

September 2024 Town and Parish Newsletter

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Suffolk adults urged to take up potential life-saving opportunity

People across Suffolk aged between 40 and 74, who don't have a pre-existing health condition, are being encouraged to take-up a potentially life-saving opportunity.

The call to action comes after Suffolk GP Federation were awarded a contract to deliver over 23,000 NHS Health Checks in the county annually.

Suffolk County Council have also become one of 45 local authorities in England to receive funding from the government as part of the national Workplace Cardiovascular Disease Health Check Pilot. Working with Suffolk GP Federation 2,000 additional NHS Health Checks will be delivered in workplaces in the county by March 2025.

NHS Health Checks play a really important role in preventing disease and helping people live healthier lives for longer. They can be lifesaving as they help spot increased risk of stroke, kidney disease, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and dementia early, before the conditions develop. They also give people an opportunity to talk to a health care professional about how to reduce their risk.

Cllr Steve Wiles, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Public Protection at Suffolk County Council, said:

"NHS Health Checks are an important tool in spotting health conditions early and helping people become more aware of what they can do to improve their health and wellbeing in the future. Prevention is always better than cure and I encourage residents who are invited for a free health check to make an appointment as soon as possible."

"I am also delighted we received additional funding to provide workplace checks. This will help us to gather evidence on the feasibility and impact of delivering health checks in targeted workplaces and, in doing so, help more people live well for longer."

For more information about the Suffolk NHS Health Check Service visit [the Suffolk GP Federation website](#).

OPINION: Lowestoft's Gull Wing bridge is a new landmark for all of Suffolk

Column by Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council.

Thousands of Lowestoft residents made history on Saturday as they walked, wheeled and drove for the first time across the town's new, world-leading and unique Gull Wing bridge.

Built on behalf of Suffolk County Council by leading civil engineering contractor Farrans, the Gull Wing heralds a new era for Lowestoft and promises to bring both immediate and long-term benefits to the town, its businesses and residents.

A new bridge such as this doesn't just happen overnight, and whilst its design may be modern, and its construction techniques and materials state of the art, this bridge's history and political genesis dates back decades, and I want to pay tribute and thank all those who, over the years, have played their part in making the Gull Wing possible.

Last week, I was fortunate enough to speak to Clifford Smith, the first Chief Executive of Suffolk County Council, whose previous role was County Planner. Clifford described to me the efforts he went through 60 years ago to try and secure a third crossing in Lowestoft. Thank you, Clifford, for your vision back in 1964, which undoubtedly laid the foundations for the Gull Wing bridge.

Of course, it would be decades later before this project received the nod of approval from the government. I must thank Peter Aldous who, in his former role as Member of Parliament for Lowestoft, showed tenacity and Herculean determination that, come what may, a third crossing in Lowestoft must happen. I remember well when Peter invited the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, to Lowestoft in April 2015, and when the Prime Minister committed the government to helping to fund a bridge in the town. Many doubted it would happen – well, those who doubted Peter's determination and Lord Cameron's promise can now see it clearly. Thank you, Peter for staying true to your word, and thank you, Lord Cameron, for giving it your enthusiastic backing.

I also want to thank my predecessors at Suffolk County Council, Mark Bee and Colin Noble, and all the various cabinet members who grasped the opportunity offered by the government and enthusiastically gave this project their backing.

Then, there was the decision on what route the new bridge should take. Bob Blizzard is no longer with us, but I want to pay tribute to him today because the very route it takes owes much to his lobbying and campaigning.

I want to thank Farrans for their work as our construction partner in this project. Even with the challenges of a global pandemic and foreign wars disrupting supply and energy chains, you, and your army of excellent sub-contractors, have delivered this bridge for the people of Lowestoft.

I want to thank Bam Nuttall and Arup for producing such a stunning, iconic design. This is not just a bridge. This is a new landmark for Suffolk, of which we are all proud.

I want to thank Oilgear, Eadon, Ardent, Victor Buyck, Javlin, Quinn, TJ Edwards Steel and Associate British Ports. I want to say a special thank you to local Lowestoft contractors LEC Marine and Sharp Contract and Surveying, as well as DPL from Ipswich. I know I will have missed some businesses in the limited space I have, but I hope you are all proud of this new bridge for Lowestoft, which will serve the town for decades to come.

Finally, I want to thank Simon Bretherton, Suffolk County Council's Gull Wing Project Director, and his team for managing this bridge into reality. Building something of this scale - the largest of its kind in the world - was never going to be easy, but you did it brilliantly. Thank you all.

It was wonderful to see so many local people turn out on Saturday to be part of a momentous occasion for Lowestoft. I hope that many will return for the civic opening ceremony on Tuesday 19th November.

The people of Lowestoft have waited decades for a third river crossing. I am proud that the Gull Wing is now open and I look forward to seeing the positive impact it will have on our community. The Gull Wing truly is a promise made, and a promise delivered.

Uncertainty looms for 177,000 Suffolk residents currently eligible for winter fuel payments

As many as 177,000 Suffolk residents are currently eligible for winter fuel payments and should be protected from Government plans to cut the allowance, Suffolk County Council has warned.

According to 2023 mid-year population estimates from the ONS, around 177,000 people over the age of 66 in Suffolk are eligible for these crucial payments, leaving them potentially vulnerable if they are withdrawn.

In response, Suffolk County Council's leader, Councillor Matthew Hicks, has written to all of the county's MPs - urging them to vote against the proposed changes. The council is particularly concerned that rural areas, like much of Suffolk, will be disproportionately affected due to reliance on expensive oil heating and the added burden of rural deprivation.

Rural homes are statistically less energy efficient compared to urban homes, meaning they require more energy to maintain a healthy temperature. Furthermore, many rural homes are not connected to mains gas, forcing households to rely on more costly heating sources like wood, canister gas, or oil. The price of heating oil has now risen to 66p per litre, a 12p increase since 2020.

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

"The removal of winter fuel payments will have a devastating impact on many of our residents, particularly those living in rural areas. With homes in these locations often being less energy efficient and lacking access to mains gas, they rely on expensive alternatives like oil and wood. This, combined with the rising cost of heating oil, is putting increased financial pressure on households.

"Winter fuel payments provide a lifeline for many, and we urge Suffolk MPs to vote against any changes that would leave our most vulnerable without this crucial support."

Energy projects and the wellbeing of communities

Suffolk County Council has produced guidance to help protect the wellbeing of local communities impacted by large Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).

The new document - [Community Engagement and Wellbeing Supplementary Guidance](#) - complements the council's Energy and Climate Adaptive Infrastructure Policy, and is aimed at project promoters, parish councils and local communities.

Research by Suffolk Mind, and the experiences of the county council, show that the wellbeing of local residents and communities suffers when NSIPs are proposed in a local area, especially when multiple projects are on the table.

Feelings of fear, mistrust, anger, and frustration are all reported, along with impacted sleep, and inability to plan for the future, due to the uncertainty created by the proposed development.

The new guidance stresses the importance and value for project promoters of an NSIP to collaborate with local communities from the early proposal stages, through to life after construction, to protect the wellbeing of those local communities.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

"So often we see project promoters doing the bare statutory minimum to engage with local communities, through a few local events and consultations.

"This is never enough, and in fact doesn't do the promoter any favours in the long run. I believe they could often do a far better job working with local residents, parish councils and community leaders, throughout the process but particularly following approval if a project is given the go ahead by government.

"An NSIP can cause stress, insecurity and anxiety amongst communities, particular for local community leaders who bear a burden of responsibility, often with little experience of the technicalities and enormity of such complex planning applications.

"A promoter simply informing communities is one thing, but there is a real opportunity to empower them – but promoters need to show a commitment to healthy, continuous engagement, and help local communities to understand their project, feel listened to and feel included in its progress.

"This new guidance won't stop us standing up to project promoters, fighting for a fair deal for Suffolk and, where necessary, objecting to a scheme. However, if promoters listen to our recommendations it should markedly improve the experience, and wellbeing, of local communities whether a scheme is approved or refused."

The cumulative effect of NSIPs has resulted in considerable impacts on the wellbeing of individuals, the overall wellbeing of the community, and has also led to feelings of lost identity.

One member of the public described how the association with the energy projects has "created a perception that the nature of our village and parish... has been completely altered, and is now one to be defined by the presence of large industrial complexes, rather than what it actually is, a rural community... it remains a small rural village, with living breathing people, who strive to protect its unique quality."

The document provides a framework for promoters to follow, to help them understand their project's impact on the wellbeing of local communities, and what they can actively do to mitigate it.

Window now open to apply for primary and secondary school places

Parents and carers can now apply for a place in the normal year of entry at a primary (including infant and junior) school and secondary school for September 2025.

The deadline for applications to secure a place at a secondary school is Thursday 31 October 2024 and for primary school places, including infant and junior schools, the deadline is Wednesday 15 January 2025.

All applications received by the relevant closing date are processed at the same time using the schools' oversubscription criteria to prioritise applications when necessary. Late applications are processed after all of those received on time.

Last year, Suffolk County Council received just under 15,000 on time applications for pupils wishing to start at a primary or infant school, or to transfer to a junior school, or into Year 7 at a secondary school from September 2024.

94.7% of applicants received offers for their first preference school and 98.5% of applicants received an offer for one of their top three preferred schools.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, said:

"Parents and carers need to carefully consider which schools to apply for on behalf of their child. To make sure they have the best chance of getting a place at one of their preferred schools, they need to make sure they complete and submit their application by the relevant closing date. We recommend that parents and carers apply for more than one school, and they can list up to three schools on their application." "I would strongly advise that parents and carers think about how their child will travel to school before they apply for a school place. It is important that parents and carers check which is their child's nearest suitable school on our Nearest School Checker because this might not be their catchment area school. This can be found at <http://nearestschool.suffolk.gov.uk/>."

Further information on SCC's School Travel Policy can be found at www.suffolkonboard.com/schooltravel.

Parents and carers should apply online at www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions as they will receive confirmation that their application has been received. If for any reason they are unable to apply online they should apply on a paper application (CAF1). Suffolk County Council is unable to acknowledge receipt of paper applications and therefore suggest that proof of posting is obtained.

If families are planning to move house or think their circumstances may change before next September, it is still important to make an application on time using the current address. It is recommended to apply for schools based on the current address in case the proposed move falls through. Advice and guidance about this process is available at www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions.

Families who apply online will be able to log on to the Online Service on the National Offer Day, which is Monday 3 March 2025 for secondary school places and Wednesday 16 April 2025 for primary school places, to see their offer of a school place, and they will receive an email to confirm this offer on the same day. Offer letters will be sent by second class post to applicants who made a paper application.

Information to help parents and carers make their application is available at www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions.

£500 million investment in Suffolk scrapped by Government

Suffolk's proposed in principle devolution deal, which would bring more than £500 million to the county over 30 years, has been scrapped by the Government.

The additional funding – which would come with new local decision-making powers over areas including housing, transport, adult education and regeneration – is no longer being offered to Suffolk. The deal would

mean local people who know and love Suffolk would be empowered to make more decisions about the county's future, rather than people in Whitehall.

Key aspects of the deal included:

- Control of a new investment fund worth £480m over the next thirty years
- Local control of the Adult Education Budget each year (worth £9.4m in 2025/26)
- £5.8m one-off funding to prepare brownfield sites for development
- Multi-year transport funding plus an additional £500,000 over two years to finalise Suffolk's Local Transport Plan
- The leader of Suffolk County Council would be directly elected by the people of Suffolk – rather than by county councillors.

Most people who responded to an independent survey, run by Ipsos, were in favour of the proposed deal. 63% of people supported or strongly supported it while 7% disagreed. 21% of people were unsure. In a separate but linked poll run by Suffolk County Council, 49% of people who responded supported or strongly supported the deal, whilst 40% did not and 11% were unsure.

Suffolk County Councillors were expected to vote on the deal after the General Election in July.

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

"This feels like a real slap in the face for Suffolk from a Government that won't listen to what local people are saying. First, they waved through the Sunnica application, showing little regard for the communities affected. Then, they scrapped the winter fuel payments, which will adversely affect older people living in rural areas. Now, our proposed devolution deal – which has widespread public support – is in the bin.

"Governments of any colour should be pro devolution because councils know how best to serve local people. Local councillors have now been stripped of the opportunity to support or reject the proposed deal which is a sad day for democracy by any measure."

Council's actions bring hope to local communities despite pylon project approval

Suffolk County Council is confident that details announced in today's approval of National Grid's Bramford to Twinstead pylon project, will have significant implications on other Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) across the country.

The application was approved on 12 September 2024 by the Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Despite objecting to the Bramford to Twinstead pylon application, the county council's influence throughout the process has led to the Secretary of State acknowledging the importance of the role of local authorities - by requiring their approval of National Grid's detailed construction and environmental management plans as part of the process prior to work starting.

Following points made by the county council during the examination process, the Secretary of State has agreed that National Grid should not wield so much control over the delivery of the project, recognising instead that local authorities are integral to the proper and fair delivery of NSIPs.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

"Whilst not a perfect proposal, and one which the council did feel the need object to, I'm pleased with this council's influence in setting some precedents for future infrastructure projects.

"The recognition of the role of this council, and others like us, sends a strong message to National Grid and other project promoters, that they cannot just do as they wish.

"My hope is that other projects sit up and take note – protecting local communities is of paramount importance, something we continually fight for."

The county council had formally objected to the application, concluding that National Grid had failed to adequately safeguard Suffolk's environment and communities affected by the scheme. It felt that proposals did not go far enough to mitigate the impact of the scheme, and that supervision of construction would be inadequate.

There were disappointments in the approval decision, such as working hours to include weekends and bank holidays. However, certain locations will be exempt from these hours, which is encouraging for other communities where NSIPs are yet to be approved.

Cllr Rout continues:

"Although we would still prefer to see better mitigations with this project, I feel this is a step in the right direction and hopefully sees an end to project promoters thinking they can have a free-for-all approach and ignore local authorities.

"With such a barrage of projects from solar farms to pylons, substations to interconnectors, all wanting a piece of Suffolk, it is our duty to stand with our communities to protect our residents, businesses and our historic, beautiful and environmentally-rich county."

The project will see 18 km of overhead lines and around 11 km of underground cable through the Dedham Vale National Landscape and in the Stour Valley.

Public asked to comment on plans to expand Mildenhall Academy

Members of the public are being encouraged to have their say on plans to expand Mildenhall Academy.

A public consultation opens today (Monday 16th Sept) into plans to build seven new classrooms, offices and additional dining space at the school in Sheldrake Way, Mildenhall. The plans can be viewed online.

The extension, which is due to open in January 2026, will replace the modular units currently on the school site. Pupil numbers will not increase.

Cllr Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Education and SEND at Suffolk County Council, said:

"This extension will make a significant difference to pupils and staff at Mildenhall Academy.

"I'd encourage those in the community to view the plans and, if you'd like, submit your comments."

Suffolk County Council is working with Concertus Design & Property to deliver the plans.

To comment, visit www.suffolk.gov.uk/consultations. The consultation will close on September 30. You can also comment via email to schools@suffolk.gov.uk

Draft plans will also be displayed at the entrance to the Mildenhall Hub.

Second abnormal load rescheduled for Suffolk

On Sunday 6th of October, the second abnormal load which was previously postponed by the haulier, Allelys, will be transported from Ipswich Docks.

Allelys has been working with Suffolk Highways, National Highways, Suffolk Police, as well as J McCann and Swarco to reschedule the abnormal load movement, on behalf of Conrad Energy and National Grid.

A 164-tonne transformer, which is being transported on a vehicle measuring 71 metres in length, will depart from Ipswich Docks at approximately 6am on Sunday, starting its journey to the Synchronous Condenser Plant in Yaxley.

To support future abnormal loads, since 2021, Suffolk Highways has been replacing permanent street furniture such as safety railings, road signs and traffic signals with easily removable versions. This has since proven to limit the amount of work and disruption required during the lead up to abnormal load movements.

Teams will be leading and following the vehicle to prepare the route, temporarily removing and reinstating street furniture. This will enable the load to be transported safely whilst keeping disruption to a minimum.

A temporary road closure of the A140 will be necessary whilst the load moves to its destination. A temporary overbridge at Brockford will be installed to protect the roads and structure.

Once the load has safely passed the overbridge and the road is deemed safe for public use, the overbridge will be dismantled in readiness for when the A140 can be reopened. The closure could be in place for several hours from late morning. Whilst the A140 is closed, between A14 and A1120, access to smaller vehicles will be allowed to cross from East to West and vice versa. However, this will be subject to the position of the abnormal load at the time.

Other restrictions will also be in place, such as parking and weight limit restrictions, the suspension of any double yellow lines along the route and the closure of Derby Road, Tomline Road, and the St Matthews Street subway, in Ipswich. Old Norwich Road, Ipswich and Old Norwich Road, Whitton will also have parking restrictions as a contingency route in the unlikely event that the move needs to be spread over two weekends.

To allow the load to navigate safely around permanent street furniture on the day of the move, the load will be travelling on the opposite side of the carriageway at times. Traffic Management teams will be leading the load, whilst Suffolk Police will manage traffic. Mid-morning, traffic on the A14 eastbound will be temporary held whilst the load travels the wrong way from the Whitehouse Interchange (jct. no. 53) to the A140 Interchange (jct. no. 52).

The Suffolk Police enforced rolling roadblock on the A14 eastbound is anticipated to be in place between approximately 10am and 10.30am. The A140 is expected to be closed from approximately 11am until 6pm; however, these timings will be subject to change.

To limit the impact on the travelling public, there may be temporary stop points along the route to support with minimising congestion.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for Ipswich, operational highways and flooding, said:

"It is good news that Suffolk Highways has been able to facilitate the rescheduled abnormal load move. The team will continue to support future abnormal loads ensuring these are carried out safely and with minimal impact on Suffolk's residents."

Whilst the restrictions and road closures are in place, road users are encouraged to avoid the area where possible to ensure disruption is kept to a minimum.

Newmarket recycling centre future in discussion

Suffolk County Council continues to explore a solution to provide a recycling facility in Newmarket.

However, the challenge is now much more difficult following the cancellation of Suffolk's County Deal by the government last week.

The recycling centre on Depot Road has been closed since 2018 when current permit holders, Newmarket Open Door, ceased operations citing that it was no longer a financially viable venture.

Last week the government cancelled Suffolk's devolution deal, or 'County Deal', which included an additional £16 million per year for the next thirty years.

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

"Suffolk County Council has always had the ambition to find a solution for a recycling centre for Newmarket's residents. We have been working together with West Suffolk Council on this for some time. However, one of the main avenues open to us as a county council was the use of funds attached to Suffolk's County Deal. That opportunity has now been wrenched from us, and from Newmarket residents, by the government.

"This is a big setback, and whilst the county council will continue to try and explore options with Newmarket Open Door to retain the Environmental Permit, which is needed to operate a recycling centre, the government's decision last week has made those efforts very difficult indeed.

"What is even more disappointing is that Cllr Waterman personally led the efforts of District and Borough councils against the County Deal by orchestrating a letter to Government urging them to bin it, abandoning all the progress made, and throwing away the half-a-billion pounds worth of investment that the deal would have brought to the whole of Suffolk, including Newmarket.

“This is part of a growing theme of the new government letting Suffolk residents down. West Suffolk Council pulled out of our joint legal challenge to the Sunnica Solar Farm, while the government has cut Winter Fuel Payments to tens of thousands of Suffolk pensioners and now stopped £500m investment in our county.”

Discussions will continue for the county council to look at feasible options to provide a recycling service in Newmarket.

Plans unveiled for A12 Major Road Network improvements in East Suffolk

Suffolk County Council has unveiled its proposals for improvements to the A12 in East Suffolk, between the A14 Seven Hills junction and A1152 Woods Lane in Melton.

The A12 is a key route in East Suffolk, linking Ipswich and Lowestoft and provides an important connection for local communities and visitors, as well as access to the Energy Coast.

The scheme is designed to upgrade key junctions on the A12, between the A14 at Seven Hills and the A1152 at Woods Lane. These proposals would help to tackle congestion, provide space for future growth and improve conditions for all road users including pedestrians and cyclists.

The scheme introduces a new dual carriageway at Seckford Hall between the B1438 and B1079. It also enhances bus journeys and improves local walking and cycling connections, including a widened overbridge at Martlesham Heath.

Councillor Chris Chambers, Suffolk County Council’s cabinet member for transport strategy, planning and waste, said:

“I am delighted to see this important project progressing closer to delivery. The county council is firmly committed to delivering on these improvements, which look set to provide major benefits to all those travelling between our two largest towns, Ipswich and Lowestoft.

“Following public consultation back in 2021 and a commitment of government funding last year, we are now in a position to share our detailed designs and proposals with residents.

“These improvements will provide greater access to the east coast, an area with several Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) including Sizewell C, easing congestion and network disruption during its construction. I encourage residents to take a look at the plans, read up on the benefits and let us know their thoughts.”

The local community and users of the A12 are encouraged to take part and share their feedback until Tuesday 29 October 2024. The community is invited to attend any of the three in-person events to learn more about the scheme and speak to a member of the project team.

- **Thursday 26 September, 5:30pm – 8:30pm** Woodbridge Community Hall, Woodbridge
- **Saturday 28 September, 2:00pm – 5:00pm** Martlesham Community Hall, Martlesham
- **Tuesday 1 October, 4:00pm – 7:00pm** Shire Hall, Woodbridge

There will also be a virtual event on **Tuesday 8 October, 6:30pm – 7:30pm**. This event will be hosted on Microsoft Teams. You can register to attend this event, [here](#).

To find out more about the proposals and how to submit your feedback, visit: www.suffolk.gov.uk/A12MRN.

Up to £2.5 million in funding available for agrifood innovators

Suffolk organisations are invited to apply for a share of up to £2.5 million in grant funding for business-led agrifood projects in Eastern England. Two new competitions have been launched as part of Innovate UK's Eastern England Launchpad, a partnership between Innovate UK, Suffolk County Council, Greater Lincolnshire LEP, Norfolk County Council, and Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority. The Launchpad aims to boost innovation in the region's agri-tech and food technology sectors while strengthening its reputation as a top hub for food production and sustainability.

The competitions offer a share of up to £2.5 million in two strands:

- The first competition, 'MFA', is open to micro, small and medium sized businesses. Grants between £25,000 and £100,000 are available for projects lasting 6 to 12 months.
- The second competition is for collaborative research and development (CR&D) projects. Applications can be led by businesses of any size and consortia must include at least one small or medium enterprise. Grants between £150,000 and £300,000 are available for projects lasting 6 to 18 months.

The competitions open on Monday 23rd September and will close at 11am on 6th November 2024. For more information and to apply, visit <https://www.gov.uk/apply-funding-innovation>

Projects can focus on one or more of the following themes:

- enhancing the productivity of primary crops, livestock, aquaculture or ornamental crops
- biotechnologies related to agriculture, aquaculture, food processing and nutrition
- food that promotes safe, lower carbon or more sustainable healthy and nutritious diets
- resource efficient production and processing methods for low emission foods.

Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills, said:

"These competitions offer an exciting opportunity for local businesses and researchers to build on the region's strong reputation as a leader in fresh produce, meat, poultry, fish and seafood processing. With the largest food logistics sector in the UK, a thriving drinks and convenience food industry, and many niche and specialty food producers, Eastern England is the perfect place for this kind of innovation.

"If you think this funding could benefit your project, I encourage you to apply."

Suffolk County Council launches £500,000 Culture Project Fund to Boost cultural activity across the county

Suffolk County Council is pleased to announce the launch of its new £500,000 Culture Project Fund. This initiative is aimed at strengthening and supporting local arts and museum projects in our local communities across the county.

This fund's goal is to improve the cultural landscape in Suffolk, benefiting communities through diverse and impactful initiatives that align with the council's key priorities: health and wellbeing, economic development, environmental protection, and value for money.

The fund offers three tiers of grants:

Small grants up to £1,500

Medium grants up to £15,000

Large grants up to £50,000

This inclusive approach ensures that both grassroots ventures and larger, more established organisations have equal opportunities to access funding. Eligible applicants include Arts and Museum organisations, skilled freelancers, registered charities, community interest companies, non-profits, and social enterprises based in Suffolk.

The fund supports both capital and revenue projects, with a maximum of £25,000 available for capital expenditure.

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

"The launch of the Culture Project Fund marks a significant investment in the future of Suffolk's cultural sector. By supporting projects that focus on our key priorities, we aim to create happier, healthier, and stronger communities.

"This fund is about more than just arts and culture, it's about building resilience, fostering inclusion, and boosting the wellbeing of our residents. We're excited to see the positive impact these projects will have on our county."

The culture project fund will support projects that have been designed to reach, engage and inspire people and communities to take part in and enjoy arts and museums. The fund is particularly to support projects that reach some of our most vulnerable people and communities with an application process that is streamlined and accessible. This includes activities designed for those on low incomes, isolated individuals, and marginalised groups, the fund aims to support projects that enhance both mental and physical health, creating resilience and improving overall wellbeing through inclusive and accessible activities.

Furthermore, the fund aims to strengthen Suffolk's economy by supporting projects that enhance skills development, promote social enterprises, and attract visitors. By focusing on these areas, the Council seeks to foster a thriving cultural sector that contributes to the county's growth.

Key Dates:

Fund opens for applications: Monday 23 September 2024

Medium and Large grant applications deadline: Friday 29 November 2024

Medium and Large grants awarded by: Friday 14 February 2025

Small grant presentations: Monday 17 March, Monday 14 July, and Monday 15 September 2025.

Suffolk County Council has welcomed news that a £25 million investment will enable flood defence works at Benacre to be fully completed.

A timeline of images showing how the coast is eroding and the need for the scheme. (1985 image courtesy of Mike Page / 2018 image courtesy of Edward Vere Nicholl, Benacre Estates)

[The contribution is coming from Sizewell C](#), which will now mean that the Benacre and Kessingland flood risk management project can go ahead.

Overall project funding of £59 million is being committed to the project by DEFRA and a range of other organisations. The county council itself plans to commit £2 million to the scheme, an amount already earmarked from reserves, and will go before Cabinet for approval at its meeting on 8 October 2024.

If the scheme did not go ahead, it is estimated that the economic impact would run into the hundreds of millions of pounds, just from the flooding of the A12 alone. There would be significant costs to the county council from having to manage regular road closures, to delivering an alternative long-term solution to protect the A12.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

"This is great news on so many levels. The defences against flooding will protect the A12, dozens of local homes, hundreds of acres of farmland and give security to the local economy and tourism. The chosen solution will also create hundreds of acres of valuable inter-tidal habitat for wildlife and people to enjoy.

"Doing nothing was simply not an option. If this scheme did not go ahead, the impacts would be genuinely catastrophic. The A12 would flood up to twice a day with the tides, essentially cutting the east of the county in two.

"For those that maybe don't travel around this northern part of the county, imagine your nearest A-road being cut off twice a day for hours at a time, with all the additional pressures and complications that would bring.

"This is evidence that the right infrastructure project in the right place can bring huge benefits to a local area and its economy, much like the Gull Wing bridge which we have just delivered up the road in Lowestoft."

Preliminary work on flood defences has been underway at the site, near the A12 at Benacre sluice close to Lowestoft, which is close to being breached. This work is being led by the Waveney, Lower Yare & Lothingland Internal Drainage Board, supported by the Environment Agency to safeguard the area for now and long into the future.

The new investment will mean that the full project can be completed, with construction expected to begin in Spring 2025.

OPINION: The right project in the right place can bring benefits to our economy

Column by Cllr Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

The flooding scheme superimposed in the valley with the A12 in the background (Credit: Edward Vere Nicholl, Benacre Estates)

Looking out of my window as I write this, trying to make out the Birmingham skyline through the raindrops running down the pane (I'm here for the Conservative Party Conference), I think we can confidently say that the last knockings of summer are behind us. We are now truly ensconced in autumn, and probably sooner than we'd like, winter.

Some of our communities know too well the impacts that the rain can cause in terms of flooding, and the county council continues to work hard on mitigating these effects.

But it is a different type of flooding I wanted to highlight today – the kind that emanates from the sea.

Although I live in a more land-locked part of Suffolk, I enjoy regular trips to the coast, whether for work or for pleasure. From Felixstowe in the south to Lowestoft in the north, and the multitude of spots in-between, we are a haven for coastal-related tourism, commerce and industry.

Suffolk really is a special place in this respect, bringing holidaymakers from around the country, whilst being recognised as a crucial player in securing the nation's low carbon energy future – regular readers will be familiar with the council's on-going challenges to solar farms, pylons and all the associated infrastructure, as we work hard to protect our communities.

But part of our coastline at Benacre, near Lowestoft, is under imminent threat from the sea. Preliminary work on flood defences has been underway at the site, near the A12 at Benacre sluice, which is close to being breached. Agencies have been working hard on immediate flood prevention measures, but a much bigger project is needed to protect the area.

If nothing is done, dozens of local homes and hundreds of acres of farmland will be under severe threat in the very near future. The A12 would flood up to twice a day with the tides, essentially cutting the east of the county in two.

Left unattended, the repercussions would be catastrophic. There would be significant costs to the county council alone, from having to manage regular road closures, to delivering an alternative long-term solution to protect the A12.

So what is being done?

The good news is that the Benacre and Kessingland Managed Realignment Scheme has been drawn up. It's a £59 million project to be funded by a range of organisations, including a planned £2 million from county council, which has already been earmarked in our budget, and will be put before Cabinet next week for approval.

The final piece of the jigsaw came with yesterday's news that Sizewell C will commit £25 million to the project, meaning that all funding is now in place, and work is expected begin in the Spring next year.

This is great news on so many levels. The new defences against flooding will protect the A12, local homes, farmland and give security to the local economy and tourism. It will also create hundreds of acres of valuable inter-tidal habitat for wildlife and people to enjoy.

It will create a new 82-hectare saltmarsh which will provide a habitat for sea-fish, invertebrates, wading birds and a wide range of other wildlife. It will improve 52 kilometres of local rivers and protect 11 million cubic metres of local freshwater from the encroachment of sea water. The area will be open to walkers, bird watchers and nature lovers, giving a boost to local tourism.

Doing nothing was simply not an option. If this scheme did not go ahead, the impacts would not bear thinking about – particular around the flooding of the A12.

If you don't have cause to travel around that northern part of the county, imagine your nearest A-road being cut off twice a day for hours at a time, with all the additional pressures and complications that would bring.

I am genuinely delighted that this project can make its way to the finishing line. Much like the Gull Wing bridge which we have just delivered up the road in Lowestoft, it goes to show that not all infrastructure projects are divisive and controversial - the right project in the right place can bring huge benefits to a local area and its economy.