



Suffolk

County Council 2020/2021 News Highlights

This is a selection of news items from Suffolk County Council that have featured over the last 12 months. For further details on any of these stories, and more, visit: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/>

March 2021

Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders review county's positive collective action towards addressing the climate emergency and Covid-19 Recovery planning

Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders met on February 26 to discuss local plans to reduce the impact on the environment as part of Suffolk's climate emergency declaration, and to focus on the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and how Suffolk plans to enter a local recovery phase when the time is right.

In 2019, all councils in Suffolk declared a Climate Emergency, committing themselves towards working to achieving Carbon Net Zero by 2030 through day-to-day business operations. To support this work and to chart progress, Suffolk Public Sector Leaders (SPSL) agreed to map out the projects already underway, and explore what would be needed to meet the challenge of reducing carbon across Suffolk.

There are already a number of notably successful projects up and running with the installation of plug-in vehicle charging points, the planting of new trees and hedgerows, and the planned use of new zero and ultra-low emission fleet vehicles for councils and Suffolk Police. Taking a collaborative approach to this work gives partners across Suffolk a greater voice in encouraging others to follow this example and to lobby and work with Government on new environmental initiatives.

Leaders previously commissioned an independent evidence base to inform development of a collaborative climate emergency plan across Suffolk.

The collective work towards achieving Carbon Net Zero is based around the following six key themes:

- Domestic Buildings
- Transport (public and private)
- Industry and Commercial Energy Use
- Power (consumption and generation)
- Finance
- Cross cutting issues (that affect all partners)

It is hoped that the full plan can be considered by SPSL in their June meeting.

During the same Suffolk Public Sector Leaders meeting there was also a presentation to update the group on Suffolk's recovery plan for Covid-19 following the Prime Minister's announcement this week, charting the four significant markers to reopen schools and in time businesses and hospitality.

The presentation at SPSL updated how the Leaders' and NALP joint investments created a Suffolk Inclusive Growth Investment Fund the first round of which has seen some £338,000, to support the roll out of the Virtual High Streets initiative in Babergh and Mid Suffolk; enabled businesses to take on apprentices in 2021, improved coordination of work across Suffolk's network of business innovation hubs and invested in Suffolk's creative digital sector, providing space for business growth and support for business start-ups. The second round of investment will be announced in March 2021.

As part of the revised timetable given the continued period of Covid-19 response, Suffolk's recovery plan is due to go to Suffolk Public Sector Leaders' meeting in June to ensure there is continued momentum and support measures in place.

Over 98% of pupils receive a place at one of their preferred Secondary Schools on National Offer Day

On March 1 it was announced that 98.16% of pupils received a place at one of their Preferred Secondary Schools in Suffolk on National Offer Day.

This year, Suffolk County Council (SCC) received 7,652 applications from parents indicating at which secondary school they would prefer their child to be educated from September 2021.

7,114 pupils received offers for their first preference school and 7,511 pupils received an offer for one of their three preferred schools.

Feedback sought to improve Recycling Centre booking system

People of Suffolk are being asked to rate their experience of the 'book a slot' system that's in place to visit a Recycling Centre.

A booking system was introduced at Suffolk's recycling centres in May 2020 to manage maximum visitor numbers and enable the safe reopening of the service after closure at the start of the first Covid-19 lockdown. The sites welcome around 14,000 visitors per week on average.

Suffolk County Council is working on upgrades to the booking system software to improve the customer experience by making it quicker and easier to make and amend bookings. Before any improvements can take place, the council is seeking feedback on how well the booking system has worked so far.

People can give their views by completing the 2-minute questionnaire online at suffolkrecycling.org.uk.

Suffolk has long held ambitions to Create the Greenest County and the Suffolk 2020 fund, which is a programme of work all about investing in projects that benefit Suffolk communities, aims to support the council's climate emergency declaration and improve Suffolk for all residents in years to come.

Breaking down the barriers to accessing digital care services in Suffolk communities

On March 5 Suffolk County Council announced the launch of a new project which commits to providing a range of accessible local care support services to help residents continue to live independently in their own homes.

As a largely rural county, Suffolk County Council is committed to providing a wide range of accessible local care support services to help residents continue to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible. This approach is even more important at the current time with Covid prevalent in the community, and the authority has successfully adapted its services through the use of technology to reduce risks to the health of residents as well as staff at this time.

Making the most of the advances in digital technology and keeping residents and communities connected has really proved successful in recent months as more and more people see the benefits of using the range of opportunities to personalise the care services they receive through digital options.

As a result of Suffolk 2020 project funding, the Council is launching a new initiative to adapt and kit out a number of community vehicles with digital connectivity and provide a

showcase for a range of supportive technology and digital solutions to take out and about into local communities, introducing residents to the potential benefits of using the equipment and services.

Last year, Suffolk County Council successfully introduced the use of video carephones to people who may be vulnerable or shielding, to help them stay connected with friends and loved ones during periods of isolation. As part of this Covid response, it became increasingly clear that there was a significant number of other elderly, vulnerable and isolated people in Suffolk who do not have the ability to access technology or connectivity but may find such services useful and beneficial. Such an approach has already proved to be successful in other parts of the UK and is supported by national and regional data.

The plan is for Suffolk County Council to enhance existing community vehicles as 'Mobile Digital Care Hubs' to enable residents to experience some of the digital care technologies first-hand to better understand opportunities available to them and if they would support them to meet their individual needs. The vehicles will be travelling around the county with a focus on reaching those who live in more isolated areas of Suffolk.

The project will provide a chance for skilled members of staff to talk about, show and demonstrate some of these technologies first-hand and provide a better understanding of how digital care can help individuals to live more safely and independently for longer.

Digital care solutions offer a wide range of other benefits including improved wellbeing and the ability to stay better connected with family, friends and other people who may offer invaluable support.

Councillor Beccy Hopfensperger, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Adult Care, said:

"Projects like this help break down the barriers that might otherwise restrict or stop Suffolk's vulnerable residents from accessing and benefiting from the services available through digital care.

"Digital care solutions help to supplement existing care and bolster support provided by our experienced, committed and excellent team of carers during these difficult times. By helping to keep people connected we have seen many positive benefits supporting the mental and emotional wellbeing of people, evidenced by speaking to family members, care providers and local support networks.

"Digital enablement is vital for the future of care delivery in Suffolk and is something that has become ever more pronounced during the course of the last year."

Suffolk criminal exploitation initiative extended after success

Of March 8 an additional £1.4million was awarded to extend a successful initiative that supports young people in or at risk of criminal exploitation.

The Suffolk Against Gang Exploitation (SAGE) Team was established in 2018 as part of Suffolk's three-year work programme to tackle gangs and county lines and is funded by Suffolk Public Sector Leaders.

During that time it has been delivering diversion, prevention, and early intervention work with young people in or at risk of gang violence and has also developed a practice framework, training courses and provided expertise and advice for practitioners across the county.

A recent evaluation of SAGE showed positive results for the young people they are working with including equipping them to make better choices in future, improved attendance & completion of interventions, deeper level of awareness and understanding amongst practitioners and reported improved mental wellbeing.

Building on this success, Suffolk Public Sector Leaders have pledged an additional £1.4million to tackle criminal exploitation in Suffolk. The new work programme will run from April 2021 until March 2024.

Suffolk partners with environmental charity in new campaign to stop people trying to recycle disposable nappies

It was announced on March 11 that Suffolk Waste Partnership has joined forces with environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy and other local authorities across the country to launch a new campaign aimed at stopping the millions of disposable nappies that are contaminating recycling.

The campaign comes after a new survey revealed that seven per cent of nappy users – parents, grandparents and carers – wrongly put their disposable nappies in with their recycling, which equates to more than one million people.

Locally, around 150 tonnes of nappies end up in Suffolk recycling bins each year. This equates to approximately 3000 nappies needing to be removed from the recycling every day. This truly unpleasant job needs to be done by hand by staff at Suffolk's Material Recycling Facility (MRF) in Gt Blakenham. So, by keeping nappies out of our recycling bins, you are not only helping to get our recycling right but protecting staff at the MRF.

The national survey, carried out by YouGov, also revealed that younger people, aged 18-24 were more likely to put them in their recycling bin (15%) and more than one in ten Londoners who used disposable nappies (11%) tried to recycle them.

Now, the Suffolk Waste Partnership is trying to reach nappy users with a new campaign that has been tested with them and offers a clear message that disposable nappies should never go in their recycling.

The campaign is fronted by 'Ted' and will be appearing on billboards around the country and on social media to drive the message home. In Suffolk, additional information will be shared on the Suffolk Waste Partnership's website, social media channels and newsletters.

Suffolk launches Quiet Lanes for residents to enjoy as lockdown eases

On March 16, the Quiet Lanes initiative was launched. Suffolk County Council is encouraging residents to explore more of the beautiful countryside on their doorstep.

As we move into spring, we are all keen to get outside and make the most of the weather. Quiet Lanes is a nationally recognised designation for narrow, rural roads which can be shared with walkers, horse riders, cyclists and other road users. It encourages drivers to take their time when they see the Quiet Lanes sign, so we can all enjoy rural lanes with greater safety.

Quiet Lanes at Snape and Glemsford have just achieved planning consent and the initiative has another 50 proposed lanes going through planning for April 2021. A new website allowing residents to find the Quiet Lanes near them will be available in May.

Suffolk to be included in Government's UK Gigabit Broadband programme

On March 19 it was announced that Suffolk is to be included in the £5 billion strategy to deliver next generation, gigabit-capable broadband to the entire country.

The programme aims to connect the first one million homes and businesses with gigabit speed broadband in the hardest to reach 20% of the UK by 2025. Gigabit-capable broadband connections offer the fastest and most reliable speeds currently available. Connections will enable and create a range of social benefits alongside boosting jobs and economic growth over the coming decades, and help improve connection and opportunities, especially for rural communities. It is hoped the rollout will give people the freedom to live and work more flexibly.

The scheme will use a broad range of interventions to deliver gigabit broadband, including contracts for new publicly funded infrastructure, use of broadband vouchers and other innovative solutions to deliver the roll out.

Success following £500k boost for highways improvements near schools

It was announced on March 23 that locations around schools across Suffolk have benefitted from new road markings and signs, following £500,000 Highways Investment Fund (HIF) cash boost.

The extra funding, which was announced by Councillor Andrew Reid, cabinet member with responsibility for highways during his speech at February 2020's full council meeting has been focussed on improving the safety of pupils and parents travelling to and from school, refreshing lines and cleaning and repairing signs in and around school zones.

Following inspection of the condition of road lining and signs in the vicinity of every school in Suffolk, 146 locations were identified as requiring new signs to replace those that were damaged or missing. Additionally, 218 areas with faded road markings are receiving a refresh.

Sign cleaning and light vegetation works have also been carried out where it was required.

100,000 trees planted as part of ambitious council scheme

On March 23 it was announced that 100,000 trees had been planted in just five months, since Suffolk County Council committed £228,000 from its Suffolk 2020 Fund to protect biodiversity.

Located in the Little and Great Waldingfield area, the 100,000th tree, a field maple, is part of 6.4 miles of new hedgerow which the council has planted across a number of its farm holdings.

The council has been working closely with the farm tenants, The Woodland Trust, Giles Landscapes, The Suffolk Tree Warden Initiative and local communities to ensure that a total of 102,586 saplings have been distributed and planted in the best possible places available over this last winter.

Hedgerows are important features of Suffolk's agricultural landscape, providing a habitat for many species and 'corridors' for wildlife to move through them. All the planting stock being used is UK sourced and grown to reduce plant health risks and improve biosecurity.

Local straw mulch is being used to reduce competition from weeds and to help retain moisture as the hedges become established. The tenant farmers will continue to maintain the hedgerows located on their land.

Automatic number plate recognition cameras to be installed in villages across Suffolk

An announcement on March 24 noted that Suffolk County Council and Suffolk's Police and Crime Commissioner and Suffolk Constabulary, has launched the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras.

The Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras are being used to help detect and deter speeding offences that have been highlighted in Suffolk villages, and educate drivers on the importance of road safety.

An ANPR camera will be installed at a site where it has been identified by a parish council, with support from their county councillor, there is a problem with speeding and / or rat running on roads with a 20 or 30mph speed limit.

An ANPR camera will identify a speeding vehicle by capturing an image of the number plate of the vehicle. Data will then be shared with the Police and the County Council. The County Council will write to the owner of the vehicle on behalf of both parties explaining that their vehicle has been registered as speeding. Repeat offences at a particular location could prompt the deployment of speed enforcement vans and subsequent fines to those who breach the speed limit.

Ten ANPR cameras will be purchased and each one will remain in situ for up to one week per site. There is the option of extending this period if needed.

The project has received funding from the Suffolk 2020 Fund, which is a programme of work all about investing in community projects and improving Suffolk for all residents now and in years to come. The funding secures the ANPR project for a two year pilot where its impact to reduce speeding will be monitored before it receives a further financial commitment.

Healing woods and spaces to play an important role in Suffolk's mental health

On March 24 it was announced that 90% of respondents strongly support the idea of establishing 'healing woods' in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The creation of healing woods and spaces will give more people better access to the natural environment, offering dedicated places for peaceful reflection and offering a positive focus.

Two in every three respondents to the survey, said that the pandemic had negatively impacted on their mental health and wellbeing.

The council's healing woods project connects with the motion unanimously passed by the county's councillors (18 March 2021), to commit to developing mental health support in Suffolk.

Since the survey, officers have been contacting organisations who expressed an interest in supporting the scheme, and the council is now appealing for communities to suggest sites where healing woods and spaces could be adopted or created. Suggestions can be made by contacting HealingWoods@suffolk.gov.uk.

Although the idea of healing woods and spaces has been in response to the pandemic, they will leave a long-lasting, positive legacy for communities and allow people to benefit from nature for many different reasons.

New research recently published by the University of Essex with The Green Light Trust demonstrated that access to woodlands and green space can significantly improve people's wellbeing.

One shining example of how access to the natural environment is helping people, is The Green Light Trust's project at Castan Wood in Martlesham. The woods are on land owned by Suffolk County Council, but leased to the Trust as a safe and secure setting where educational courses and wellbeing support can take place, often working with vulnerable people. Over 200 adults and around 80 children benefit each year through organised programmes at the site.

Suffolk County Council secures £3.1M for building decarbonisation initiative.

Suffolk County Council (SCC), working in conjunction with property specialists Concertus, has been successful in gaining over £3M of funding from The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to promote capital energy efficiency and heat decarbonisation projects within buildings used to provide frontline public services.

Working with Concertus, the council has been preparing a range of packages to support the decarbonising of various buildings in the Council's estate including applications for the council's headquarters at Endeavour House in Ipswich, four rural fire stations, Beacon House, Waterloo Centre and Leiston Children's Centre.

The council's Children and Young People service also reviewed their portfolio of school buildings along with Concertus. This review resulted in the submission of grant applications for nine schools across the county, all of which were successful.

This grant scheme aligns with BEIS' new mission and priorities: fighting coronavirus, backing business, unleashing innovation, and tackling climate change. Through this scheme, it is supporting the council's own commitment to be net zero by 2030 along with the Government's own net zero goals and encouraging further green investment within the UK.

Packages of work vary from building to building, but many include the fitting of solar panels and battery storage, as well as improvements to wall or roof insulation and installation of Air Source Heat Pumps to move away from the use of fossil fuels for source of heating. The council hopes to have the work completed at all the sites before the 30 September 2021.

February 2021

Suffolk County Council increases budget to support most vulnerable residents and county's recovery from Covid-19

On February 11, Suffolk County Council agreed its budget for 2021/22.

Following approval of its annual budget, Suffolk County Council is increasing its planned spending once again in 2021/22 to £597.9million, some £41million (7.4%) more than 2020/21. As part of this, the council will be spending £15.3million to address its ongoing Covid-19 costs, arising from the continuing local response to the pandemic. There are no proposed reductions in council services or personnel in 2021/22.

This year's budget is based on a 12-month financial settlement from government, rather than the 3 or 4 year agreement which is usually offered.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic over the last 11 months or so, the Government has continued to support local authorities as they adapt to serve communities, redeploy staff into alternative specialist roles and see income streams such as business rates and council tax reduce significantly. Suffolk County Council has received around £82.2 million in financial support during 2020 to meet Covid-19 related costs and whilst the challenges of continuing to respond, and in time recover, from Covid-19 remain, significant financial pressures will continue.

The council's income from council tax is going to be £7.9 million less than expected in 2021/22 and this shortfall will be met by using council reserves. Reserves can only be

spent once and do not represent a viable long term financial solution. This effective use of reserves is made possible because Suffolk County Council has maintained a consistent approach to managing its finances effectively for a number of years, holding a proportionate level of reserves for this exact situation.

In 2021/22, general Council Tax will rise by 1.99 per cent, which represents an increase of £26.68 for a Band D property, from £1,224.70 in 2020, to £1,251.38. There is also a two per cent rise in the Social Care Precept for the forthcoming year as the council recognises the ongoing challenges with meeting the rising costs and rising demand for adult care services. This means a Band D property will see an overall rise of £53.55 this year for Suffolk County Council's element of their Council Tax bill, from £1,343.61 in 2020-21 to £1,397.16 in 2021-22.

It is fair to say that the pandemic this year has also significantly impacted the expected progress of the council's recognised transformation programmes, as it has been absolutely necessary to focus on community resilience. This has included redeploying staff into bespoke roles such as procuring personal protective equipment (PPE) to support Suffolk's care sector and adapting working practices for frontline staff to maintain effective social distancing measures. As a result, the council is expecting a shortfall of around £7.8 million in projected savings for 2021. Whilst this means that further work is needed to identify potential future programmes of work, many of the new ways of working adopted by the council during 2020 because of the pandemic may actually offer potential alternative transformation savings as the organisation continues to adapt and tailor the way it works to deliver services for Suffolk's communities.

As part of the meeting, the council's Business Plan for 2021/22 was approved which draws attention to the ambitions for the authority over the next 12 months and its commitment to four key priorities:

- Living with Covid-19 and Suffolk's recovery
- Inclusive Growth
- Health, Care and Wellbeing

- Efficient and Effective Public Services

Throughout the business plan the Council presents its environmental thread demonstrating the range of projects and commitments in place as part of addressing the climate emergency that was declared in 2019. This includes details of the Council setting its Carbon Budget and the related work involved in achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030.

Suffolk County Council's cabinet confirms its support for Freeport East

On February 23, the cabinet of the county council confirmed its support for the creation of a new Freeport (Freeport East).

The Freeport would cover both the ports of Felixstowe and Harwich as part of the Government's aim to create a number of Freeports across the country to drive job creation, investment and international trade post Brexit.

A Freeport includes secure customs zones and tax sites where business can be carried out inside a country's land border, but where different tax and customs rules apply. These rules mean Freeports can potentially reduce administrative burdens and tariff controls, provide relief from duties, import taxes, and ease tax and planning regulations.

Freeport East has several unique aspects which make its bid for Freeport status particularly strong. This includes global and regional connectivity, with 36% of all the UK's container traffic passing through the Port of Felixstowe, unrivalled international connections, particularly with Asia, strong connectivity to the Midlands and the North, thereby supporting the government's "levelling up agenda" in these areas. The bid also stands out as supporting other national objectives such as the development of new technology and the push for clean energy. The Port of Felixstowe has recently won funding to trial a pilot 5G network and has strong research and development links with Cambridge and Essex Universities. There are also strong links with the energy sector and the emerging hydrogen economy.

true considering that many of the businesses based here are directly responsible for jobs and investment in the North of England, not to mention the reliance on the ports of Felixstowe and Harwich to export goods made in the North to the rest of the world.

16 new COVID-19 rapid testing centres to open in Suffolk

On the 19 February it was announced that a further 16 rapid testing centres for COVID-19 were to open in Suffolk, bringing the total number of centres to 28.

The 28 centres use 'lateral flow' testing to identify people who may have coronavirus but who do not have symptoms. The tests are for people who do not have symptoms of coronavirus and cannot work from home.

It's because one in three people with coronavirus do not have symptoms so regular testing is vital in breaking the chain of infection and keeping Suffolk safe.

All 28 centres are listed on Suffolk County Council's website, including their addresses and opening times. The testing sites are operated on behalf of Suffolk County Council (SCC). Tests should be booked online or by phone in advance.

Employers are being urged to encourage their staff to book regular testing.

There are already 12 facilities open, including at the University of Suffolk in Ipswich, the STEM Centre in Western Way at West Suffolk College, Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill Arts Centre, St Etheldreda's parish centre in Newmarket, and Kirkley & Pakefield FC in Lowestoft.

Suffolk County Council pushes ahead to new levels of digital connectivity as it launches sensor "gateway" roll-out.

Suffolk County Council launched a new initiative on Friday 19th February, deploying 'gateways' to build a network that covers all of Suffolk.

This will enable individuals or organisations to measure things like temperature, sound and movement via sensors linked to the Long Range Wide Area Network (LoRaWAN).

The network is being built in partnership with Norfolk County Council and funded by the New Anglia LEP. Once finished, the network will be made up of almost 100 'gateways' or data receivers and transmitters fitted to public sector buildings across the county. This will make Suffolk's rollout part of the largest free to use LoRaWAN deployment in the UK. Norfolk County Council launched its part of the network last September.

Businesses and individuals can buy their own sensors, adapt them to measure different things like visitor numbers, weather data and temperature, and tap into the gateways for free.

Highways doubles drainage budget following £27.2m announcement

On February 17 it was announced that Suffolk Highways allocated an extra £2m to support the fight against flooding.

Drainage and flooding, Rights of Way bridges and resurfacing of roads in Suffolk have been allocated extra funds for the 2021/22 financial year following Department for Transport's funding announcement.

Keen to progress more drainage schemes across Suffolk to support the fight against flooding, Suffolk Highways has allocated an extra £2m – double its current budget allocation – in order to help tackle the worsening flood problems being experienced across the county.

Suffolk Highways also looks set to bolster its resource to support in the repairing or replacement of seven Rights of Way bridges across the county with an additional £800k, whilst committing a further £3.4m to the county's surface dressing programme.

Although the budget is less than the 2020/21 allocation, Suffolk Highways prudently prepared for a decrease and allocated a tentative £21m for the 2021/22 financial year.

Peter Aldous, MP for Waveney, said:

"It's an incredibly exciting time for the East Anglian coast, with these much-needed schemes now underway. The Government has committed to levelling up across the country and with these two major projects, we are now starting to see this happen in our region. The Gull Wing will create local jobs and apprenticeship opportunities in Lowestoft and the Waveney area. Local people regularly emphasise the importance of the Gull Wing. It is great news that I shall now be able to tell them that the talking is now over, and the work has begun."

The Rt. Hon. Brandon Lewis CBE, MP for Great Yarmouth, said:

"These are both fantastic projects that will be truly transformational for the whole region. The Third River Crossing will significantly improve traffic flows, which will help residents and visitors to get around as well as bring meaningful benefits to local businesses, especially those in the energy sector."

Although similar in many respects, the Third River Crossing and Gull Wing are unique projects and will move at different rates throughout their respective construction periods. Both projects aim to open to the public in 2023.

January 2021

Suffolk 2020 fund project embraces love of the great outdoors – Discovering Suffolk

The Discovering Suffolk project was launched in January 2021.

The aim of the project is to raise further awareness of the range of great walking routes, areas of interest and the variety of landscapes that form Suffolk's beautiful countryside through public rights of way and points of access.

Given the experiences many people have faced over the last year living through the pandemic, it was recognised that exercise and wellbeing is a fundamental element in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, Suffolk's countryside offers a freely accessible means for many of us to experience nature and stay healthy.

The key element of the Discovering Suffolk project is the development of a smartphone app alongside a range of supporting QR codes fixed to rights of way signposts located along different routes to promote walking, cycling and exploring in Suffolk's countryside.

Discovering Suffolk builds on our changing behaviours when visiting the countryside, as people become ever more interested in local exploration and taking short walks and cycling exercises during the pandemic. The project will continue to promote the Discover Suffolk website as new content, information and advice continues to be added to the current offer, promoting walking routes and cycle rides through local communities. The project seeks to actively engage new audiences who are not aware of the options available on their doorstep or have perhaps only begun to explore the local countryside beyond their neighbourhood.

Work will shortly start on developing the Discovering Suffolk App and setting the sites for the QR code points around the county. After development, the new, free App will provide access to the full range of Discover Suffolk outdoor guides with over 100 walks across the county. The App and QR codes will include audio, video, imagery and fun activities to further enhance people's enjoyment, appreciation and understanding of Suffolk's natural and built environment.

Help us shape ambitious new Dementia therapy initiative using virtual reality experiences

On the 28 January it was announced that as part of its work in supporting local care home providers and the ongoing care of residents with Dementia, Suffolk County Council is launching an exciting new initiative to develop virtual reality content, helping people recall and access positive memories that they hold dearly. Such experiences help to complement the support offered on a day to day basis, providing a variety of positive stimulus to those using the equipment and valuable respite for their carers.

In recent years, a number of international academic studies have demonstrated proven successes in using such technology as a reminiscence and therapeutic aid to help people access memories and positive emotions, despite facing the effects of experiencing Dementia. Some care providers already use theme rooms in their settings and show archive films to residents with positive effect. Developing the use of virtual reality will support and complement the great experiences that local care providers use.

The intention is to produce a range of local, Suffolk-based films and interactive materials that people can enjoy and experience whilst sat in comfort in their usual care setting, with the support and input of their carers or family members. A set of equipment, each consisting of a headset and connecting equipment will be made available to support different areas of the county, supported by the Council's Adult Social Work Teams. A budget of £80,000 has been granted for this project through Suffolk County Council's Suffolk 2020 Fund, which is all about developing a range of community-focussed initiatives to support residents across the county. This money covers the cost of developing the films and materials, carrying out supporting academic research, the purchase of the equipment and the management and resourcing required to deliver the project in coming months.

As part of getting the ball rolling, the council would like to hear from people who have ideas about what kinds of films and experiences they may like to see produced.

The project team would also love to hear from care providers, service users and their family carers across Suffolk that may be potentially interested in helping to trial and take part in using the technology in months to come and take part in a service user group to drive the success of this project.

Those who are interested in taking part and/or sharing the ideas for possible content should contact the team in the first instance by emailing: suffolk2020vr@suffolk.gov.uk

Beccy Hopfensperger, Cabinet Member for Adult Care at Suffolk County Council, said:

"This initiative is part of the digital revolution that is happening across the care sector at the moment. Given the extremely challenging period everyone has experienced through Covid-19, it has been essential to find ways to innovate and adapt to the changing circumstances and make the most of technology and supportive aids where possible to continue supporting our most vulnerable residents alongside the amazing work of our committed care providers and their staff.

"The virtual reality experience may seem a strange choice to some, but there is a great deal of evidence to support the research demonstrating that residents with Dementia who use the technology are able to often access memories and experiences, triggered by particular places, colours and sounds. Where it has been used elsewhere, the technology has offered positive outcomes including improving wellbeing, behaviour, and even cognition in some cases. This type of therapy also supports inter-generational shared experiences between older and younger family members.

“We really want to work with our partners in the local care sector to think about what sorts of experiences may work best, such as films of trips to the seaside, archive film footage of historic moments or particular landscapes and Suffolk landmarks.”

DECEMBER 2020

Suffolk wins the Most Innovative Family Information Service award

On December 16th, Suffolk won the Most Innovative Family Information Service award at the National Association of Family Information Service Awards (NAFIS), 2020.

The award highlights the work undertaken to adapt Suffolk’s online Community Services Directory, **Suffolk InfoLink** (www.suffolk.gov.uk/infolink), to meet the public’s rapidly changing needs during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Community Information Team and teams across the children and young people’s directorate worked together with thousands of community partners to collate and provide information to support to the public. Many service providers in the voluntary and community sector were quick to adapt their offer and were supported to use Suffolk InfoLink to promote these opportunities to the public.

There are 7000 community organisation records provided on InfoLink allowing teams to communicate information quickly to thousands of sector partners, and the voluntary sector, and report progress to relevant government departments. On a week-by-week basis Suffolk InfoLink was updated to highlight which childcare providers were open for vulnerable children, and key workers such as NHS staff during the first National Lockdown which was an essential element of the Covid rapid response.

As well as helping key workers to find childcare, these developments also supported Suffolk’s Track and Trace, Home but Not Alone and the Suffolk Advice and Support Service and provided ‘easy to use’ access to essential information including financial help and food banks.

New cycle parking installed thanks to Government’s emergency Active Travel Fund – Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill

On the 8th December, new cycle parking was installed in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill as a result of the Government’s Emergency Active Travel Fund to help make cycling safer.

One of the positives to come out of the COVID-19 crisis is the noticeable increase in people cycling. Whether that is for commuting to work to avoid overcrowding the transport network, for leisure or as part of people’s daily exercise.

This has resulted in reduced congestion and improvements in air quality as well as supporting people's health and wellbeing.

In Haverhill, the parking racks have been installed on the High Street and outside the Bus Station.

In Bury St Edmunds two cycle parking racks have been installed on St Andrew Street South.

The locations for the cycle parking were selected in partnership with West Suffolk Council and supports the vision for their town centre masterplans.

A third cycle parking rack in Bury St Edmunds has been installed outside the parade of shops on Westgate Street.

Suffolk County Council's efforts and commitment to active travel have been praised by the DfT, which is why the county council has been awarded a further £1.685 million in tranche two from the Emergency Active Travel Fund.

To keep up to date with how Suffolk County Council is making it safer and easier for residents to choose active and sustainable travel modes – visit www.suffolk.gov.uk/adviceontravel

November 2020

Suffolk County Council delivers its largest digital care support project in record time

On November 12 it was announced that Suffolk County Council successfully delivered the largest digital care project in its history, from procurement to delivery in just 16 weeks.

Working alongside care technology specialists, Alcove and Rethink Partners, the council delivered over 750 Carephone devices to elderly and vulnerable people, both in and outside of formal care settings, to help them, their families and care providers stay in touch during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Carephone service is provided through the Alcove Video Carephone, a simple communication device that allows people with little or no technological ability to have two-way video contact with care workers, family members and other approved service providers. The project also worked to deliver comprehensive training to both the user and their care providers on how to get the most use from this new technology.

This technology is helping to keep families connected, easing the pain of separation that all families have felt at some point since the pandemic started. It also provides essential welfare reassurance for the family and is helping to reduce incidents of poor mental health on both sides of the call. This project has also indicated that this technology can have a positive measurable impact on the devastating effects of loneliness in older and vulnerable people.

It has also helped to maintain and enhance the communication chain between care giver and care receiver. The benefits of this project continue to be felt and have provided us with clear insight about how we can use this technology to improve care outcomes, especially over the oncoming winter.

Speaking about the success of the project and the potential for the future, Councillor Rebecca Hopfensperger, Cabinet Member for Adult Care said:

"The challenges of this global pandemic have been felt hardest by our vulnerable and elderly communities. Whilst those that need face-to-face care have of course continued to receive that level of care, this kind of digital enablement project is absolutely vital for the future of care delivery across the UK. We must not underestimate the positive benefits of just being able to speak to family members, care givers and support networks when needed.

Maintaining real connections with others is so vital for the mental and emotional wellbeing of residents and their families. I hope we will continue to see initiatives like this, and I am pleased the Carephone project is already having a positive impact this winter, especially now with the new national restrictions in place.

I want to thank all those people who have been involved in this success story for Suffolk. Especially our tirelessly committed social care staff, care providers, Alcove and Rethink Partners, and voluntary health partners."

October 2020

Adopt East launches

14 October marked the launch of Adopt East, a regional adoption agency which has been established to recruit adopters across the East of England.

Adopt East will work across local authorities in Southend, Thurrock, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Hertfordshire, Bedford and Luton to find families for children who are waiting to find their forever home. Adoptionplus, Barnardo's, and Adoption UK are also part of the partnership.

The Adopt East alliance will deliver the highest quality adoption service to children and families throughout the region by bringing together the expertise and skills of all its partners.

The scale of the organisation means that adopters will have access to a larger number of children waiting for adoption. This will help partners to match children with the right family for them, at the earliest opportunity.

Adopt East is committed to providing good quality adoption support services to support all families with their adoption journey.

Council announces £228,000 for tree-planting, protecting hedgerows and verges across Suffolk

In October, it was announced Suffolk's natural environment will receive investment for tree-planting, restoring hedgerows, and improving roadside verges for wildlife.

£228,000 from the Suffolk 2020 Fund will enable Suffolk County Council to enhance its work to protect and encourage biodiversity in the county. The authority will do this through a number of new schemes, as well as building on existing work.

Working with The Woodland Trust, Suffolk Tree Wardens, landowners, and county farm tenants, the funding will support the planting of around 100,000 trees, including replanting hedgerows in suitable locations across Suffolk over the next 18 months. It will also help establish around 10 community tree nurseries, which will support more planting in years to come. Local volunteers will be supported to collect seeds, set up nursery beds and grow trees in their communities.

The funding will also be used to trial better ways to manage roadside verges for wildlife. This includes exploring the use of new technology and cutting techniques, as well as developing new partnerships with parishes and landowners. The funding will help expand the existing Roadside Nature Reserve network managed by the council with the help of volunteers, seeing a 25% increase in the overall length of verges managed for wildlife.

September 2020

The Hold welcomes first visitors and opens inaugural exhibition

Monday 28 September saw the public able to access The Hold, Suffolk's flagship new heritage facility on Ipswich Waterfront.

This versatile new building will be the permanent home of the Suffolk Archives Ipswich branch and is shared with the University of Suffolk, who have dedicated teaching spaces within the building.

The creation of The Hold, and its associated countywide programme of events and activities, has been made possible thanks to a grant of £10.3m from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, and further funding support from other national organisations and local Suffolk heritage groups.

The public are currently able to access 'front of house' areas, including archive inspired displays, the café, shop, and toilets, including a new Changing Places facility.

First year History students were some of the first to try out the new facilities, with lectures and seminars beginning in the new facilities. The main area, known as 'The Street', as well as the café and shop, enjoyed a steady trickle of curious visitors and passers-by.

On 2 October, the long-awaited Exhibition Gallery also opened to visitors. The inaugural exhibition, *Global Events: Suffolk Stories*, examines how Suffolk has responded as a community to key global events over the past 100 years.

It focuses on the arrival of American service people during the 'Friendly Invasion' of World War Two, as well as the rising tensions and public messaging of the Cold War period, and the collective community response to the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020.

Through original archival documents, photos, music, and film, visitors will be able to explore the similarities and differences between these three global events and understand how Suffolk has changed as a result.

Council announces £300,000 for electric vehicle charging points in rural Suffolk

On September 23, it was announced that 100 fast charging points for electric vehicles will be installed in rural parts of the county by Suffolk County Council.

The council will be reaching out to interested parish and town councils and non-profit organisations to put in fast chargers where there are currently none. The funding will cover the installation and set-up costs, meaning very little expense for the hosts and possibly creating a source of income for them.

This project is the first to benefit from the council's Suffolk 2020 Fund, which was announced earlier this year. This is a £3m fund for the council's own projects to bid into. Projects must help address the council's climate emergency declaration and must improve Suffolk for all residents in years to come.

The £300,000 award will link into the council's existing Plug In Suffolk project, which was launched in February 2019. It is the UK's first 'fully open' public fast charging network for electric vehicles, meaning drivers simply pay by contactless payment with no need to register their details.

The fast-charging points supplied by Plug In Suffolk do not require any registration, membership or apps - drivers simply park, plug in and charge using contactless payment.

There have already been expressions of interest for charging points from around 20 suitable sites. In the coming weeks, officers from Suffolk County Council will be contacting town and parish councils to investigate more possible locations.

August 2020

Suffolk celebrates 1,000 miles of newly surfaced roads

On the 5 August, it was announced that Suffolk Highways completed its 1,000th resurfaced mile, following the Council's commitment to relay new road surfaces on a quarter of Suffolk's road network.

In 2017, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet committed to resurfacing 1,000 miles of road across Suffolk over a four-year period; in a bid to improve the quality of roads, reduce the number of potholes and to help stop potholes from forming in the first place.

The commitment also makes sound financial sense, as preventing the deterioration of road surfaces by machine surfacing or surface dressing helps reduce the need to spend more money on reactive maintenance repairing potholes now, and in future years.

The 1,000th mile was laid at Horham Road in Eye.

New resources will help young people understand the link between movement and mental health

New resources have been published to help young people in Suffolk understand how movement and physical activity can improve their emotional wellbeing.

The resources, which include a handy, pocket-sized information card, have been developed for young people with input and feedback from young people.

Made possible by Suffolk Mind and the Suffolk Most Active County Partnership, with assistance from Suffolk County Council's Children and Young People's engagement hub, the

resources provide essential information about seven ways young people can improve their mental health through movement.

They also include three simple and effective ideas that young people can try straight away to help them take control of their mind and mood through movement, as well as a range of key local contacts for further support.

July 2020

Council proposes unprecedented environmental plans in response to climate emergency

In response to its declaration of a climate emergency, Suffolk County Council aims to lead the way with an unparalleled range of activities and policy changes to support its ambition of being a 'net zero' authority by 2030.

At its meeting on 14 July 2020, the council's Cabinet reviewed and agreed an extensive programme of recommendations to achieve this ambition.

The plans include dozens of changes and new ways of working, from making its pool car fleet all-electric, to making it mandatory for all future committee decisions to consider the net zero ambition.

Being 'net zero' means that the council will remove its carbon emissions where it can; if it is unable to do so, it will compensate for those emissions. The council will adopt a more detailed method to measure its carbon emissions output, so that it can more accurately track its progress on an annual basis.

In March 2019, Suffolk County Council was the first authority in the county to declare a climate emergency.

One of the council's priorities after this declaration was to set up a policy development panel (PDP). The panel met regularly, discussing the changes and challenges the council faces in reducing its carbon emissions. The panel included councillors from outside the Conservative group and invited experts to share their experiences and insights. It is this panel that has compiled the recommendations.

Amongst the recommendations, Suffolk County Council will continue its work with all other local authorities and agencies, under the umbrella of the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership, which was formed in 2007. With all local authorities having now declared a climate emergency, they will use their combined powers, duties, influence and leadership,

continuing their work together to achieve the net zero ambition for emissions from all of Suffolk.

Vans, trailers and trade waste now accepted at nine of Suffolk's recycling centres

As of 1 July 2020, people with vans, trailers and trade waste can now book to visit nine of Suffolk's 11 recycling centres.

All visitors will need to pre-book an appointment online, where they will be asked what type of vehicle they will use and whether they are bringing household or business waste. To prevent queuing on neighbouring roads, people without a booking will not be able to enter the site. Social distancing measures also operate on site.

Currently, appointments for vans, trailers and trade waste are unavailable at Haverhill and Leiston Recycling Centres. These are smaller sites and have fewer appointments available. There are a number of restrictions in place to help support social distancing at sites and to make sure waste is dealt with efficiently. These include:

- Vans with trailers will not be allowed on any site.
- Only one visit per household or vehicle within seven days. This allows more visitors on site, while maintaining social distancing and protecting the health and safety of site staff and users.
- Trailers must be no more than 750kg max gross weight, single axle and unbraked. No other trailer size or type is permitted.
- All waste should be pre-sorted to make your visit as quick and simple as possible and to maximise recycling.

June 2020

First business benefits from council's free solar panel scheme

In June, a Lowestoft-based charity was the first organisation to benefit from free solar panels, as part of Suffolk County Council's Renewable Energy Fund.

Nirvana Health and Fitness, on Pinbush Road in Lowestoft, is now hosting a 70kWp solar panel installation and is benefitting from zero-carbon electricity.

The council's £400,000 Renewable Energy Fund is open to eligible businesses looking to reduce their energy costs and carbon footprint through solar power. Successful applicants will have solar panels supplied and installed for free.

Once the panels are installed, the business is sold electricity at a better rate than their existing tariff, so they will see immediate savings.

The Fund itself benefits from income generated by the sale of the solar-generated electricity. This means money goes back into the pot, allowing more solar panel applications to be considered by the Fund and installed across Suffolk.

Better Broadband for Suffolk reaches 100,000th customer as third phase contract is agreed

By June 3, more than 100,000 households across Suffolk were using faster broadband, thanks to the council-led Better Broadband for Suffolk programme.

The partnership - between Suffolk County Council, Openreach, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) and local councils – has made faster broadband available to around 150,000 premises so far, since being launched in 2010.

It means the current total superfast broadband coverage in Suffolk stands at more than 96 per cent, with plans currently in place to reach 98 per cent coverage before the end of the year.

The team has plans to go even further, after today announcing an additional phase of work, to provide connectivity to approximately 5,000 more premises, including over 550 businesses, in some of the most rural parts of Suffolk.

The work will be carried out by Openreach – operator of the UK's largest phone and broadband network, used by the likes of BT, Sky, Plusnet and TalkTalk – and is set to start as soon as deployment under the current contract ends. Work will continue until September 2022.

Faster broadband provides many benefits including staying in contact with friends and family through video conferencing services, easier web browsing and online shopping, the ability to stream high-definition video and work from home. Covid-19 has led to many of these benefits becoming even more crucial during times of social distancing and will have a large part to play during the recovery phase.

May 2020

Discover Suffolk's history with new Suffolk Heritage Explorer website

On 20 May, Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service announced the launch of its new Suffolk Heritage Explorer website at heritage.suffolk.gov.uk. This offers users a completely free resource of interesting, up-to-date information on the archaeology and history of Suffolk.

The new website includes an upgraded searchable interactive map and a database of known archaeological sites, which can be used to discover more about Suffolk's history from the comfort of your home.

Alongside free downloadable publications and resources, there is updated guidance and best practice advice on finds recording and access to the county's archaeological archives.

The website features key archaeological sites and projects, such as Suffolk's World War II heritage. You can find out more about the internationally significant Anglo-Saxon site at Rendlesham, its 12 years of ongoing archaeological research and results, with podcasts and archaeological reports.

A dedicated section on Ipswich also summarises the town's development through the ages, featuring the recently completed 'Urban Archaeological Database' with useful archive and planning guidance. There are also lots of downloadable activities for families and children.

April 2020

Government opens COVID-19 testing site on outskirts of Ipswich

On 17 April, as part of its national COVID-19 testing programme, the Government opened a 'Drive Thru' testing facility on the outskirts of Ipswich.

Based on the existing Park and Ride site at Copdock Mill, off the A12 and A14 Junction, it was one of up to 50 sites created around the country. This is a Government-led programme, supported by the Suffolk Resilience Forum and partners in Essex.

More than 98% of pupils receive a preferred primary school on National Offer Day

On 16 April, it was reported that over 98.57% of Suffolk children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of the schools preferred by their parents.

Suffolk County Council received 7,602 applications from parents indicating which primary school they would prefer their child to join in September 2020.

Some 7,116 children received offers for their first preference school and 7,493 children received an offer for one of their three preferred schools.

March 2020

Access for all at Suffolk rail stations

Following successful bids for funding, Needham Market and Bury St Edmunds rail stations will now receive improved access to platforms for its passengers.

A partnership of stakeholders including Greater Anglia Trains, Suffolk County Council, Mid Suffolk District Council and the Needham Market Group has secured Access for All funding – a government funding programme for schemes to improve station access.

For Needham Market, the station will receive an upgrade to improve access to the Ipswich-bound platform 2.

At the Bury St Edmunds station, the funding will provide a new accessible entrance on the north side of the station, linking the new car park with the station concourse.

Plans for improvements to the Bury station have received support from Greater Anglia Trains, Suffolk County Council, West Suffolk Council, Bury St Edmunds Town Trust and other local organisations.

Following the funding announcement, all parties involved are now committed to making the initiatives happen as soon as possible.