

County Council report – November 2024

Government's new housing targets must put infrastructure first

Suffolk County Council has raised concerns in its response to the government's proposed reforms for planning policies for England.

It expresses fears about the lack of clarity around infrastructure, such as schools, transport, waste and community facilities when new housing developments are approved.

The proposals include a significant increase in the number of new homes to be built across Suffolk – the government's own figures suggest that East Suffolk alone would see an 87% increase in the number new homes, compared to those currently planned.

Suffolk County Council is already very active in securing developer contributions and delivering infrastructure. It secures Section 106 contributions as well as funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy from district councils - but this is to maintain a baseline level of service rather than make a positive overall improvement to infrastructure.

In its response to government, the council said that the simple question of "who pays" for the infrastructure needs to be answered when permissions are being granted. Local planning authorities should not be allowed to assume that other authorities and agencies will make up any difference.

Suffolk launches pothole prevention programme ahead of winter weather

Suffolk County Council has launched a pothole prevention programme to target areas of Suffolk's Road network that could worsen when the winter weather hits.

Teams with additional resources and the latest technology have already started visiting and treating locations susceptible to deterioration or where there are smaller defects that could grow as the colder and wetter weather strikes.

Building on the success of earlier trials with the Roadmender Elastomac and Dragon Patcher machines, teams will be deployed across Suffolk to use this equipment in addition to our usual Safety Defect Service that deals with larger defects as they occur.

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

"Cold and wet weather often wreaks havoc with our roads, which is why we have taken proactive steps and developed a targeted campaign to tackle and provide resilience to our road network ahead of this winter.

“This week we launched an additional programme of repairs in areas which pose a higher risk of potholes forming during the winter months. The aim of the programme is to treat areas of Suffolk’s roads earlier with the goal of reducing the number of more substantial defects that may cause safety concerns to road users throughout the winter.

“These plans have been carefully worked up over recent months to ensure we can get ahead of pothole repairs between now and December prior to the drop in temperatures, mostly in January, February and March, where the largest number of potholes form. I look forward to sharing progress with residents.”

Highways workers using the Roadmender Elastomac system will target urban roads that are at higher risk of damage to locate cracks and smaller potholes and carry out repairs. Unlike traditional methods, which require potholes to be saw-cut, excavated and asphalt to be compacted on top, Elastomac is a flowable material used to seal the repaired area.

Once applied, this adhesive, flexible material bonds with the existing road surface, preventing water getting in the cracks and extending the road’s lifespan. The process is more sustainable and efficient, reducing material movement and waste by 90%, lowering costs and minimising disruption.

The Dragon Patcher machines clean the surface of the road using compressed air, preparing it for repair with an application of aggregate and hot bitumen material, and will target rural roads.

Fuelled by biodiesel, HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil), the patcher reduces raw material use, generates zero waste, and has demonstrated significant carbon savings compared to traditional patching techniques.

The locations have been carefully chosen, focusing on areas with a higher risk of potholes forming during winter. Highways teams will be working when weather conditions allow, from 7am to 5pm, moving across the county to treat the more vulnerable areas. Whilst the repairs are underway, traffic will be managed temporarily by staff on site, and there may be waiting times of up to 15 minutes.

Council to offer interest-free loans to make homes more energy efficient

Suffolk County Council will offer interest-free loans to help make residents’ homes warmer, safer and cheaper to run.

Energy efficiency upgrades such as insulation, solar panels, batteries, glazing, or heat pumps will all be possible with loans of up to £15,000 to be repaid over a maximum of 7 years at 0% interest.

Making homes more energy-efficient helps retain their heat and use less energy, meaning homeowners can save on their energy bills and reduce their carbon emissions. A warm home also has a positive impact on health and well-being.

Money for the loans comes from £3 million of funding received as part of the council’s negotiations with the previous government to secure a County Deal.

It was allocated from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to support an energy efficiency and energy generation 0% loan fund for people that cannot access grants currently available to low-income households.

The scheme supports Suffolk's Climate Emergency Plan, by increasing the number of properties which have energy-efficient and low carbon energy measures installed.

An increase in demand for energy efficiency measures will also help support businesses providing those services, meaning jobs, skills development and investment in the green economy.

Suffolk County Council is partnering with Lendology CIC to deliver the interest-free loan scheme. Lendology CIC is an experienced Social Enterprise Lender, managing similar schemes with councils across the country.

For more information and to register your interest in an interest-free loan, visit: www.lendology.org.uk/warm-home-suffolk-loan

Suffolk County Council set on major investment to further protect Suffolk from flooding as it calls on Government to 'step up'

Suffolk County Council has announced its intention to invest another £1.5 million to carry out important flooding prevention work.

- Council set to agree £1.5 million to deliver first phase of works identified in initial flood investigation reports
- Authority calls on Government to recognise ongoing impact of Storm Babet and fund £20 million of further prevention work urgently needed
- Extensive work already completed since Storm Babet including more than 111,000 drains cleared and significant road repairs.

The commitment comes as initial flood investigation reports have identified that a further £20 million is needed to complete the work – a figure that the county council can't afford. The council has therefore written to the Flooding Minister, Emma Hardy MP, and demanded the government step up and plug the funding gap.

Examples of the kind of projects that could be delivered include:

1. Creating flood water retention ponds in land above villages and green spaces within communities to capture water and slow the flow into residential areas.
2. Installing flood doors and non-return valves on drains to stop water entering properties that are particularly at risk of flooding.
3. Help landowners with advice and guidance, especially those within responsibilities to maintain ditches and streams on their properties (known as 'riparian ownership').
4. Bolstering Suffolk Highways' resources to deliver planned and reactive maintenance on the county's roads and footpaths.

Councillor Paul West, Cabinet Member for Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

“Since Storm Babet, our teams have been working hard to repair the damage it caused, investigate what happened and to help reduce the flood risk in future. This preventative work is complex, costly and requires lots of agencies to work together.

“Despite limited resources and budgetary challenges facing all county councils, we have managed to find extra money to tackle flooding and propose investing a further £1.5 million to deliver work identified in our investigations. However, this isn’t enough and - so steep is the challenge facing areas like Suffolk, who were hit hard by Storm Babet - the government must act and provide extra funding. This is why we’ve written to the flooding minister asking for additional money. The government needs to step up to the plate and help us ensure Suffolk’s residents don’t face uncertainty when these extreme weather events occur.

“I saw firsthand how devastating the impact of Storm Babet was for many families and businesses across Suffolk. The finished flood investigation reports give us a clear understanding of what work needs to be done and at what cost. It is right that we continue to increase our resources appropriately, but unless the government acts too we will not be able to go as far as our residents deserve.”

Storm Babet struck between October 18 and 21 last year and caused substantial flooding and disruption across Suffolk. A month’s worth of rain fell in 24 hours, flooding more than 900 homes and businesses. The impact of the storm was exceptional and demanded an urgent multiagency response.

So far, Suffolk County Council has committed more than £13.75 million for work to aid recovery from Storm Babet.

Suffolk County Council has made several achievements as part of our continued commitment to reduce flood risk.

The council has already committed £12.25 million, including:

- £1 million on bringing in additional flood investigation specialists
- £1.25 million for repairs to Suffolk’s highways following the flood damage
- £10 million funding, which was committed in 2021, to address long-standing drainage issues over three years. This complements £2 million a year invested in drainage repairs and improvements funded from the Department for Transport maintenance grant.

The council has completed seven location-based flood investigations, with an estimated 50 to complete. This compares to an average of three or four investigations in an average year. These reports provide a detailed account of events for each flooding location and recommendations for other organisations, landowners, businesses and residents.

Carried out extensive works on Suffolk’s highways. Specifically:

- Cleared 96% of highway drainage gullies across Suffolk, more than 111,000. This involves lifting the iron grates and sucking up the debris that has washed off the roads
- Attended more than 3,500 emergency call outs for flooding related incidents – an unprecedented number. This includes pumping an estimated 2.5million litres of water from the roads, removing 53 tonnes of debris and clearing 121 fallen trees

The new money is set to be agreed by the council's Cabinet on 5 November.

Loft Insulation Offer gives Suffolk residents 50% off eco-friendly insulation

According to The Energy Saving Trust, an uninsulated home loses up to a quarter of its heat through its roof.

An effective way to reduce this heat loss, and your heating bills, is to insulate your loft.

For the second year running, Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders have provided funding to help Suffolk residents make their homes warmer and save money on their energy bills.

The Suffolk Loft Insulation Offer enables homeowners in Suffolk to receive a 50% discount (up to £200) and free delivery on orders of 200mm or 370mm wide eco-friendly, itch free thermal insulation rolls from High Loft, the UK's leading eco loft insulation brand.

Last year, the project enabled over 5,000m² of roofs in Suffolk to be insulated. This year, the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership want to double that figure. The offer is open to anyone in Suffolk and will only close once the allocated funding has been spent. Simply go to highloft.co.uk/pages/suffolk-council-200-loft-insulation-contribution and fill in the form to receive your discount code.

The Loft Insulation Offer is being funded by Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders and High Loft and will help contribute to Suffolk's Climate Emergency Plan and our vision for a net zero Suffolk. To find out more visit <http://www.greensuffolk.org/>