

**MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL,
7.30pm 10th MARCH 2025.**

PRESENT - Mr P. Mortimer, Mr P. Schwier, Mrs C Pryce, Dr C Osborne, Mrs D Fowler, Mr B Lee-Harwood, Mr J Gadsdon, Cllr Lloyd (SCC), Cllr Hadingham (MSDC).

Clerk- Mrs L Duckett

No members of the public were present.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE - Mr P Smith, Mr D Hall

2. TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE MEETINGS HELD 13th JANUARY 2025.

The minutes were agreed and approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES –

The site operator at Withersdale Hall Farm is now under court bail conditions not to enter the site or bring waste to the site. The Environment Agency has requested that any activity observed is reported directly to the police.

Although previously approved, the road safety team have now informed the Clerk that two of the sites identified for the Speed Indicator Devices were no longer considered suitable. The Clerk has requested a site visit to discuss options but had not yet received a response.

Potholes continue to cause concern. The Clerk also reported a delay in response times when using the SCC highways reporting tool. Reference numbers will be emailed to Cllr Lloyd.

The Chair thanked Mr Hall and his staff for the excellent job made of the hedge cutting around the village. An offer had been made to Captains Farm to assist with cutting back their boundary hedge, but this had been turned down.

4. REPORT FROM DISTRICT COUNCILLOR HADINGHAM (as provided)

The MSDC monthly report was circulated prior to the meeting and can be found at the end of these minutes.

Comments were made regarding the leaflet recently posted to all residents by MSDC. It was questioned if this was a good use of funds. The “Stowmarket -centric” approach was also commented upon. Cllr Hadingham explained that this had already been raised by herself and others but was not considered an issue by leaders of the District Council.

It should be noted that the telephone number quoted in the leaflet for Cllr Hadingham is incorrect.

5. REPORT FROM SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL (as provided)

The SCC monthly report was circulated prior to the meeting and can be found at the end of these minutes.

Cllr Lloyd commented upon the recent application for a solar farm at Eye which he is opposed to. Concern was raised that there is an increased threat of solar development taking out arable land, yet there is a broken infrastructure for transmitting the power to substations. This lack of connection is restricting growth such the use of solar panels on industrial buildings in preference to stand alone sites.

The proposed transfer of library services was also discussed. It was felt that the opposing views of the County Council and current Library services were contradictory, so it was hard to understand the true situation. Cllr Lloyd explained that there was further information fuelling the County’s decision, but this was currently considered confidential so not available as part of the debate.

Both Cllr Hadingham and Cllr Lloyd gave their views on the current state of devolution. There was no unanimous view over the number of unitary divisions preferred – both agreed that geographical location reflected different needs so the area would benefit from some division.

6. MATTERS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Concern has been raised regarding the antisocial behaviour of some residents in social housing in the village. The Chair reiterated that the Parish Council does not get involved in domestic disputes, but Cllr Hadingham agreed to take the comments back to the MSDC housing department.

7. FINANCE

i) Payments approved between meetings.

ElanCity – SIDs x 2 £5,014.78 (previously approved but not paid until the SIDs had been checked)

ii) Payments approved at the meeting

SCC – Streetlight maintenance and energy costs £292 +VAT

iii) Sign off of CIL expenditure.

The Chair and Clerk signed the formal expenditure form for the CIL grant spend. This will be published on the village website and sent to MSDC, as required as part of the grant conditions.

iv) Adoption of updated Financial Regulations

The updated financial regulations were circulated for review prior to the meeting. They were agreed and formally adopted. A full copy can be found under Governance on the village website.

8. PLANNING – TO REVIEW ANY CURRENT PLANNING APPLICATIONS

DC/24/03486 Householder Application - Erection of two storey side extension (following demolition of existing side extension). - Hattens Farm Fressingfield Road Metfield Harleston Suffolk IP20 0LL

There is still no decision on this application

DC/24/00579 - Retention of change of use of 2no existing farm buildings to a commercial use under Class B8 of the Use Classes Order 1987 (as amended) Location: Vale Farm, The Common, Metfield, IP20 0LP

This application has now gone to the appeals office.

DC/24/05335 - Removal of Condition 2 (Garage Restriction) of planning permission 0102/77 dated 28/04/1977 - Erection of bungalow and garage and amendment to existing vehicular access. To allow garage to be converted into a habitable room.

Location: Harmony, Fressingfield Road, Metfield, Harleston Suffolk IP20 0LE

This application has been approved.

DC/25/00522 – Tree works in a conservation area, Oak House, The Street, Metfield, Harleston Suffolk IP20 0LB

This application was reviewed between meetings due to deadline constraints. No objections were raised. It has now been approved.

DC/25/00580 - Tree works in a conservation area, Bell House, The Street, Metfield, Harleston Suffolk IP20 0LB

This application was reviewed between meetings due to deadline constraints. No objections were raised

DC/25/00579 - Tree works in a conservation area, Ivy House, The Street, Metfield, Harleston Suffolk IP20 0LB

This application was reviewed between meetings due to deadline constraints. No objections were raised.

To consider creating a Neighbourhood Plan

Advice was provided by the MSDC planning office via the Clerk. It was debated but felt there was not currently the resource for developing a neighbourhood plan. This is a lengthy and costly procedure involving professional consultancy as well as local input, which was considered inappropriate for Metfield due to its size and lack of facilities making large development unlikely. It would, however, be kept under review, should circumstances change.

9. PLAYGROUND REPORT

Mrs Fowler reported that there were no new issues with the playground equipment. A working party will be convened on Tuesday 18th March to prepare the swing area and subsequently distribute the rubber chippings purchased in January.

10. VE 80TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT

On the 8th of May 2025, the country will be commemorating the 80th Anniversary of VE day. Suggestions for what should happen in the village were discussed.

It was agreed that there would be a gathering by the village sign in the centre of the village rather than at the beacon for this event. The church bells will be rung, and a short ceremony conducted with candles lit for those from the village who fell in WWII. Mr Gadsdon will provide amplification of music for singing of the hymn "I vow to thee my country." The Clerk will advertise via Six Sense and a sign will be erected on the green. The event will start at 7.30pm

11. MATTERS RAISED BY COUNCILLORS.

The Chair reported that the hedge planted around the new section of the cemetery in Hunters Lane needs weeding, and the gravel driveway needs weedkiller spraying. A working party will be arranged for the work to be carried out. The Clerk will contact the grass cutter to arrange a cut before Easter, with scheduled cuts going forward from then onwards.

Dr. Osborne informed the group that the old Huntsman and Hounds sign was to be repainted on his property. As the house is listed the planning office had been contacted, but planning permission was not required.

12 CORRESPONDENCE

The Clerk had received an email from the West Suffolk Wilder Communities Advisor for Suffolk Wildlife Trust offering to arrange community workshops. It was agreed that this offer would be better off directed to the village Hall Committee. The Clerk will forward.

The meeting closed at 8.50pm.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING **Monday 14th April 2025 – Annual Parish Meeting**
Monday 12th May 2025 – Parish Council Meeting

MSDC Report – as provided.

Your briefing notes for town and parish councils



Babergh & Mid Suffolk Councils

Council tax freeze agreed for Mid Suffolk

Mid Suffolk District Council has bucked a nationwide trend by agreeing to freeze its element of council tax for the upcoming financial year – helping residents to navigate the cost-of-living crisis while continuing investment in priority areas to improve quality of life in the district.

Energy infrastructure ‘must be coordinated’ to minimise impact on Mid Suffolk communities

Rising demand for energy developments and connections to the National Grid in Mid Suffolk must be coordinated to minimise the harm on local communities and the environment, it has been warned.

£150k boost to community projects across Babergh and Mid Suffolk

Funding towards a new football club stand and play area improvements are among 21 grants to support community groups and organisations in Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

Mid Suffolk leader named co-president of national cross-party climate network

Mid Suffolk District Council leader, Cllr Andy Mellen, has been announced as the new co-president of UK100, the national network committed to tackling the climate crisis at local level.

National recognition for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils’ building control team

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils’ building control team has been named as the best in the business.

Council to consider funding design of Residents’ Parking Zone in Stowmarket

Mid Suffolk District Council is set to consider plans to help tackle residents’ parking issues in Stowmarket by investing in the next stage of a possible residents’ parking zone (RPZ).

Wildlife Wise announces new grant project support

A new small grant scheme has been announced by Wildlife Wise, supporting projects that aim to prevent recreational disturbance and damage to Suffolk’s coast and its important wildlife and habitats.

Ipswich to Cambridge Community Rail Partnership gets underway

The new Ipswich to Cambridge Community Rail Partnership (CRP), backed by Mid Suffolk District Council, is up and running and preparing for its first full year of operation.

Government launches public consultation on Suffolk and Norfolk devolution

The Government has launched a public consultation on proposals to create a Mayoral Combined County Authority across Norfolk and Suffolk.

Support for our residents – in a way that suits them

From Monday 24 February, we are extending our opening hours at our customer access point in Stowmarket – offering face-to-face support for residents, five days a week.

Covid-19 day of reflection

On Sunday 9 March 2025, the UK will recognise a Covid-19 Day of Reflection. If your community wishes to take part, you can find a full list of resources about the day of reflection on our website.

New tenant handbook

Housing Services have launched a new tenant handbook, providing information about tenants’ rights and responsibilities, as well as setting out what the council’s responsibilities are as their landlord.

SCC Report - as provided.

New cabinet role to lead on devolution and local government reform in Suffolk

A new Suffolk County Council cabinet role responsible for devolution and local government reform has been created, following a reshuffle announced by council leader Cllr Matthew Hicks. The changes take effect immediately.

Cllr Richard Rout has been appointed to the role – which comes as Suffolk is one of only six areas in the country chosen by the government to be fast-tracked for devolution and local government reform.

The reforms will see all six of Suffolk's district, borough and county councils disbanded, to be replaced by one or more unitary (singular) authorities responsible for delivering all local services that are currently delivered by the different tiers of local government.

It will also see the election of a mayor (covering Suffolk and Norfolk) in May 2026, who will take control over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, economic development, health improvement and blue light services – along with devolved government funding to deliver positive change. The mayor would not run the unitary councils or have oversight of them.

Cllr Hicks said:

"These proposals represent the most significant changes to local government in Suffolk County Council's 50-year history. This is a pivotal moment for our county, which presents an opportunity to streamline local government, reduce costs for taxpayers and deliver more effective services.

"Given the scale of these changes, I am creating a new cabinet role to lead this work. Cllr Richard Rout's expertise and leadership will be crucial in guiding these reforms locally and working with our partners to ensure the best possible outcome for Suffolk and its residents."

Alongside his new responsibilities, Cllr Rout will continue to lead on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), a role he held as deputy cabinet member prior to this reshuffle.

The new Cabinet and Deputies will now consist of:

- **Richard Smith** – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills
- **Beccy Hopfensperger** – Cabinet Member for Adult Care
- **Paul West** – Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding
- **Andrew Reid** – Cabinet Member for Education and SEND
- **Bobby Bennett** – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services
- **Philip Faircloth-Mutton** – Cabinet Member for Environment, Communities and Equality

- **Chris Chambers** – Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy, Planning and Waste
- **Steve Wiles** – Cabinet Member for Public Health and Public Protection
- **Richard Rout** – Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and NSIPs
- **Alexander Nicoll** – Deputy Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy
- **Nadia Cenci** – Deputy Cabinet Member for Property and County Farms
- **Debbie Richards** – Deputy Cabinet Member for SEND
- **Judy Cloke** – Deputy Cabinet Member for Flooding

Suffolk prepares for another significant solar farm proposal

Suffolk County Council is preparing to respond to another large solar farm proposal, set to cover around 1,500 acres, near Eye.

EcoPower Suffolk is putting forward plans to build a solar farm and battery storage facility, which would impact Yaxley, Brome, Gislingham, Mellis, Eye and Occold, with connections made at the existing substation to the north of Yaxley.

The project aims to deliver around 250 megawatts of renewable energy. At that size, it will be classed as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), requiring planning approval from the Secretary of State, rather than the local authority.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and NSIPs, said:

"Another NSIP is looking to land in Suffolk and for many of the communities impacted by EcoPower Suffolk's plans, this comes hot on the heels of discussing the Norwich to Tilbury pylon proposals. So I can fully understand how local communities are warily bracing themselves for a time-consuming and uncertain road ahead.

"It does feel like a case of 'here we go again', but I am expecting regular, productive engagement with EcoPower Suffolk – not just with the council, but with local residents and parishes.

"I trust that their opening words on their website are sincere – they talk about collaboration, and a commitment to community engagement and understanding local challenges and aspirations."

A number of consultations, beginning in March 2025, will be held by EcoPower Suffolk as it shapes its final planning application.

The county council will be contributing to these, to support and represent residents, businesses, agriculture, our landscape and ecology.

Cllr Rout continues:

"Suffolk County Council has previously been clear in setting out its views that solar farms in Suffolk should not take our best quality farmland out of food production and that, broadly speaking, solar installations should be rooftop before rural.

"Moreover, the council has the highest possible expectations that any solar developer fully rules out any possible links to forced labour in China or elsewhere in the world."

"Ultimately, any decision to approve or refuse this scheme will be made by the government. The worst-case scenario is that we will suffer a similar farce to the Sunnica project: an incredibly poor proposal, seemingly rushed through on a whim by the Secretary of State, with no interest in the welfare of local communities or the environment. All because the government is hastily chasing an unrealistic target of decarbonising the Grid by 2030."

EcoPower Suffolk hopes that the project will connect to the Grid in 2030.

More information can be found at www.ecopowersuffolk.com

£1.6 million investment proposed following inspection of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service

Further funding is earmarked for the county's fire service following a key report by Government inspectors.

Suffolk County Council is proposing to invest an extra £1.6 million over two years into Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) following a government inspection.

Inspectors from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) found SFRS effectively operates its 35 stations, 43 fire engines and a range of specialist vehicles strategically situated around Suffolk.

The inspectors rated the service as good at preventing fires and risk, and protecting the public through fire regulation, and that it met requirements for responding to major incidents, plus managing and developing its leaders.

However, the assessment highlighted areas where inspectors feel the service needs to improve – leadership, culture, commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, and IT infrastructure.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Chief Fire Officer, Jon Lacey, said:

"The report recognised that in the key areas of emergency response readiness, preventing fires and protecting the public the service we perform well, and I want to take this opportunity to thank our incredibly hard-working members of staff for their ongoing commitment to keeping Suffolk's residents safe.

"We recognise there is much work to be done, which is why we are already developing an action plan to drive improvements across all service areas – taking into account the challenges we've experienced over the past 12 months, I am putting the inspection outcomes front and centre as our driver for change.

"It is essential that my colleagues from across the service are involved in developing our action plan so we can reflect the experience of all those working here, ensuring we are inclusive during the delivery of our improvements.

"Keeping Suffolk's residents safe and responding to emergencies remains our top priority – this will continue to be our key focus, whilst building on our core values and cultivating a positive and collaborative working environment for all. I welcome the investment as pressures on fire services increase."

A targeted action plan is already being developed with staff to drive improvements in areas highlighted within the report.

These include IT infrastructure and staff, cultural changes and risk management.

To deliver the plan, Suffolk County Council is set to propose an additional investment of £1.6 million.

Councillor Steve Wiles, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for public protection, said:

"I thank His Majesty's Inspectorate for their recent inspection and feedback on how we in Suffolk can provide the best possible fire services to our residents.

"We acknowledge and accept the findings within the report. It will be reassuring for residents to know we are already tackling areas that have been highlighted for improvement. Our additional £1.6 million investment proposal will mean the service can push on with its action plan.

"I will work closely with the chief fire officer and his team to ensure the improvement plan is clear and deliverable - ensuring necessary changes are made swiftly and effectively."

All fire services in the UK undergo inspection every two years. The last inspection report of SFRS was published in 2023.

However, new assessment criteria has since been introduced by HMICFRS that gives a more stringent evaluation, which means the 2025 report for SFRS cannot be compared with inspection gradings from previous years.

The inspection took place last autumn and assessed how well Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service performed across a number of areas.

Funding made available for safer, healthier and accessible travel around Suffolk

Suffolk County Council has been awarded £3.7 million to continue to encourage cycling, walking and active travel across the county, and making journeys more accessible.

Government has awarded the county council £0.9 million from the Round 5 of the Active Travel Fund, and £2.8 million from the Consolidated Active Travel Fund.

Funds are available to be spent on projects such as:

- Better footpaths and crossing points
- Maintenance of existing walking and cycling infrastructure
- Improved cycle routes
- Traffic calming measures
- Improvements to the Public Rights of Way network
- Rail station access improvements

Councillor Chris Chambers, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy, Planning and Waste, said:

"We're looking forward to building on the successes of similar, previous projects such as at Ipswich Waterfront.

"Such schemes are important to the county, making it easier, cleaner and safer for people to get around.

"Cycling, walking and wheeling can help improve our health, whilst also reducing vehicle emissions to improve air quality and protect Suffolk's environment."

With the funding confirmed (12th February 2025), the county council is now considering suitable local projects, which will be announced in the coming months.

Arts organisations and museums across Suffolk get £500,000 funding boost

Thirty-three arts organisations and museums from across Suffolk have been awarded funding from Suffolk County Council's £500,000 Culture Project Fund.

- 33 organisations made successful bids

- Vast array of projects cover all corners of Suffolk
- Successful bids range from £1k to nearly £30k

Thirty-three arts organisations and museums from across Suffolk have been awarded funding from Suffolk County Council's £500,000 Culture Project Fund.

From baby classes to a new community radio show, the successful projects range in size and scope, and support an array of different people across Suffolk. Examples include promoting performing arts in Sudbury with the Quay Theatre, environmental events at Dunwich Museum, and an education and arts project to address racial inequalities in Ipswich.

The successful bids range from £1,000 to £27,000.

The new fund, which was launched last year to boost cultural activity across the county, attracted 131 applications, requesting a total of £2 million in funding. The quality of applications was exceptionally high, and more than 60 projects scored 'excellent' or 'outstanding' against the assessment criteria. Following a rigorous selection process, a panel of experts from across the arts, heritage, and community sectors reviewed 62 shortlisted applications. This resulted in 33 successful bids.

Cllr Philip Faircloth Mutton, Cabinet Member for Environment, Communities and Equality, at Suffolk County Council, said:

"We are thrilled to be supporting such a diverse range of creative and cultural projects through the Culture Project Fund.

"As well as some higher-profile organisations, it's wonderful that lots of smaller projects, which often get overlooked for funding, will also benefit. I know firsthand the difference that grassroots initiatives make to the people that use them.

"The level of ambition and creativity shown in the applications was truly inspiring, demonstrating the incredible talent and passion that exists within Suffolk's cultural sector. This funding will help bring new artistic experiences to local communities, support the growth of our creative industries, and celebrate Suffolk's rich heritage."

One successful bid was made by Ipswich Community Media for a project called Making Waves, which engages young offenders and those at risk of offending in music, media and the arts. The project aims to divert young people from offending towards positive activities, building confidence and self-esteem and was awarded £9,000.

Another example is the Red Rose Chain, which has been awarded £20,000 to deliver theatre activities for disabled and disadvantaged children and young people within mainstream and SEND schools across Suffolk.

A number of small grants – up to £1,500 – are still available for arts organisations and museums across Suffolk. [Visit the website for details.](#)

There will be another round of funding for large and medium projects, which will open in Autumn 2025. These new projects will be delivered in 2026/27.

Suffolk's 45 libraries to remain open and see new investment as Suffolk County Council plans to take service back in house

Suffolk's 45 libraries would remain open, see no change to opening hours and have new mobile libraries and computers as part of a plan to bring the service back into Suffolk County Council.

Subject to a formal Cabinet decision on 18th March 2025, staff running Suffolk's library service – along with their years of experience and love for libraries - will transition to the direct employment of the council on 1st June 2025.

The county council would invest £200,000 in replacing Suffolk's aging mobile libraries with a further £157,000 for new books and to replace public computers in libraries across Suffolk. This is in addition to the £6.6 million a year budget available for Suffolk's libraries.

It follows an attempt to secure an external provider for a new six-year contract (with the option to extend for up to a further six years) which had to be abandoned due to difficulties in aligning submissions with the service requirements and budgets.

Following the end of the procurement process, Suffolk County Council entered negotiations with Suffolk Libraries (the current provider) to reach agreement on a shorter-term contract. The intention was to secure the immediate future of the library service from 1 June 2025, while the longer-term future was considered. However, Suffolk Libraries were unwilling to accept those terms and proposed different terms which were not acceptable to Suffolk County Council and would have breached procurement law.

In addition, serious concerns about the viability of Suffolk Libraries also surfaced. The concerns included their proposal to reduce opening hours by 30% and issues with the financial stability of the organisation. There is also concern about the cost of their head office, including senior managers, which equates to 33% of their annual staffing costs. Suffolk County Council believes that more of the library budget should be invested in frontline services.

Councillor Philip Faircloth-Mutton, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Environment, Communities and Equality, said:

"The future of Suffolk's 45 libraries will be in safe hands as part of our plans to protect and enhance the service.

"With these proposals, there will be no library closures, no reduction in library opening hours, and certainty and security for our most important asset - library staff and volunteers.

"Additionally, we propose new investment to buy new mobile library vehicles and upgrade computers across library sites.

"We know how important library services are to residents, particularly those who rely on them for education, access to information, support and, of course, books.

"A 30% cut to opening hours and the current management costs are unacceptable to Suffolk County Council. This is why we're taking action. We are responsible for libraries in Suffolk and this is the right thing to do to protect them and the services they provide to residents."

Background

- Suffolk's library services have been delivered by Suffolk Libraries IPS since 2012, with the current contract ending on **31st May 2025**.
- Suffolk County Council is the main funder of the service, with an agreed budget of £5.9 million a year. In 2023/24, Suffolk County Council increased the annual budget by £720,000 to £6.6 million a year.
- The contract to operate libraries in Suffolk had to be put out for competitive tender in 2024 as it had reached its maximum legal length.
- The procurement was abandoned due to difficulties in aligning submissions with the service requirements and budgets.
- Following the end of the procurement process, Suffolk County Council entered negotiations with Suffolk Libraries (the current provider) to reach agreement on a shorter-term contract. The intention was to secure the immediate future of the library service from 1st June 2025, while the longer-term future was considered. However, Suffolk Libraries were unwilling to accept those terms and proposed different terms which were not acceptable to Suffolk County Council and would have breached procurement law.
- In addition, serious concerns about the viability of Suffolk Libraries also surfaced. The concerns included their proposal to reduce opening hours by 30% and issues with the financial stability of the organisation. There is also concern about the cost of their head office, including senior managers, which equates to 33% of their annual staffing costs. Suffolk County Council believes that more of the library budget should be invested in frontline services.

Suffolk County Council published two open letters explaining its proposal, one to Suffolk residents and the other to Suffolk Libraries staff, volunteers and supporters.

County leaders to propose one council for Suffolk

One council for Suffolk would make delivering public services simpler, cheaper and quicker, and better meet the needs of residents and businesses, county leaders have said.

Following a recent government announcement that Suffolk's county, district and borough councils will be replaced with a single-tier system, Suffolk County Council argues that consolidating all services under one unitary authority is the only effective way to deliver against the government's criteria for local government reform.

The move would see all council services, such as waste collection and disposal, housing, social care, planning, highways maintenance, leisure, school placements and travel and street cleaning, all provided by one authority - rather than the six that currently exist in Suffolk.

Bringing together district, borough and county council functions is expected to reduce duplication, lower administrative costs and ensure a more coordinated and cost-effective approach to delivering essential services.

The council warns that splitting services among multiple bodies would force the duplication of essential functions - such as social care, highways maintenance and schools - currently managed at a county level.

The key benefits of one council are:

- **Simpler for residents** – one council would make it easier to understand and contact local government
- **Clearer accountability** – there would be less confusion over who is responsible for what
- **Better use of funding** – a more coherent, strategic, financially sustainable, county-wide approach to budgeting
- **Better alignment of services** – since everything is under one roof, services can be more easily coordinated, creating opportunities to improve services for residents
- **More efficient decision-making** – with just one council, decisions can be made more quickly
- **Stronger leadership** – a single, visible and accountable body providing a clear strategic voice for Suffolk.

The council will submit its initial proposal to the government by 21 March, with a more detailed business case to follow later in the year.

The government will then undertake a public consultation.

Cllr Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and NSIPs, said:

"The financial benefits of unitary local government are clear. By cutting unnecessary bureaucracy, the new council – whoever may serve on it – will have more money to invest in frontline public services, ensuring better value for taxpayers.

"But reorganisation must go beyond financial savings. It must also deliver greater accountability, speed up decision-making and lead to better outcomes for local communities. There is huge opportunity in pulling together services currently separated across the district, borough and county councils – such as housing and social care.

"If the government is serious about delivering savings, efficiencies, better outcomes for residents and financially sustainable local government, then there is only one answer - one council for Suffolk. Moreover, it is the only model that meets their criteria of serving over 500,000 people.

"One council for Suffolk will provide clear leadership, simplify access to services and eliminate the confusion of navigating multiple councils. Carving the county in two or three – as has been suggested - would defeat the purpose."

The government's plans will also see the election of a mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk in May 2026, who would take control over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, economic development, health improvement and blue light services – along with devolved government funding to deliver positive change.

Octopus Energy and Suffolk County Council trial 'Zero Bills' upgrade on existing homes

Octopus reveals first 'Zero Bills' green tech upgrade for existing homes, offering no energy bills for at least 5 years.

- Kicking off trials in Suffolk, with county council offering £15k interest-free loan for residents to kit out their homes with solar panels and a battery
- Octopus Energy estimates 500,000 UK properties built since 2013 could be eligible to be upgraded to 'Zero Bills' standards

Octopus Energy, the UK's largest energy supplier, is taking its world-first 'Zero Bills' initiative to the next level by trialling an upgrade offer for existing homes, allowing more householders across the UK to eliminate their energy bills.

Octopus's upgrade trials will transform existing homes by installing cutting-edge green tech - a heat pump, a battery and solar panels - bringing them up to Octopus' 'Zero Bills' standard, where customers receive no energy bills for at least 5 years, guaranteed.

The energy supplier is kicking off a series of trials in new homes in Suffolk. The company is teaming up with Suffolk County Council to help more local people benefit from low-carbon tech through the County Council's £15,000 interest-free Warm Homes Loan.

The loan covers the upfront costs of installing solar panels and a battery, allowing Suffolk homeowners who already have a heat pump to embrace low-carbon living while unlocking major savings on their energy bills.

Octopus is reaching out to local Suffolk customers with homes built since 2015, offering them a chance to join the revolutionary trial and take advantage of the council's funding.

The energy supplier estimates 500,000 UK properties built since 2013 could be eligible to be upgraded to a 'Zero Bills' home. Octopus Energy aims to deliver 100,000 'Zero Bills' homes by 2030, and has already rolled out the initiative in Germany and New Zealand, as well as the UK.

Councillor Philip Faircloth-Mutton, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Environment, Communities and Equality, said:

"Suffolk County Council prides itself in bringing pioneering net zero projects to our residents, and we're excited to be the first local authority working with Octopus Energy on 'Zero Bills'.

"We appreciate the role we have as local authority to be able to lead, influence and support local residents in as many ways possible to help reduce both their energy bills and their impact on the environment."

Octopus has already accredited well over 1,200 'Zero Bills' homes through contracts with a number of prominent developers. Accredited homes span affordable and private rent, as well as private and shared ownership.

For more information on Suffolk County Council's Warm Home Loan, please visit: <https://www.warmhomessuffolk.org/warm-homes-loans>

More information on 'Zero Bills' can be found [here](#).