

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – NOVEMBER 2023



Cllr Stephen Burroughes - Framlingham Division

• **NEW HIGHWAYS SERVICES ARRIVE IN SUFFOLK.**

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 which commenced on 1st 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

To read about the new Suffolk Streetlighting contract with McCann, visit: [Go Live! Suffolk County Council Street Lighting Services Contract Gets Underway - McCann \(mccann-ltd.co.uk\)](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/news/2023/10/27/street-lighting-services-contract-gets-underway-mccann)

• **'BIKE LIBRARY' PILOT LAUNCHED AT LOWESTOFT SCHOOL**

Suffolk County Council has launched a 'Bike Library' for year 5 and 6 pupils at Phoenix St. Peter Academy, Lowestoft as part of a pilot project to promote active travel. The free loan bikes were secured using funding from Active Travel England's Capability and Ambition Fund and support the county council's ambition to look after residents' health and wellbeing.

Following additional funding from ScottishPower Renewables, supporting partner of the Suffolk stage of the Tour of Britain, the pupils and their parents or carers will also be offered a Bikeability training course to give them the skills, confidence and understanding they need to take their bike on the road.

The course will also teach them the basics of bike maintenance, such as how to fix a puncture, and how to stay safe while cycling. As part of the pilot, Rotary Club of Lowestoft East Point and Lowestoft Rising have contributed bike locks and helmets to go with the bikes.

• **RISK OF "TREATING SUFFOLK WITH CONTEMPT" AS LARGE-SCALE ENERGY PROJECTS EMERGE**

Energy developers who are bringing forward large-scale energy projects without speaking to councils or communities, were criticised heavily by Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council and Cabinet member for Finance and the Environment, following the latest publication of National Grid's Transmission Entry Capacity (TEC) Register.

The TEC Register is a list of projects, which often end up as large nationally significant infrastructure projects (called NSIPs), that have secured the right to connect to National Grid's network if they are consented, under the Planning Act 2008 by government, not local councils. These connection offers, which form a legally binding contract with National Grid, are routinely published and made, prior to the development and consenting of electricity generation or storage projects.

The current list of connection offers published by National Grid shows that new projects have been offered connections at National Grid's sites in Suffolk, at Bramford near Ipswich, and at Yaxley, near Eye, in north Suffolk. These new projects are large-scale solar panel and battery storage proposals in the same style as the recent SUNNICA scheme in West Suffolk, which is a proposal to create a 2500-acre Solar Farm on the Suffolk Cambridgeshire border.

Suffolk County Council, which is recognised by the Government as a centre of excellence when it comes to managing the impacts of big energy schemes, has previously outlined its concerns over the way large energy developers treat communities. In July this year, Cllr Rout wrote to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, to outline the significant shortfalls of the West Suffolk SUNNICA application, described as "the worst example of what can go wrong" when developers mistreat local communities.

These projects can now be brought forward by the respective developers for consideration under the NSIP programme and, if they meet the criteria, will be considered by the planning inspectorate for approval in due course. Due to the size of these proposals being like the SUNNICA proposal, if they do come forward, their planning applications will be ultimately decided by central government, not local councils.

- **MORE LINK FOSTER CARERS ARE URGENTLY NEEDED IN SUFFOLK**

A column by Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children & Young Peoples Services with responsibility for Fostering and Adoption.

Suffolk County Council urgently needs to recruit more LINK foster carers for children with additional needs and disabilities. LINK foster carers serve as a lifeline for parents and carers of children with disabilities, providing essential breaks in their caregiving responsibilities.

Unlike some other types of foster care, LINK care is a voluntary arrangement, often suggested to families as a means of supporting the family unit. It is designed to be a long-term commitment, with the goal of the LINK carer becoming an extension of the family. They resemble a reliable family friend, trusted and equipped with the skills to offer practical short break care to these children. Some of the most successful LINK arrangements in Suffolk have lasted well into the child's teenage years.

LINK care offers flexibility, ranging from a few hours per month on a weekend to several nights per month. It provides children with disabilities the chance to explore new environments and form close relationships with trusted adults and their families. It also gives parents a much-needed break from their caregiving responsibilities, allowing them to get a good night's sleep, have a night away, or spend quality time with their other children.

Shelagh is one of our LINK foster carers who embodies the heartwarming essence of the LINK programme. In her own words, Shelagh reflects on her experience;

"I went to a fostering information event and LINK was mentioned so I asked what it was. I thought that it was a good way to start if I wanted to foster and I have never looked back since. "It was a year before I was matched with *Alfie. We met at Christmas time when he was 2 and a half and I've been looking after him for 12 years now. It's been amazing!

"It's not like LINK now, it's like he's my little nephew. He's part of the family. I was there when he first started walking, I've been to his school and watched him in his Christmas play."

For Alfie's mum, having Shelagh has been an incredibly valuable experience. "LINK has enabled Alfie to spend time with another trusted adult other than just me and his dad. We don't really have any local family, so it is good for Alfie to spend time with others and feel secure."

The advantages of LINK care are not limited to Alfie alone. It also provides respite for Alfie's parents, as his mum explains, "He is a really good child but his needs are demanding so the respite we get from LINK is essential – although we can't help missing him when he's gone!"

"Shelagh has long been considered part of our family. We trust and know that if there were any problems, Shelagh would pick up the phone to let us know and vice versa."

LINK carers are particularly in demand for Suffolk's younger cohort of disabled children, typically between the ages of 3-8 years old. There is also a gap in the availability of those who use or are willing to learn British Sign Language to provide short break care for deaf children in Suffolk.

If you believe that you could become a LINK carer and make a positive difference in the lives of children, please do not hesitate to get in touch. The needs of children requiring LINK care can be diverse and varied, which is why LINK carers must possess qualities of kindness and empathy. They should be willing to learn about disabilities and open to training that equips them with the skills and knowledge needed to provide compassionate care to these children. To find out more about this rewarding journey and how you can become a Link carer, we encourage you to visit our website www.fosterandadopt.suffolk.gov.uk/link-care, get in contact with us at fosterandadopt@suffolk.gov.uk or call 01473 264800. Your commitment can truly make a lasting impact on the lives of children in need.

• **COUNCIL URGES COMMUNITIES TO RESPOND TO SEA LINK CONSULTATION**

Suffolk County Council is preparing its response to proposals for a significant off-shore electricity connection which could affect Saxmundham and Aldeburgh. It is encouraging local residents and businesses to do the same.

Sea Link is a proposal for a new 2 gigawatt subsea high voltage direct current electricity connection developed by National Grid Electricity Transmission. It is approximately 140km in length and predominately offshore.

A [statutory consultation](#) opened to the public from 24 October, and closes on **18 December 2023**.

The council remains concerned about the lack of coordination with this, and other offshore energy projects such as Nautilus and Lionlink. It also fears for the impact on local coastal communities and the environment.

Plans for Sea Link include:

- a connection from the existing transmission network via the consented, but as yet unbuilt, Friston Substation
- landfall on the Suffolk coast between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness
- a 2 GW high voltage direct current (HVDC) converter station up to 26 metres high plus external equipment (such as lightning protection & railings for walkways) near Saxmundham
- a high voltage alternating current (HVAC) underground cable of approximately 1.7 km in length between the proposed Friston Substation and the proposed converter station
- 10 km of HVDC underground cable between Saxmundham, and a transition joint bay (TJB) approximately 900 m inshore from a landfall point between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness

In December 2022, the council submitted [a 58-page response](#) to NGET's non-statutory consultation, outlining its concerns to the initial Sea Link proposals. It will continue to engage with National Grid to achieve best possible outcomes for the communities and the environment.

For more information, see below:

Sea Link information on National Grid website:

<https://www.nationalgrid.com/electricity-transmission/network-and-infrastructure/infrastructure-projects/sealink>

Suffolk County Council's responses to Sea Link:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/major-infrastructure-projects/nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects-nsips/national-grid-electricity-generation-sea-link>

- **NEW FUND DELIVERS DIGITAL BOOST FOR SUFFOLK**

Almost £250,000 of funding was announced at an event in October 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.

Healthwatch Suffolk's *Digital Care and Health: Guiding principles for health and social care providers and commissioners planning or delivering digital care in Suffolk and north east Essex* is available at www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk

- **COUNCIL SEEKS YOUR VIEWS FOR NEXT YEAR'S BUDGET**

Suffolk County Council is keen to hear from Suffolk residents, businesses and local communities, as it decides how it will spend money next year. [An online consultation](#) has been launched, and a number of focus groups will be held, to explain the council's current financial situation, along with the chance for Suffolk residents and businesses to have a say on Council Tax proposals.

The council's budget setting process will take into account the responses to the consultation, advice from council officers, elected members from political groups, businesses and partners in health and other public service organisations across Suffolk. Results of the consultation will be included in the report considered by the council when agreeing the budget in February 2024.

The council's budget consultation helps to explain the council's finances, what it has been doing to save money, and how it can generate more money to spend on public services. The two main ways in which the council can increase the budget, are an increase in the money it receives from government, and/or through Council Tax.

There are three key questions, the first is on which services people have recently used, the second asks for thoughts on seeking a greater contribution to Council Tax to help fund public services, and the third on which service area you would like to see more money spent.

The online consultation runs from 25 October and closes on 4 December 2023, and can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/budget. Focus groups are also being organised with local community groups and members of the public, details of which will be shared on the council's website and social media channels.

• **MORE THAN 200 PROPERTIES FLOODED BY STORM BABET**

True number could be much higher as councils urge people to report all flooded premises and government funding available to those who report flooding. Interim figures show more than 200 properties in Suffolk were flooded by Storm Babet. The number of flooded premises, including businesses and homes, is expected to be higher as Suffolk councils and emergency planners work together to compile a full list.

On Wednesday, Communities Secretary Michael Gove and Environment Secretary Thérèse Coffey announced a number of financial measures to support those who have experienced exceptional localised flooding.

Under the measures announced:

- Flooded households in affected areas can apply for up to £500 to give cash quickly to help with immediate costs.
- Households and businesses significantly affected by recent flooding will be eligible for 100% council tax and business rates relief for at least three months.
- Small-to-medium-sized businesses in affected areas will be eligible for up to £2,500 from the Business Recovery Grant to help them return quickly to business as usual.
- Eligible flood-hit property owners will be able to apply for up to £5,000 to help make their homes and businesses more resilient to future flooding via the Property Flood Resilience Repair Grant Scheme.

The support will be made available through a scheme known as the Flood Recovery Framework, which is used in exceptional circumstances to support councils and communities following severe flooding.

The full details of the scheme are yet to be announced by the Government, including where residents can apply and who is eligible. Suffolk County Council will share updates once received. To report a flood visit the [report a flood in Suffolk](#) page. Alternatively, you can call the customer service number on 0345 606 6171.

• **SUFFOLK RESIDENTS INVITED TO HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF LIBRARY SERVICES**

A public consultation has been launched today (Monday 30 October), encouraging Suffolk Residents to tell Suffolk County Council what they want from their library services in the future. Suffolk County Council's contract with Suffolk's Libraries Industrial and Provident Society (IPS) Limited, the independent charity that runs the library service, comes to an end on 31 May 2025, with a new contract set to begin in June 2025. The Council is therefore seeking views from the public about what is important to them, ahead of awarding the new contract.

The 13-week consultation will be followed by a competitive Tender Process, before the new contract is awarded in November 2024. To inform the consultation, the council has undertaken engagement with over 30 organisations including Suffolk's Libraries IPS Limited staff, key service users, schools and partner organisations.

A key focus of the consultation is the council's Library outreach services, which include three mobile library vehicles, serving more than 500 stops across rural parts of the county each month, for the pickup and exchange of books. The mobile library vehicles are coming to the end of their life and the council therefore needs to consider the best way to continue to deliver these services to people in rural areas of the county going forward. Library Outreach services also include Pop-up Libraries and a home library service, run by local volunteers, for Suffolk residents that find it difficult to access a library building or mobile library.

The consultation is made up of two parts. Part one gives residents an opportunity to tell the council what they value in their library service and what they would like to see more of in the future. Part two seeks views on how Library Outreach services could be run in the future.

The council is keen to hear from people who currently use library services and those who do not, to better understand the needs across the county. This feedback will help to inform the requirements for the future contract. The value of the new contract will be £6.8m per year, increased from the previous contract value of £5.9m. The increase takes into account increased service costs, management of the Library Outreach service, and to allow for innovation in future years.

The term of the contract will be 6 years, with the option to extend for a further 6 years. The consultation runs from Monday 30 October, until Friday 26 January. Residents can have their say by visiting www.suffolk.gov.uk/LibraryConsultation Alternative formats of the consultation are available on request, please email: Libraries.consultation@suffolk.gov.uk

Those who cannot access the consultation online can request a printed copy or assistance with completing the survey by calling 0345 603 1842.

The results of the consultation will be considered by Suffolk County Council at its meeting of the Cabinet in March 2024.

Cllr Stephen Burroughes

County Councillor for the Framlingham Division

Deputy Cabinet Member for Children & Young Peoples Services