



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 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.

Speaking about the funding Councillor Nick Gowrley, Cabinet Member with responsibility for council assets said: "This is a really important step in the council delivering upon its commitment to be net zero by 2030. The estimated cumulative effect of these packages will see the council's carbon footprint reduce by over 360 tonnes of CO2 per year, the equivalent of taking 120 cars off the road. This is a fantastic result and underlines our commitment to the county and the planet. I would like to thank all those involved in securing this funding, especially Concertus, Vertas and the Greater South East Energy Hub. I look forward to seeing the work rolled out over the coming months."

The council hopes to have the work completed at all the sites before the 30 September 2021.

February 2021

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.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council said:

"Suffolk County Council fully supports a bid for a Freeport in our county, this is especially true of Freeport East as so much of the bid is in line with the council's wider objectives around inclusive economic growth, job creation, regional investment and our commitments to the environment and decarbonisation.

"Freeport East is a fantastic opportunity for the Government to show that its commitment to levelling up the country is not just reserved for the Midlands and the North of England. To level up successfully the government must recognise the importance of investing in the foundations of growth and wider opportunities at both ends of the A14. This is especially 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.

"Whilst the final decision about Freeport designation rests with central government, I urge everyone in Suffolk, especially community and business leaders, to give this bid their wholehearted support."

The Government is due to make its final decision about Freeport status later this year after assessment of all bids received nationwide in March.

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.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Suffolk County Council's leader and chair of the Suffolk Local Outbreak Engagement Board, said:

"Testing is a key weapon in the battle against COVID-19, so we are delighted to be able to open a further 16 sites in more rural communities across Suffolk.

"Whilst Suffolk's vaccine rollout programme rapidly picks up pace, we need people who can't work from home and who don't have symptoms to get tested twice a week. It's how we will break the chain of infections and protect vulnerable people.

"It takes just 15 minutes to get a test and you get the results within the hour. 12,780 tests have already been completed. Suffolk needs everyone to play their part."

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.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council said:

"In today's increasingly technological and digital world, it is entirely right that as an authority we do all we can to support local businesses to access and use real time data to help them succeed. This project has the potential to strengthen businesses, grow our local economy and help support the jobs and innovations of the future.

"I really do hope that as many people as possible come along to the launch event so that they can see how this technology could benefit their business."

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.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member responsible for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs, said:

"Allocating funding for Suffolk's highway budget is a complex process and one we carefully consider ahead of receiving our allocation from the Department for Transport. It's important to ensure our funding is used to focus on current priority areas across the county.

"I am glad our allocation is more than we prepared for the 2021/22 financial year and I am delighted that we will be able to progress on some much longed for drainage schemes, bridge repair projects, not to mention our bolstered road resurfacing programme – where we have committed to resurfacing a further 140 miles this year.

"Although this funding still represents a fall when compared with last year, we will continue to do what we can to spend this allocation appropriately and for the benefit of all Suffolk's residents."

Major infrastructure projects now underway in East Anglia

On 4 February work began on two new bridges on the East Anglian coast, promising to bring huge economic benefits locally.

The Third River Crossing in Great Yarmouth is managed by Norfolk County Council, and the Gull Wing project in Lowestoft by Suffolk County Council. The projects are just 10 miles apart and have a combined cost of £246m.

The UK Government acknowledged the two bridges as nationally important infrastructure projects, with the Department for Transport committing a combined total of over £170million to both ventures.

Farrans, one of the UK's leading building and civil engineering contractors, is involved with the construction of both projects. In Great Yarmouth, the construction is a joint venture with BAM Nuttall, and in Lowestoft it is the sole responsibility of Farrans.

Road closures for both projects have already been implemented as preparation work gets underway. The Third River Crossing in Great Yarmouth will start demolition of some buildings and structures later this month and trial holes for utilities are underway for the Gull Wing in Lowestoft.

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

"I'm looking forward to visiting Lowestoft, when it is permitted to do so, to see where work has begun. There will be a lot of preparatory work that goes on behind the scenes and may not be immediately obvious to passers-by, but the Gull Wing is most definitely go. I'm delighted to have delivered my commitment to make the Gull Wing a reality and thank you to East Suffolk Council and all partners for their continued support."

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.

Councillor Mary Evans, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills said:

“I am delighted Suffolk has won this award for our Family Information Service, and its work with our Community Information Team in Public Health. The work of these teams to adapt our Community Directory Infolink has helped many families and businesses gain access to essential services and information during the covid-19 pandemic.

“I would like to thank both teams, our supplier Idox Ltd who were involved in this work, and in particular many of the 7000 partners in the voluntary and community sector who use Infolink to promote their services and support to the public during the pandemic.”

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.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs, said:

“Many residents in Suffolk have embraced cycling during the pandemic, so we have a real opportunity here to make cycling safer and easier, not just for this unprecedented period, but for the future as well to reap the associated health and pollution benefits.

“To get more people cycling long term we need to ensure there are enough places for them to safely store their bikes, so I am really pleased it is now easier to access Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill town centres on two wheels.

“I hope the facilities will encourage more people to grab their helmet and give it a go.”

Councillor Susan Glossop, Cabinet Member for Growth at West Suffolk Council said:

“We are pleased more cycle parking is being introduced by Suffolk County Council at trial locations in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill town centres. We had strong public engagement in shaping the town centre masterplans with many public comments calling for more places to store and lock up bicycles in the town centres.

“Furthermore, it supports our commitment to the environment and improving public health, by encouraging people to not use the car to come into our town centres.”

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

Lowestoft’s Gull Wing secures Government approval, work to start in the new year

Construction of Lowestoft’s Gull Wing bridge will get underway early in 2021, following final approval of the scheme on Wednesday 25 November by the Government.

The Gull Wing project team at Suffolk County Council received official confirmation that its full business case has been approved, meaning that the £73.39m funding from the Department of Transport can now be accessed.

With this final milestone now reached, the contract with building and civil engineering contractor, Farrans, will be signed. Other formalities such as formally acquiring land can also be completed, paving the way for construction work to start in the new year.

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

“I’m delighted with the announcement from the Government today, which means that the Gull Wing is go.

“With this news, the final step in our application to build this bridge is now complete. We can now access the funding, sign the construction contract, and start building the bridge.

“Any doubts are now over, and we will get spades into the ground early in the new year to build Lowestoft’s third crossing.”

Peter Aldous, Member of Parliament for Waveney, said:

“This news is extremely welcome and is a real positive boost for the residents of Lowestoft. I’d like to commend Suffolk County Council on their commitment to this project and to the town. The official processes are now complete, and we will see construction start in the new year. Our skyline is about to change forever, for the better.”

Archaeology surveys have already taken place on site and further preliminary groundwork will continue in the coming months, to allow construction work to begin in the spring of 2021. The Gull Wing is planned to open in the summer of 2023.

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.

Councillor Mary Evans, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills, said:

"In Suffolk we have been working hard to find loving and supportive families for children waiting for adoption. These children have not always had the best start in life and really do deserve to find their forever homes. The adoption process can seem daunting for families,

but SCC have a wealth of experience and are there to support families every step of the way. Adopt East is great news for Suffolk as it will mean we can draw on expertise and skills from across the whole region to help us to find the right families for our children.”

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.

Councillor Richard Rout, Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection at Suffolk County Council, said:

“This funding will boost the council’s existing work to protect Suffolk’s environment and wildlife. Increased tree planting will allow us to offset carbon emissions, though we are continuing to work to eliminate the council’s emissions where possible, as part of our commitment to our climate emergency declaration.

“But this is much more than just planting trees and walking away. We are setting up the support needed to allow trees, hedgerows and verges to thrive for years to come, including in urban areas. We are committed to a ‘right tree, right place’ policy and to working with others. This will be achieved through a new Suffolk Tree Partnership, involving many others across Suffolk, to support local communities and landowners to help manage and increase tree cover.

“We will also work with others to develop a ‘healing wood’ initiative as a way of recognising the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our communities.

“With Suffolk’s healing woods we will all have access to natural spaces, where we can reflect on our own experiences of the pandemic or take a quiet moment to grieve for loved ones.”

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“With Suffolk’s healing woods we will all have access to natural spaces, where we can reflect on our own experiences of the pandemic or take a quiet moment to grieve for loved ones.”

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.

Councillor Paul West, Portfolio Holder for Heritage, said:

“Although there is still some way to go before The Hold is fully ready, it is very exciting that the major milestone of public access has been reached. We hope people are excited to see how this major development has progressed, and we encourage visitors to take advantage of the building being open to come and see the progress so far.

“The archives service has been waiting a long time for the ability to display documents and artefacts in a way that is accessible to the wider public and we are very pleased to have our inaugural exhibition up and running so we can get this next crucial phase of our work under way.”

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.

Councillor Richard Rout, Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection at Suffolk County Council, said:

“Ultra-low emission vehicle ownership has nearly trebled in the last three years in Suffolk and I want to this to continue by making it even more convenient to charge up across the county. I’d like to see fast charging points at our rural village halls, community buildings, sports clubs, places of worship and in small villages. We can now make this a reality and hopefully provide the host with a source of income too.

“If you look at a map of existing charging points in the county, there are big gaps – and one of the barriers to people switching to an electric vehicle is lack of confidence about finding a place to charge. This funding will help fill those gaps and give people that confidence. Once these charging points are installed, Suffolk will have one of the best rural charging networks in the country.

“We will be contributing to better air quality, reducing carbon emissions and cutting down our reliance on fossil fuels – all supporting our climate emergency declaration and ambition to create the greenest county.

“A better charging network can also help Suffolk economically. The UK’s electric vehicle owners can look fondly on Suffolk as an even more welcoming destination, as they will be able to charge their cars right across the county.”

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.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs, said:

"I am delighted to see our teams deliver on our promise to lay new road surfaces on a quarter of Suffolk's roads. Not only that, but we are also due to exceed the 1,000 miles and complete this work sooner than expected.

"Residents and businesses have always been clear that they want to see roads and infrastructure improved in Suffolk. This continues to be the biggest discussion point in our local communities. By delivering this programme we have been able to focus our budget and resources on improving our roads countywide and keeping them pothole-free for longer.

"I want to take this opportunity to thank all those who have worked through a very challenging time to stick to this programme and deliver even better roads for Suffolk and its residents. We remain committed to focussing our efforts and resources where possible on this type of road improvement."

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.

Commenting on the resources, Councillor James Reeder, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Public Health and Prevention, said:

“The publication of these resources is very timely given emerging evidence that young people’s mental health and wellbeing has suffered during lockdown”.

“The link between exercise and mental health cannot be over-stated, but sadly is something that often gets forgotten. So, to have a clear and concise reminder of the all the benefits we gain from being active is extremely helpful and something, I hope, will act as an incentive to encourage our young people to think about moving more”.

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.

Councillor Richard Rout, Cabinet Member for Environment & Public Protection at Suffolk County Council, said:

“Suffolk County Council has been involved with successful climate change projects for many years, including the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership. We have put millions of pounds into energy efficiency projects for both businesses and homes and continue to do so.

“Suffolk has been moving in the right direction, having seen carbon emission reductions of 41% since 1990. But now is the time to move up through the gears and do even better.

“The impact of climate change is an issue which involves everyone and affects everyone. With the approval of these plans, the council will lead by example. We will inspire other businesses to see what can be achieved, to show that change can, and must, happen.”

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.

Paul West, Cabinet member for Waste at Suffolk County Council, said:

“Our phased response to reopening recycling centres since the lockdown has gone extremely well and we are grateful for the support of the public in allowing us to support social distancing on site, while still having the capacity to process the county’s waste.”

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.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection, said:

"The new Suffolk Heritage Explorer website is exciting and will inspire a love of history in the next generation. It will allow the public far and wide to access and celebrate Suffolk's unique heritage online."

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.

Councillor Mary Evans, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills, said:

“We have a good track record of offering places at preferred schools and this year is no exception. I am delighted that we have been able to give most parents a place for their child at one of the schools they want.”

“We use published criteria to decide who has priority for places so that the process is fair and clear. I appreciate that not all families will have received a place at their preferred school and where a parents’ preference for a Suffolk school is refused, we will automatically add their child’s name to the waiting list for that school. We will also advise them about how to lodge an appeal should they wish to do so.”

March 2020

Suffolk wins funding for the next stage of A12 improvements

On 13 March, it was announced that Suffolk has secured £830,000 of funding from the Department for Transport, to develop an Outline Business Case to take forward its plans to improve the A12.

Announced during the Government's budget, Suffolk County Council has been successful in winning £830,000 of funding from the Department for Transport (DfT), to develop an Outline Business Case (OBC) to take forward its plans to improve the A12 East of Ipswich.

This project is specifically looking to increase capacity and improve overall traffic flow at junctions and will explore the potential for a new pedestrian and cycle bridge over the A12.

With the funding secure, Suffolk County Council's Transport Strategy Team will now begin work to develop the outline business case which, following public consultation, will be used to make a further bid to central government for funding to deliver the scheme.

It was also announced in the budget that the DfT have given their approval for Suffolk County Council to develop and submit a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for a project to dual the A12 between the Seckford and Dobbies roundabouts near Woodbridge. Whilst this does not include any funding at this stage, the SOBC will enable SCC to bid for future funding for this project too.

Speaking about the award of funding, Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

"I am delighted that once again Suffolk County Council has been successful in bidding for funding from central government for large infrastructure projects. These improvements are between the A14 Seven Hills junction and the A12/A1214 Park and Ride Roundabout and will help boost road capacity and traffic flow. I am also pleased that the scheme includes additional proposals to help encourage more walking and cycling."

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.