

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – SEPTEMBER 2024



Cllr Stephen Burroughes - Framlingham Division

• **NEW EUROPA WAY LINK ROAD IN IPSWICH GETS START DATE**

Works to build a new link road at Europa Way, connecting Sproughton Road with Bramford Road in Ipswich will begin on 9 September. This scheme will include extending the existing Europa Way road to create the link road. This new section of road will include an off-road footpath and cycle path, with a new mini roundabout being built to connect the new extension of Europa Way to Bramford Road.

The scheme brings many benefits for local residents and aims to:

- Improve the transport network's reliability and safety
- Improve connectivity for sustainable transport modes such as pedestrians, cyclists and bus services
- Support Suffolk's economy by unlocking employment creation opportunities and planned growth
- Achieve a balanced development by installing green features to help avoid putting additional pressure on the surrounding environment, such as; installing Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to manage surface water runoff

The construction work is programmed to commence on 9 September 2024 with the aim to complete the works and open the new link road by the end of April 2025. The work will be carried out in phases and will use various traffic management methods for each phase. This is essential for the safety of road users, residents and our team.

To facilitate construction, temporary parking restrictions will be placed along part of Bramford Road. Suffolk Highways requests that vehicles are relocated from the marked area whilst the works are carried out.

Temporary traffic lights and pedestrian crossing points will be the main method of traffic management used during works on Bramford Road. Towards the end of the work it may be necessary for part of Bramford Road to be closed. Full details will be confirmed at a later date.

• **COUNCIL FORMALLY OBJECTS THE LATEST SEA LINK PLANS**

Suffolk County Council has formally objected to National Grid's Sea Link project, because of proposals for the building of a new bridge and for construction work to take place on Sundays and Bank Holidays. The scale of a new permanent access bridge across the River Fromus is deemed hugely disproportionate. Plans show that it could be up to six metres in height with a span of over 150 metres, including embankment.

Updated plans from National Grid also revealed that core working hours are being proposed to include 7am to 5pm on Sundays and Bank Holidays.

In response to Sea Link's latest public consultation which has just closed, the council has submitted a 29-page document outlining these and a variety of other potential impacts, that the scheme would have on local communities and the environment.

In its response, the council adds that roads will be subject to construction traffic seven days a week. This provides no relief for locals or visitors who want to enjoy the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths National Landscape, and will disrupt local amenities and tourism.

National Grid expects to submit its application for development consent in early 2025.

- **SUFFOLK RESIDENTS CAN ACCESS ELECTRIC VEHICLES ON A SHORT-TERM BASIS, FROM NEXT SUMMER**

A trial of electric community vehicles is set to launch next summer in Suffolk, with the tender process beginning this autumn. Plug In Suffolk Car Clubs will be placing sixteen electric vehicles across eight locations in Suffolk which local residents can book by the minute, hour or day. Planned locations include Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket, Sudbury, Needham Market, Stowmarket, Lowestoft and Woodbridge.

Members of the public interested in this project are urged to sign up to the mailing list to receive updates as the project progresses - [Plug in Suffolk Car Clubs - Mailing List](#).

Car Clubs have already offered people in other parts of the UK access to local, low-emission vehicles without the expense of owning one. Local communities in these areas have already experienced many benefits including improved air quality, reduced congestion and increased mobility for those without access to their own car. Current providers remain reluctant to fully fund electric community vehicles in rural and semi-rural areas like Suffolk as they do not yet have the real-world data to support the usage.

The project is funded by Suffolk's public sector organisations, helping deliver on two of the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan's goals; a reduced number of cars on the road and an increased proportion of vehicles on the road that are low or zero emission. Additional charge point funding is being provided by the Department for Transport's On Street Residential ChargePoint Scheme (ORCS).

- **PREPARING FOR THE NEW SCHOOL TERM CAN BE BOTH EXCITING AND DAUNTING**

A column by Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Education and SEND.

In just two weeks, pupils across Suffolk will head back to school after the six-week summer holidays. I hope that families and teaching staff have had an enjoyable, relaxing break and are feeling prepared for the new school year.

I want to begin offering my best wishes to students who received their A-Level, BTEC and T-Level results last week. Young people should be very proud of their efforts, they are a testament to their hard work and dedication as well as the commitment of teaching staff to deliver the best education and support to our young people, throughout their school careers. I would also like to wish good luck to all students receiving their GCSE results on Thursday. I hope that you achieve the results you need to progress to the next stage of your education or training. If students have not received the results they expected, there is lots of helpful information at www.thesource.me.uk. It is most important to remember that no matter what grades you receive, you always have options to choose from.

The start of a new school year can present challenges for families and schools alike. The prospect of walking back through the school gates after the summer holidays, or indeed for the first time, can be both exciting and daunting.

While many children and young people will be looking forward to going back to school, I know some families may be feeling anxious and that it can feel quite difficult for many children and young people. It is normal to feel anxious, and there is a lot of support out there to help children manage the transition back into school, including a suite of top tips for families on the Suffolk County Council website: www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/wellbeing-in-education.

These resources have been written by our Psychology and therapeutic team and were co-produced with the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum. They include advice for families with primary and secondary aged children as well as guidance for families with children who have additional needs and/or anxiety. The resources are broken down into five top tips and I have pulled out five top tips which I think are really helpful to remember:

1. Starting conversations about going back to school sooner rather than later will ensure there is time for children to share their worries, think through problems and allow you to find solutions together.
2. The things we as parents worry about are not always the same as our children so ask them what they need to feel prepared.
3. Taking small steps to try and introduce routines early is a great way to prepare for the return to school. Bedtimes, waking times and mealtimes may well have changed during the holidays so adjusting these gradually to establish a routine to prepare children for the new school term will help them.
4. Using visual prompts and timetables and checklists with personalised themes can help with preparation and reduce feelings of worry.
5. Planning and knowing what to expect on their first day back. Who will be there and what will happen on their first day.

As well as these resources, InOurPlace offer online courses dedicated to improving emotional health and wellbeing in parents, children, teenagers, adults and grandparents. They have produced a suite of online training and information for parents to support children with the transition to primary or secondary school, called 'Moving Up'. Families in Suffolk can access online training and resources from InOurPlace for free by visiting www.inourplace.co.uk/movingup and using the access code WOLSEY.

We have been sharing links to these resources on our social media channels and will continue to do so over the next couple of weeks as schools return. I hope that parents find these useful.

I wish children, young people and all school staff the very best as they return to school.

• **SOLAR TOGETHER LAUNCHES IN SUFFOLK**

Residents of Suffolk can come together to invest in renewable energy sources through a group-buying scheme for solar panels and battery storage. Solar Together Suffolk helps homeowners feel confident that they are paying the right price for a high-quality installation from qualified installers.

Suffolk residents can join the group-buying scheme, which offers solar panels with optional battery storage and EV charge points, as well as retrofit battery storage for residents who have already invested in solar panels and are looking to get more from the renewable energy they generate. The scheme allows homeowners to increase their independence from the national grid.

It's free to register here, and there is no obligation to go ahead with an installation. Suffolk's councils are working in partnership with iChoosr, experts in sustainable energy transition, to make the transition to clean energy as cost-effective and hassle-free as possible.

How does it work?

- Householders can register online to become part of the group for free and without obligation at solartogether.co.uk/suffolk
- Approved UK solar PV suppliers participate in a reverse auction. They are able to offer competitive pricing as the volume and geographic concentration makes it possible for them to realise greater efficiencies, which they pass on with lower prices for installations.
- After the auction, registered households will be emailed a personal recommendation which is specifically linked to the details which they submitted in their original registration.
- If they choose to accept their recommendation, the specifics of their installation will be confirmed with a technical survey after which a date can be set for the installation of their solar PV system.

- Telephone and email helpdesks are on-hand throughout the whole process which, together with information sessions, will allow households to make an informed decision in a safe and hassle-free environment.

iChoosr has been collaborating with UK councils since 2015 on its Solar Together scheme, aiming to accelerate the energy transition nationwide. The initiative aims to encourage residents to partake in the collective purchase of solar PV and battery storage systems. To date, Solar Together has installed 13,750 solar panels in Suffolk, reducing carbon emissions by 27,100 tonnes over 25 years – equivalent to 15,000 cars off the road in that time! iChoosr's schemes have been delivered in partnership with local authorities in five countries. More than 180 schemes have led to 178,000 residents installing solar PV systems.

• **SMALL IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED AS CHILDREN'S SERVICES' OFSTED REPORT PUBLISHED**

Ofsted has published its report into Suffolk County Council's children's services. The report rated the service as 'requires improvement to be good'. The ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) report conveys a mixed picture across Suffolk. Importantly, inspectors concluded that children's safeguarding is strong and that the experiences and progress of children in care were good. They also reported that 'children in care thrive'.

However, they highlighted weakness in some of the processes and systems in place. These included inconsistencies with the way first contact with children and young people is processed, and the quality and support to children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless. It also found inconsistencies in the level of understanding that care leavers have about the range of support available to them.

The report outlined seven points for improvement, which have either been implemented already through small amends to systems or processes, or are in progress.

The inspection looked at four areas; the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families; the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection; the experiences and progress of children in care; and the experiences and progress of care leavers. Although the majority of the report is positive, three of these were graded as 'requires improvement to be good'. The experience and progress of children in care was 'good'. Following publication of the report, an action plan will be sent to Ofsted by the end of September and a partnership board will be set up to oversee improvements. The council will also carry out a quality assurance review of systems and processes.

• **SUNNICA CHALLENGE ENDS AS TWO COUNCILS PULL OUT**

Judicial review proceedings from four local councils against the Sunnica solar farm project will not be pursued after West Suffolk Council and Cambridgeshire County Council chose to withdraw from the process.

Suffolk County Council had written to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Rt Hon. Ed Miliband MP, regarding his decision to approve the Sunnica solar farm.

The pre-action protocol letter was the first step in potential judicial review proceedings against the Sunnica solar farm project, in a bid to secure appropriate funding for work that the council will have to do as a result of the scheme. The council believes that, in his haste to approve the application in just a matter of days, the Secretary of State ignored the council's funding arguments.

The new Secretary of State has shown scant regard for the communities affected, and for the local authorities who must pick up considerable amounts of additional work as a result of the project.

This comes at a time when local authorities are having to make difficult financial decisions across all service areas, in order to prioritise supporting the most vulnerable in their communities, through adult social care and SEND.

Suffolk County Council and East Cambridgeshire District Council remained committed to seeing through the legal challenge but were left in an impossible position to continue.

With West Suffolk Council and Cambridgeshire County Council abandoning the process, the cost of legal fees for the two remaining councils versus the likely financial return in a successful outcome was no longer a justifiable use of public funds. Although both councils still had the desire to take things forward, the loss of two councils in the group action is damaging to the process as a whole.

All four councils had earlier received a response from the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Rt Hon. Ed Miliband MP, to their pre-action protocol letter in a bid to secure appropriate funding.

That reply outlined the government's position to defend their decision to grant permission for the Sunnica project. The councils maintain their position that the Secretary of State made a legal error, but cannot now test the case in court.

• **NEW ERA FOR LOWESTOFT AS GULL WING SET TO OPEN**

Lowestoft's Gull Wing bridge will open to the public with a community walkabout on the bridge on Saturday 7th September, heralding a new era of connectivity and regeneration for the town. The new bridge, which was built on behalf of Suffolk County Council by leading civil engineering contractor Farrans, represents a significant step forward for Lowestoft and promises to bring both immediate and long-term benefits to the town, its businesses and residents.

It not only addresses longstanding issues with traffic congestion but will also act as a catalyst for economic growth, attracting new investment and positioning Lowestoft as a dynamic and forward-looking commercial centre and community.

By providing another route over Lake Lothing, the Gull Wing bridge will significantly ease traffic congestion in the town centre, shortening journey times and improving journey reliability. Modern cycle and pedestrian facilities on either side will encourage more sustainable modes of transport and better connect communities on the north and south of the waterway.

The bridge is expected to attract new businesses and trade to the area, create new job opportunities, and to streamline logistics and transportation, laying the foundation for continued growth in the town and surrounding area for many decades to come.

The Gull Wing's bascule span being installed (CHPV Offshore Film & Photography)

To celebrate this important milestone for Lowestoft, members of the public are invited to experience the Gull Wing before it opens to traffic. From 9am to 11:30am on Saturday 7th September, the bridge will be open exclusively to pedestrians. It is hoped this opportunity will allow the public to experience the unique scale and design of the bridge up close, as well as grab a selfie and check out the views, without any traffic.

From noon, the bridge will open to vehicles as well, with vintage Lowestoft buses from the East Anglian Transport Museum leading the way. Parking is not available so those planning to attend the event are encouraged to use public transport or travel by foot where possible.

A rolling road closure will be in effect on the morning of Sunday 8th September, as the Tour of Britain crosses the Gull Wing during their preliminary ride-out ahead of the final stage between Lowestoft and Felixstowe.

The formal civic opening and naming ceremony for the bridge is set to take place on Tuesday 19th November. Additional details will be provided closer to the date.

- **TWO SUFFOLK FLOOD INVESTIGATION REPORTS PUBLISHED**

The investigations into the flooding which occurred in Needham Market and Wickham Market during October 2023 have analysed what caused these events and recommend what could be done to alleviate flooding there in the future. In Needham Market, over 45 residential and commercial properties were internally flooded. In Wickham Market, it was 40 properties. In both communities, infrastructure and services were disrupted. The investigations found that the areas were severely impacted by flooding due to the intensity of rainfall that overwhelmed the natural flow routes and the capacity of watercourses and drainage infrastructure. This situation was compounded when flow paths converged with the water from rivers that had burst their banks.

Key recommendations for both areas, which include short, medium and long term proposals aimed at individual homeowners, community groups, landowners and Risk Management Authorities, include:

- Implementing community flood plans
- Maximising use of grants available to make properties more resilient to flooding
- Removing blockages in watercourses and drains (private and publicly owned)
- Investigating potential improvements to drainage infrastructure (private and publicly owned)
- Creating new natural flood management features (e.g.: storage ponds and planting that 'slows the flow' of flood water)
- Further modelling to better understand flooding within the location (Wickham Market only).

These actions could help mitigate local flood risk.

Clr Stephen Burroughes

County Councillor for the Framlingham Division

Suffolk County Council