brought in to clear any blockages. In extreme cases, cameras are used to locate hidden blockages and then work is scheduled to dig up the pipes and fix the issues.

Councillor Steve Wiles, Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways Drainage and now also providing an additional focus on wider flood prevention post-storm Babet, said:

“Storm Babet was an exceptional and sustained downpour, with water running off fields and overwhelming riverbanks and roadside ditches, and exceeding the capacity of road drains as more than a month’s worth of average rainfall for East Anglia fell in just 24 to 36 hours.

“The deluge of rain has needed significant additional work to clear and I am thankful to our highways staff for their hard work, especially in the areas worst hit.

“There is a significant amount of work being done by our district and borough council colleagues to help residents recover from the floods, including making payments from the Government’s flood relief programme. Eligible residents will start receiving grants and council tax discounts during November.

“In the coming months and years, there will be much work for councils, emergency services and residents to ensure they are as prepared as possible for extreme weather.”

Suffolk County Council is also pumping an extra £10 million into drain and gully clearing projects.

135 drainage sites were addressed during 2022/23 and 89 new projects are currently in the design phase with the county council’s new highways partner Milestone. This is in addition to Suffolk’s annual drain clearing programme which saw 111,000 drains cleared last year.

The county council has also gathered over 800 reports of flooding to homes and businesses, to enable owners to access funding from the Government. Suffolk councils are working together, with Suffolk County Council collecting information and assessing the reports, and the district and borough councils distributing the funding to eligible property owners.

Eligible residents who experienced exceptional property flooding during Storm Babet and have reported this to the county council, will start receiving financial support during November.

Suffolk County Council's Adult Social Care service rated Good overall by Care Quality Commission

Suffolk County Council has been awarded an indicative overall rating of "Good" for the quality of its Adult Social Care services.

Following a period of intense inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Suffolk County Council has become one of the first councils nationwide to achieve this standard.

Earlier this year CQC announced that 5 local authorities with responsibility for adult social care, including Suffolk, had volunteered to be part of a Local Authority Assessment Pilot, to help CQC develop the new model of inspection to help assess councils against the requirements of the Care Act. This model would then be rolled out across the country with all 153 Local Authorities with responsibility for Adult Social Care being inspected by the commission.

The assessment process began this summer with a request for information to each local authority taking part in the pilot. This collected the written evidence needed to allow CQC to understand how each council is delivering its adult social care services. Following on from this initial ask, the County Council was then required to arrange over 40 different meetings including 4 staff drop-in sessions, with over 150 people, including staff, partners, providers, carers, and people with lived experiences. These meetings allowed the CQC inspection team to meet people directly and ask questions to help further evidence the quality of social care services provided.

CQC's final report rated the overall quality of Suffolk County Council's Adult Social Care services as "Good" and highlighted areas of strength including, the quality of its leadership, the culture of learning and support for staff, the range of digital care options available, the good relationships between social care and health colleagues and locality team knowledge and understanding of community needs.

Almost £1 million extra committed to investigating significant flooding following Babet

Suffolk County Council has committed almost £1 million of funds to bring in additional flood investigation specialists as the response to Storm Babet continues.

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.

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.

In any usual year, Suffolk County Council carries out around three or four of these investigations. Following Babet, up to 100 look set to be needed.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Suffolk County Council's leader, said:

"The impact of this truly unprecedented event is still being felt across the county and will continue to do so for months to come, so it is important that we recognise that and increase our resources appropriately.

"These investigations help us to work with communities to establish the cause of flooding in the worst hit areas and identify ways to manage the risk better in future."

Councillor Steve Wiles, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways Drainage and Flood Recovery, said:

"Our teams continue to work incredibly hard to help our flood-hit communities get back to their feet following the recent storms.

"This increase in resource will mean we can do even more with our communities and, importantly, quicker."

The Government has now confirmed the arrangements for the DEFRA-funded scheme which means flooded property owners can apply for up to £5,000 to help make their homes and businesses more resilient to future flooding. Suffolk County Council will therefore start to promote, administer and audit the scheme.

December 2023

More public money for adult and children's care, but difficult decisions are needed to balance the books

In the next two years, Suffolk County Council needs to pump almost £74 million extra into protecting the county's most vulnerable residents.

£74 million extra needed to protect the most vulnerable over two years

£64.7 million savings to be made over two years Council set to reduce workforce, services and use savings As part of financial plans to prioritise those in greatest need, an additional £42.7 million for children's services and £29.9 million for adult care are being proposed.

Along with local authorities up and down the country, the council has been hit hard by inflation and rising demand for services such as children's care, special educational needs and disabilities and home to school transport. It means having to make difficult decisions about the services it provides, including £64.7 million of savings in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The two-year savings proposals, which have been published on the council's website today, include: £11 million of staffing costs through changing the way services are delivered and restructuring across the council.

£30.6 million of additional savings from an extension of the council's hugely successful Adult Social Care Transformation programme, which has focused on reducing demand for more expensive social care options by boosting people's independence and ability to stay well for longer through innovative methods including cutting edge care technology. This transformation programme has already saved £30.7 million over the last six years

£0.5 million of savings by stopping core funding to Art and Museum sector organisations. To assist with the transition, £528,000 of COVID recovery money will be made available to Arts and Museum sector organisations for 2024/25 which will fully cover the funding reduction for one year.

£140,000 of savings by centralising Suffolk Archives to The Hold and closing the branches in West and East Suffolk. In February 2023, the council committed £3.4m to relocate the West Suffolk Archives branch to the proposed Western Way development. Remaining at its current location would have required over £5 million to protect the historic records and meet modern archive standards. West Suffolk Council has since decided not to progress with the Western Way development, ending that opportunity. Centralising the three branches into one brings Suffolk in line with the majority of archive services across the country and is better value for taxpayers' money.

£15.9 million of reserves will be used to balance the 2024/25 budget.

January 2024

Council to ensure Sizewell C delivers for Suffolk

As construction begins Sizewell C today (15th January 2024) triggered its Development Consent Order, meaning that work can begin to build the new 3.2GW nuclear power station on the Suffolk coast.

Suffolk County Council played a key role to get significant improvements made to the plans during the project's examination by the Planning Inspectorate.

As a result, Suffolk will now see around £250 million made available to its communities, by way of mitigating the impact on residents, businesses, the environment, and infrastructure.

The council was also influential in ensuring that a far greater quantity of construction materials will be delivered by rail and sea, reducing the number of lorries on the county's rural roads.

Visitor attractions invited to join 'Good Journey' scheme Suffolk Growth Partnership and Suffolk County Council have teamed up with the national organisation 'Good Journey' – the UK experts in car-free leisure – in a push to cut carbon emissions and widen access to our leisure, culture and nature for more people.

The initiative, launching in March 2024, supports Suffolk's Greenest County journey towards a carbon net zero visitor economy and will welcome car-free visitors to an array of attractions across Suffolk.

Around 25 local tourism and visitor attractions are now invited to join the Suffolk Good Journey scheme offering residents and visitors discounts and incentives to leave the car at home and explore more of the county on foot, by bike or using public transport. Suffolk visitor attractions participating will be supported and feature on goodjourney.org.uk – providing easy travel information and discounts to domestic and international visitors.

Visitor attractions participating in the Suffolk Good Journey scheme will also form part of a marketing campaign showcasing sustainable tourism visits to Suffolk, offering adventures by train, bus, bike and foot to suit all ages and tastes – from exploring the towns, coast and countryside, and local food and drink delicacies to discovering the cultural and heritage attractions and film locations.

Visitor attractions and venues interested in joining Suffolk Good Journey county can find out more details by contacting Loretta Jones at Good Journey

on loretta@goodjourney.org.uk or info@suffolkgrowth.co.uk Council to propose new funding for arts & heritage in Suffolk Suffolk County Council is today (26th January) announcing its intention to create a new funding pot open to all arts and heritage organisations in the county.

Core funding for nine arts and heritage organisations still to cease after 2024/25 New £500,000 funding pot proposed from 2025/26, open to all arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk Proposal to be tabled at Cabinet meeting on 30 January Following this week's announcement from government that £600 million of further funding will be available to local councils, the council intends to propose a new £500,000 project fund to which all Suffolk's arts and heritage organisations can apply.

However, this does not alter the difficult financial decisions the council is having to make so that it can prioritise spending on services like SEND, home to school transport and children in care. An extra £74 million is still needed over the next two years to protect the county's most vulnerable adults and children.

Proposals to end the core funding of £528,000 of nine arts and heritage organisations after the 2024/25 financial year, are still in place. This funding will be replaced with the new £500,000 project funding pot, open to all arts and heritage organisations, from April 2025.

February 2024

Public consultation on Suffolk County Council's proposed devolution deal starts on 18th March

A 10-week public consultation on our proposed devolution deal with the Government will start on 18th March and run through until 26th May. The consultation will be in two main parts – an open survey, hosted by Suffolk County Council, that any residents can complete and a sample survey of 1000 Suffolk residents conducted independently by Ipsos Mori. The consultation will be available through our website www.suffolk.gov.uk/devolution and social media. There will also be media coverage highlighting the consultation.

Dragon Patcher lands in Suffolk to bolster response to rural potholes

Suffolk Highways has welcomed the new pothole-repairing machine to help fix the growing number of potholes experienced nationally during the winter season, with a trial set to initially target defects in rural Suffolk.

The Dragon Patcher is a machine that releases compressed air which cleans the surface of the road, before heating the surface to a temperature that enables repair material to bond effectively with the road surface, allowing the pothole to be repaired with an aggregate and hot bitumen material. Compared with the traditional approach of repairing potholes, the Dragon Patcher can work five times faster. This trial is in addition to the potholes being repaired around the clock as part of our routine repair programme, during the past two months Suffolk Highways has repaired 2,851 potholes across Suffolk.

Fuelled by the biodiesel, HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil), the patcher reduces raw material use and creates zero waste and has shown to provide significant carbon savings when compared to traditional patching techniques.

More of Suffolk's tree cover and orchards to be restored

Suffolk County Council has secured funding of £201,213 from the government's Local Authority Treescapes Fund on behalf of Babergh District Council, East Suffolk Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, Ipswich Borough Council and West Suffolk Council.

The funding will go towards the planting of the trees, many of which are 'standards' around six feet in height when planted. The funding also covers three years of maintenance to help the trees become established.

The Fund aims to restore tree cover in non-woodland areas which may have been impacted by issues such as disease, habitat degradation or ageing tree stock. Many of the proposed projects will involve their local community and pupils from local schools.

Creating more orchards is one of the themes across the planting projects. Nationally, there has been a decline in the number of orchards because of commercial pressures and increased imports. This loss of orchards has impacts on the species they support, with less blossom and fruit for food, and less shelter and shading. It also means we are losing some of our heritage varieties and reducing genetic diversity.

One example of this is the creation of a community orchard in Woods Meadow Country Park, near Lowestoft. Local varieties of apple, plum, gage and cherry trees will be sourced from the Suffolk & Apples & Orchards Project. The trees will be cared for by wardens, the Woods Meadow volunteer

group, the local primary school, and local residents. The fruit will be available for the local visitors to the park to pick and eat, but also a good source of food for birds and wildlife.

Council to review weed control for roads and pavements

In February 2022, the council agreed to stop using glyphosate in its routine weed treatment programmes, to find more natural alternatives to help protect the local environment. However, the alternative products proved unable to meet requirements, which was further exacerbated by exceptional growing conditions. Multiple applications were sometimes needed which could introduce other negative environmental impacts.

It has proved a challenge to reduce high performing treatments, whilst significantly mitigating the environmental impact. Other local authorities locally have experienced a similar situation. Regular weed treatment on our highway network will continue using a variety of methods, with plans for glyphosate being considered only when appropriate – the ambition still remains to reduce the use of glyphosate as far as possible.

Teams will continue to monitor and research the different approaches being used to remove weeds on our roads and pavements. Where needed, glyphosate would be used responsibly as it is one of the most cost-effective and long-lasting solutions.

£4.4 million to be spent on additional staff to strengthen SEND reform

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet confirmed that 60 new members of staff will be recruited to drive forward important reform to the way special educational needs and disability (SEND) services are delivered in Suffolk.

New Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, Andrew Reid, today reaffirmed Suffolk County Council's commitment to ensuring improvements to the SEND service go further and faster. This includes an increase in permanent SEND staff of nearly 15%. These new posts will support the improvement of the quality and timeliness of assessments, plans, reviews, and communications with families.

March 2024

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.

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 an online form.

Although not every road may be suitable, suggestions from residents will help indicate where there is demand for charging points.

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.