



February 2020 Monthly Parish Newsletter

Ipswich Northern Route will not proceed to the next stage

On 25 February, the Cabinet of Suffolk County Council voted to accept a recommendation that the Ipswich Northern Route should not proceed to the next stage of development.

The Cabinet recommendation noted that the project had failed to attract the widespread political support needed to proceed with projects of this size and financial scale. The Cabinet paper also made it clear that local planning authorities were unable to agree to any of the additional housing growth, over the level already agreed in their local plans, which would be needed to help fund the local contribution before government funding could be requested.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said: "I am disappointed that even with a good Strategic Outline Business Case, we have been unable to proceed with this ambitious project for Ipswich. However, ambition must always be tempered with reality. Without widespread political support, this project will not attract the funding needed to proceed to the next stage, let alone the £500m necessary to complete it.

"Housing growth is now a larger consideration for central government when considering funding requests for large road projects. Without clear support from local planning authorities to meet that additional growth, over and above what they have already agreed to within their local plans, being successful in bidding into central government becomes impossible."

The Cabinet also agreed to the recommendation to create a task force to build on existing work to increase modal shift within Ipswich (reducing trips by car and increasing use of buses, walking and cycling) and to improve capacity at key junctions. More information about this will be provided in the coming weeks.

Councillor Hicks continued: "I hope that today's decision to not proceed with the Ipswich Northern Route will help those who felt directly impacted by any of the three proposed routes to find some closure and move on. But we must all recognise that the issues the INR was looking to solve still exist and we will need to look at other ways to try and solve them. The new task force will play a large part in helping us do that."

Lowestoft Archives to reopen with family event

Lowestoft Archives is preparing to welcome visitors again with a family event on Saturday 29 February, run in conjunction with Lowestoft Library.

Formerly known as Lowestoft Record Office, the searchroom at Lowestoft Archives has been refreshed and remodelled to offer a brighter, more visitor-friendly and flexible space enabling more people to engage with Suffolk's history.

The drop-in event on 29 February, entitled 'Destination Lowestoft', will celebrate tourism in Lowestoft throughout history. It will offer residents and visitors the opportunity to experience the refurbished venue, which now includes an audio-visual and exhibition space, as well as new interpretation display areas.

Working with colleagues from Lowestoft Library, Suffolk Archives are hosting children's activities from 10:20am to 12:30pm on Saturday 29 February. There will be a treasure trail around both the archives and the library, as well as badge-making and colouring.

Following the event on 29 February, Lowestoft Archives will reopen on Tuesday 3 March and will be open from 10am to 3pm each Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The space will be used to run events and activities with groups, such as visiting schools, on Mondays and Wednesdays when it is closed to the public.

Lowestoft Archives will offer a wealth of material for people to discover, such as books, microform, maps and transcripts. These are items which have proven particularly popular for those carrying out research into local and family history.

New street lighting proposed to reduce the county's carbon footprint

Suffolk County Council is looking to reduce its carbon footprint by investing £9.8m in street lighting, after Cabinet approved an LED street lighting replacement project.

Following a review of its street lighting policy in 2010, and with energy prices set to increase at between 8% and 12% a year, the Council has decided the high energy consumption of its existing lanterns could create further pressure on its resources in the near future.

The Council owns and maintains over 60,000 street lights. Back in 2010, the Council took numerous steps to help reduce both the energy costs and carbon footprint of its lighting stock. This included the introduction of part-night lighting arrangements and conversion to LED for those lighting units that were consuming the highest level of energy.

The proposal to convert the remaining street lighting stock to LED will help to reduce both Suffolk's energy consumption and carbon footprint, whilst providing crisper illumination of the streets for residents. The project will also ensure that Suffolk remains resilient to any future energy price increases. The project will be completed in the autumn of 2022.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs, said:

“We recognise the importance of our environment in Suffolk and the impacts of climate change. Where possible, we want to ensure that we protect and enhance the natural environment, decrease carbon emissions and reduce the use of scarce resources, for the well-being of future generations and the natural world. Initiatives such as this are important in helping us to achieve that aim.

“We will be replacing almost 43,000 lights with new energy saving LED lanterns. This will save approximately 60% of our current energy bill which can be invested elsewhere. We will be able to reduce our carbon usage by around 80%, benefitting residents throughout Suffolk.”

County Council approves budget to spend more on services for vulnerable residents

On 13 February 2020, Suffolk County Council approved its annual budget. The Council will increase its spending power again this coming financial year, particularly in Children’s and Adults services, where demand continues to rise year on year.

In 2020/2021, the Council’s budget will rise to £556million which represents an increase of £37m (7.1%) from 2019/20. Children’s and Adults Services represent around 70% of the Council’s overall spend.

This year’s budget is based on a 12-month financial settlement from government, rather than the three or four-year agreement which is usually offered.

As well as addressing the need to maintain funding for key services, the Council will invest an additional £3.5m into two one-year programmes, the Suffolk 2020 fund (£3m) and a highways investment fund (£500k).

The Suffolk 2020 fund will be used for projects that can deliver a real difference for local communities. The intention is to adopt good ideas covering more than one area of Suffolk, rather than having a number of small-scale projects. To qualify for the fund, projects must link to one of the following themes: carbon reduction; carbon offset, road safety, natural environment; built environment; innovation; and use of technology.

Each project must offer a clear return on investment through positive economic, social, or environmental impact. County Councillors can put ideas forward on behalf of their community and must seek the sponsorship of a Cabinet Member for consideration. Further details of the fund will be made available in due course.

The £500k highways investment fund will focus on improving the safety of pupils and parents travelling to and from school, by refreshing lines and cleaning and repairing signs in and around school zones.

The funding is allocated for use within the 2020/21 financial year and looks set to benefit areas around many Suffolk schools, complementing the road marking renewal programme, which is taking place as part of the move of civil parking

powers. Suffolk Highways officers are developing a plan of how these extra works will be identified and delivered. Further information will be announced in due course.

Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, Councillor Gordon Jones said:

“The setting of a balanced budget is never easy. Especially given the continuing financial challenges we have seen during the last few years in a number of our services.

“It is right that we continue to focus our budget and resources where they will have the biggest impact. I am pleased to say this year our calls have been answered, at least in part. The provisional local government settlement for this year enables the Council to set a budget for 2020/2021 that will see no change to current service levels over and above those planned through our ongoing transformation programmes.

“Unfortunately, however, as we are only getting a 12-month settlement, we lack the longer-term certainty needed to deal with the large departmental budgets that we manage including Children’s and Adults Services. We are therefore taking the measured decision to raise council tax by 1.98 per cent and implement a 2 per cent rise in the Adult Social Care Precept, which is ring-fenced for use within our highest demand service.”

New rail link to Oxford for Suffolk and Norfolk

Local authorities in Suffolk and Norfolk are exploring how a new rail link to Oxford can benefit both counties.

The Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps MP, announced at the end of January a preferred route for a new rail line between Cambridge and Bedford, which will form the missing rail link between Cambridge and Oxford.

The East West Rail Consortium, alongside Suffolk and Norfolk county councils and its local authority partners, are now commissioning a new study to improve the rail frequency between Ipswich/Norwich and Cambridge, and to determine whether passenger and freight rail services can connect directly to Oxford.

If successful, the rail link would avoid the need to use more congested routes on the Great Eastern Main Line and on cross-country routes via Ely.

The study will be used to develop a business case to submit to government to seek funding to design and deliver new rail track and infrastructure on the lines between Ipswich/Norwich and Cambridge.

The agreement to commission the study comes at a pivotal time for East West Rail. Alongside the announcement on the route between Bedford and Cambridge in January, earlier this month permission was also granted to start major construction work on the section between Oxford and Bedford.

The link from East Anglia to Oxford via Bedford and Milton Keynes is being developed to support housing and job growth expected over the next 20 years.

The development of the business case will be led by the East West Rail Consortium's Eastern Section Group, which has representation from local authorities across Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire and is chaired by Cllr Alexander Nicoll, Deputy Cabinet Member for Transport at Suffolk County Council.

Councillor Nicoll said:

"We are working with the East West Rail Consortium to understand whether we can improve capacity on the existing rail lines between Suffolk/Norfolk and Cambridge, so that we can achieve an increase in frequency of passenger rail services.

"We also want to understand whether we can achieve direct connectivity with Oxford rail services. The work of the Eastern Section will be critical in understanding what needs to be done and how we can drive the project forward, as well as connect with new economic hubs, such as the Biomedical Campus in South Cambridge."

Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs at Suffolk County Council, said:

"A rail link between Suffolk and Oxford is a huge opportunity to connect our industries to new markets in other areas, such as Milton Keynes and Oxford.

"It also provides new rail opportunities for people to travel directly to the South West, as well as for the transportation of goods from our ports.

"This all contributes to removing more vehicles from our roads, reducing the county's carbon footprint and enabling us to grow our industries in a sustainable way."

The East West Rail Consortium and its Eastern Section Group is anticipating results from its rail study and business case to be completed by the end of the year.

Suffolk Highways waives fees for VE and VJ Day Commemoration events

In commemoration of the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe and Victory over Japan Days, Suffolk Highways has confirmed it will waive road closure application fees and help support communities with event traffic management.

Communities in Suffolk will be organising commemorative events, some of which may require an application to Suffolk Highways for a road closure.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs, said:

"It is important for us to work with communities and support events like VE and VJ Day, especially considering this year marks the 75th commemoration of the end of World War II.

"The cost of road closures and subsequent works associated with event traffic management may be prohibitive for small communities, so we want to do our bit to help make these happen.

“I am delighted to announce that we are waiving application fees and will provide some help in supporting these events with the necessary road closures and management of traffic; enabling them to run as smoothly as possible.

“I encourage anyone who is interested in holding an event to visit our website, see what is involved and get in contact.”

Communities can find out more about how to apply for a road closure as part of a commemorative event they’re holding, by visiting: www.suffolk.gov.uk/eventroadclosure

New website to promote apprenticeships in Suffolk

Suffolk County Council celebrated Apprenticeship Week (3-9 February) with the launch of a new website to support apprenticeship growth in the county.

The [Apprenticeships Suffolk website](#) now offers a one-stop shop of information and advice for employers, apprentices, parents/carers, schools and career advisors.

Apprenticeships Suffolk aims to promote the growth of apprenticeships by providing links to impartial advice, information and guidance. The website will also provide regular news updates and details of the latest apprenticeship opportunities.

The new online hub has been made possible thanks to a successful bid for £500,000 from the European Social Fund. Along with match funding from Suffolk County Council, it will also support building a new team to help small and medium-sized businesses to navigate how apprenticeships work.

Councillor Mary Evans, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills, said:

“Apprenticeships offer a great way for young people to get their first step on the career ladder. They provide the chance to train in a real work environment, whilst achieving a qualification and being paid. There are also huge benefits to employers of all sizes by taking on an apprentice and bringing new talent, skills and perspectives to their organisation.

“The new website makes it even easier for everyone to find information about apprenticeships. Relaunching Apprenticeships Suffolk will enable us to support the increase of quality apprenticeships on offer, creating new opportunities for young people and employers in Suffolk.”

Hope for better national coordination of offshore wind farm projects

Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Council have been calling for improved national coordination of the offshore wind farm projects off the county’s coast.

This approach has now been recognised in an Ofgem report. The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) document, published on 3 February 2020, suggests that money could be saved, and the environment better protected, if there is more coordination around the infrastructure of these projects.

The councils continue to support the principle of offshore wind, as it will help reduce carbon emissions and provide significant economic benefits to the county and the UK. However, this should not be achieved at any cost to Suffolk, its residents and its natural environment.

Concerns about the apparent lack of coordination in the connection of energy projects have been repeatedly raised by the councils with government ministers, National Grid and wind farm developers.

In the Decarbonisation Action Plan, which supports the target of reaching Net Zero by 2050, Ofgem says that:

“We do not consider that individual radial offshore transmission links for this amount of offshore generation are likely to be economical, sensible or acceptable for consumers and local communities.

“[We] will explore whether a more coordinated offshore transmission system could reduce both financial and environmental costs.

“With more offshore wind farm projects planned, many of which are further from shore than those developed already, there is potential for efficiencies from greater coordination of offshore transmission infrastructure.”

Councillor Richard Rout, Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection at Suffolk County Council, and Councillor Craig Rivett, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development at East Suffolk Council, said:

“We welcome the coordinated approach proposed in this report. We hope that it means the government, National Grid and Ofgem form a clear leadership role and strategy on all the energy projects affecting our coast.

“Considering each project in isolation, as is the case with current proposals which we have considerable concerns about, does not seem to make sense and increases the environmental impact and the impact on local communities.”

“We will continue to lobby the government, press National Grid and the regulator Ofgem. Just this week [5 February 2020], we met with ministers at Westminster to discuss this very issue.

“We believe we can minimise the harm to local communities through better regulation, coordination and planning, as we aim to deliver net zero carbon emissions.”

Suffolk County Council issue school crossing patrol staff with body cameras

Suffolk County Council is issuing body cameras to some of its crossing patrol officers after ‘drive-through’ incidents and verbal abuse at school crossings.

In Suffolk we have 61 school crossing patrol officers. Increasingly, more officers have reported incidents and have said they feel abuse is becoming a regular occurrence with little respect for what they do.

In the past six months, 19 'drive-through' incidents have been recorded in Suffolk where drivers have ignored the crossing patrol officer and did not stop when the officer stood in the road to allow children to cross safely.

The cameras have been purchased by Suffolk's Roadsafe partners Suffolk County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner and Suffolk Constabulary with money from the Driver Diversionary Fund, which comes from motorists who have taken part in speed awareness courses.

The ten body cameras will be rotated around the county, focusing on sites where officers have reported an incident. This includes sites in Lowestoft, Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds.

The body cameras follow the work of the 'Stop Means Stop' campaign from the Eastern Region School Crossing Patrol Group, which aims to remind drivers of the potential seriousness of their actions. Drivers are legally obliged to obey the school crossing patrol sign under the Road Traffic Act 1988. Failure to stop can lead to a prosecution and a fine of up to £1,000 and three penalty points.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs, said:

"It is outrageous that drivers are putting at risk the lives of school children by failing to stop when our patrol officers are escorting children across the road, and that some road users are being abusive towards our officers for doing their job. This is not acceptable behaviour.

"The use of body cameras will deter intolerable and abusive behaviour and can record any when it occurs. Can I also remind drivers that they must obey the Highway Code and drive slowly when passing schools."

Have your say on improvements to the Tollgate junction in Bury St Edmunds

A package of improvements is planned for the north-west area of Bury St Edmunds.

The aim is to reduce traffic congestion and improve sustainable transport facilities for pedestrians at the Tollgate junction.

As part of planning conditions, funding for the improvements will be provided jointly by Abbeygate sixth form centre on Western Way, the Marham Park housing development in Fornham All Saints, and the highways authority, Suffolk County Council.

The three options for the future layout of the Tollgate junction contain a variety of solutions, including adding a pedestrian phase to the traffic lights, the addition of an extra lane and changing the direction of travel.

Options also consider the value of the greenspace to the local area, with the proposals seeking to maintain as much of this space as possible.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs, said:

“The north-west side of Bury St Edmunds is becoming very congested with traffic, which is only due to increase in the future.

“Planning permission has provided funding to alleviate some of the additional traffic flow generated by the recent developments. However, as the highways authority, we are using this opportunity to look at a longer-term, more sustainable solution that, while more expensive, would create even more capacity to serve the area, including creating better facilities for pedestrians, to reduce the town’s carbon footprint and create better air quality.”

The consultation will be open until 11:59pm on Tuesday 17 March 2020. Members of the public will be able to take part via www.suffolk.gov.uk/tollgate.

A paper copy of the survey and the consultation booklet can be collected from Bury St Edmunds Library or West Suffolk House or they can be posted out on request by calling 0345 603 1842.

The results of the consultation will be presented at the end of April 2020 and improvement works will begin in early 2021.

Refilling your weekly shop without unnecessary plastic is getting easier in Suffolk

A number of shops in Suffolk are offering refills for a host of household items in a bid to cut down on the amount of plastic and packaging we use.

The Suffolk Waste Partnership has launched a handy online directory which lists the shops, businesses or charities that host refill points for items such as cleaning products and toiletries, and dried foods such as rice or oats and even loose-leaf tea and chocolate. At the moment there are 22 organisations that stock refills, but the partnership is encouraging other businesses to consider introducing similar schemes.

Peter Stevens, Chairman of the Suffolk Waste Partnership, said: “These refill points allow people to make a decision about what plastic they use. Of course, we have a long way to go before these refill points replace our weekly shop, but it is absolutely fantastic that Suffolk is showing such initiative in beginning the process. This is exactly the kind of ‘green’ thinking we welcome and encourage. I would ask everyone to have a look at the directory and see what is offered in their neighbourhood.”

Residents can search their local area on the directory to find where their nearest refill point is. The directory can be found here <https://suffolkrecycling.org.uk/reduce-your-waste/refill-directory>. If any retailers or businesses would like to offer refill services and get listed on the online directory please contact Waste.Management@suffolk.gov.uk.