

A Report for Bures St Mary Parish Council Meeting on 23rd November 2023 From James Finch – County Councillor for the Stour Valley

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➤ **The Government has allocated £1.8m for 2 years to Suffolk to enhance the local bus network.**

Suffolk County Council (SCC) have £1.8million to spend each year in 2023/24 and 2024/25 on enhancements to the current passenger transport network in Suffolk. There will be 3 areas of funding:-

1. Some of this will be going to the bus companies in order to support existing services,
2. Some will be going into design work on Bus Priority schemes to get them ready for delivery when capital funding is available.
3. To support new or improved services at a local level where demand can be proven.

Parish Councils, Bus Companies and other groups are now being asked to submit ideas and suggestions for these improvements. Our preferred method for this is via an online application form which can be found here: ***Suffolk on Board - News / Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus: Where should the money be spent?*** We believe that the web page and form are self-explanatory, but will be able to answer questions if required. Additionally, there is a standing invitation to all parishes to attend meetings of the **Enhanced Bus Partnership Passenger Group**.

I have submitted an outline of our wishes for an improved service in conjunction with the local parish councils and attended a consultation meeting with the local bus partnership group and await now feedback of feasible options. For more information: [Suffolk on Board - News / Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus: Where should the money be spent?](#)

➤ **Financial aid for flooded properties in Suffolk imminent as numbers hit over 800.**

Suffolk residents who experienced exceptional property flooding during Storm Babet will start receiving financial support during November. Following the recent Government announcement of grants and council tax reductions through the Flood Recovery Framework, councils in Suffolk have received 750 reports of internal flooding to homes or businesses, and this number is expected to increase.

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.

All reports of property flooding need to be submitted via the Suffolk County Council reporting tool now.

Households and businesses that suffered internal flooding between 19 - 25 October 2023 due to Storm Babet may be eligible for:

- A grant (£500 for homes and £2,500 per business) to assist with initial recovery costs.
- Households and businesses that suffered internal flooding between 19 -25 October due to Storm Babet may be eligible for 100% discount to council tax / business rates for a minimum of 3 months.
- Flooded property owners will also be able to apply for up to £5,000 to help make their homes and businesses more resilient to future flooding. Suffolk County Council is working to set this scheme up at the earliest opportunity, but it is not currently available. Suffolk County Council is working in partnership with Babergh and Mid-Suffolk, East Suffolk, Ipswich and West Suffolk councils to ensure these discounts and payments start during November.

Reporting your flood damage is the first step to receiving a potential payout. If you have experienced flooding to your property as a result of Storm Babet, you need to visit: <https://highwaysreporting.suffolk.gov.uk>; Click on: **'Report It'** & follow links to **Drainage and flooding**

For those who aren't able to submit their report online, please call 0345 606 6171.

➤ **New fund delivers digital boost for Suffolk.**

Almost £250,000 of funding was announced at an event on 25th 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.

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

Suffolk Highways' new partnership has been launched as Milestone Infrastructure and Suffolk County Council join forces to deliver highways services fit for the future as from 1 October.

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.

➤ **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 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.

When this survey was ran last year, there was an excellent response from around 2,700 Suffolk residents and businesses. I would welcome even more people completing this year's short survey, to contribute to our decision-making. It gave an excellent insight into the public's priorities, with social care services for adults and children being high on that list. This aligned with the council's thinking, and we invested an additional £50m in these areas for this current year.

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.

Therefore, the three key questions are:-

1. Which services have you recently used,
2. Your thoughts on providing a greater contribution to Council Tax to help fund public services,
3. On which service area you would like to see more money spent.

➤ **Developers risk "treating Suffolk communities with contempt" as the latest round of large-scale energy projects in Suffolk emerge**

Energy developers who are bringing forward large-scale energy projects without speaking to councils or communities, were criticised heavily by Suffolk County Council 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.

➤ **Statement on Haughley rail junction funding together with Ely Junction**

On 4th October the Government has confirmed funding for upgrades to Haughley and Ely rail junctions. This has been a longstanding top priority for both Suffolk County Council and Transport East. With the collective voice of our partnerships in the East of England this has been the reason why the Government has prioritised this investment in Haughley and Ely rail junctions over so many other investment needs within the UK.

When complete, this will ease congestion on our roads by increasing capacity of rail and enabling more container traffic to go by rail as well as provide a significant boost to the local economy.

➤ **New and independent fire control centre gives the best deal for Suffolk.**

A new fire control centre fitted with state-of-the-art communications for mobilising and managing Suffolk's firefighters would be in the best interests of the county, a report to councillors says. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) announced in June it would be withdrawing from the shared control room arrangement in place since 2011 with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire and Rescue Service, based in Huntingdon.

The report was approved at Suffolk County Council's Cabinet, on 12th September, stating that fire control would now be brought back into the county by the end of 2024.

An initial capital investment of £1.588m would be required for project delivery over three years. Additional revenue service of £1.615m annually will need to be provided to support the operating cost of the control room.

➤ **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.

➤ **Virtual Fostering and Adoption Sessions for the Stour Valley**

A Foster Carer Recruitment Event is held the 1st Wednesday of every month, and an Adoption Event is on the 1st Thursday all 7:00pm in your home. To book a place please email Claire.Gwatkin@suffolk.gov.uk.

My Priorities

Education - Supporting Vulnerable People - Jobs and Growth - Localism and the Stour Valley - Building on Suffolk's Strength all underpinned by strong financial management and fair council tax.