

County Council report – November 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.

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

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

"I am delighted to welcome our new highways partner, Milestone, to Suffolk. There has been a great deal of work taking place over the past few months to ensure we were ready to start the new partnership on 1 October whilst continuing to deliver services to our residents.

"As highways services tend to impact all those living, working, or travelling in our county; it was essential we found the best possible fit for what was needed here in Suffolk.

"I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in successfully procuring, awarding and mobilising this new contract, whilst continuing to keep our county safe and moving."

Statement following funding announcement for Ely and Haughley rail junctions

The Government has announced funding for upgrades to Ely and Haughley rail junctions today.

Councillor Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Transport Strategy and Waste, said:

“This is excellent news for Suffolk. The infrastructure at these junctions currently lacks capacity for the demand from freight and passenger traffic. This investment will reduce those constraints and allow more trains to run through Ely and Haughley, including freight on rail out of Felixstowe and more passenger services between Ipswich and Peterborough.

“This will ease congestion on our roads, help us on our journey towards net zero by reducing carbon emissions and provide a significant boost to the local economy.”

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 today (October 11th) 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.

Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council, and Cabinet Member for Finance and the Environment said:

“It is both shocking and disappointing to me that councils and communities in Suffolk are finding out about these very large proposals for the first time in this way. Suffolk County Council has not been approached by any of the businesses that have had a connection offer from National Grid, and neither have the communities, who will be expected to host these huge schemes. When you consider that a connection offer from National Grid forms a legally binding contract with developers, it is simply inexplicable to me that such a contract could exist without anyone locally being made aware, by the developer, of their proposals. In my

view, this treats the opinions of local people, and their council representatives, with contempt and is a terrible way to begin projects of this nature. Any of these projects, if they do come forward and are submitted to the planning inspectorate for planning permission, have serious implications for local people, our county's infrastructure, our agricultural capacity and heritage, not to mention our precious natural environment and wildlife habitats.”

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.

Cllr. Rout continued:

“Suffolk County Council readily understands and accepts the extent and magnitude of the infrastructure required to deliver national energy independence. However, food security is equally important, and we have grave concerns about taking vast swathes of high-quality agricultural land out of food production for solar farms. It is critical that projects, like those emerging for the first time today, are handled in the right way and treat local people with the respect they deserve. Any attempt to sneak projects through the back door or avoid early meaningful engagement with communities is simply not good enough, and I will continue to call it out when I see it happening.”

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.

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 several 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 consider 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.

More than 200 properties flooded by Storm Babet

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.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

“It is key that all residents who suffered flood damage report the incident. I understand that the pressures of finding somewhere to live or work, or stripping out damaged belongings may have dominated people’s lives since Friday, but I would urge them to take the time to fill in a flood report online. We know that this financial support is urgently needed, and we will do everything in our power to get it out to home and business owners as soon as possible.”

On Wednesday, Communities Secretary Michael Gove and Environment Secretary Thérèse Coffey announced several 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.

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 considers 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 is open from today, Monday 30 October, until Friday 26 January.

Residents can have their say by visiting www.suffolk.gov.uk/LibraryConsultation

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