

# A Report for Groton Parish Council Meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024 From James Finch – County Councillor for the Stour Valley

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## ➤ Cabinet approves new funding to resurface residential roads and welcomes recent Government announcement of £107m ring fenced over next ten years.

At Suffolk County Council's Cabinet meeting (7th November), Cabinet approved an extra £10 million to repair and resurface local roads in villages and residential areas across Suffolk. The funding will nearly double Suffolk Highways' £11 million annual road maintenance budget but be targeted at smaller residential streets which are typically maintained less frequently than busier A and B roads.

Over recent years, the county council has recognised the importance of improving roads for residents, this new proposal follows the successful £21 million contribution towards the resurfacing of 1,000 miles of road between 2017 and 2021, and more recently the committed £21 million between 2021 – 2025 to increase pavement maintenance, deliver drainage improvement schemes and repair road signs.

It is hoped that the extra £10 million boost to resurface some local roads, minor rural roads and urban cul-de-sacs would result in a reduction of new potholes, which in turn will reduce the overall financial burden on the council's emergency and reactive repair budgets. Between 2020 and 2023, 2 out of 3 pothole repairs were carried out on local roads, minor rural roads, and urban cul-de-sacs. During that period, more than half of all defects reported by the public were on these types of roads.

The extra investment will make use of more sustainable materials such as warm mix asphalts that have a lower CO2 footprint than traditional hot mix asphalts and which include recycled materials to reduce raw material use; resulting in a more positive impact on Suffolk's environment.

Suffolk County Council has welcomed the Government announcement - which is part of a Department for Transport plan to pump £609 million into highway maintenance in the East of England. £107m has been ringfenced for Suffolk over the next decade, including £3.4 million in this financial year.

## ➤ Suffolk County Council response to local government finance settlement on 18<sup>th</sup> December

The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has announced its funding package to support councils in England to deliver frontline services. Responding to this, Suffolk County Council has said:

*"This council funding announcement presents more challenges than we, and many other County Councils, expected. It means next year we will have no choice but to consider changes to some of the services we provide. The Government is facing considerable financial pressures and requests for funds from all corners of society, not least from councils across the country. We have consistently lobbied for more funding in Suffolk.*

*"We fully understand this position as we too have increasing demands on our services and rising costs to provide them – but the money we receive is not keeping pace with this need. Despite being a financially well-run council, we have significantly less funding than we need – especially in services like Special Educational Needs Development (SEND), home-to-school transport and children in care **which are all statutory responsibilities**. To prioritise these areas, we will have to make difficult decisions about the services we deliver, how we deliver them and our council tax."*

## ➤ Suffolk County Council's Adult Social Care service rated Good overall by Care Quality Commission

Suffolk County Council has been awarded an indicative overall rating of "Good" for the quality of its Adult Social Care services. Following a period of intense inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Suffolk County Council has become one of the first councils nationwide to achieve this standard.

Earlier this year CQC announced that 5 local authorities with responsibility for adult social care, including Suffolk, had volunteered to be part of a Local Authority Assessment Pilot, to help CQC develop the new model of inspection to help assess councils against the requirements of the Care Act. This model would then be rolled out across the country with all 153 Local Authorities with responsibility for Adult Social Care being inspected by the commission.

The assessment process began this summer with a request for information to each local authority taking part in the pilot. This collected the written evidence needed to allow CQC to understand how each council

is delivering its adult social care services. Following on from this initial ask, the County Council was then required to arrange over 40 different meetings including 4 staff drop-in sessions, with over 150 people, including staff, partners, providers, carers, and people with lived experiences. These meetings allowed the CQC inspection team to meet people directly and ask questions to help further evidence the quality of social care services provided.

*CQC's final report rated the overall quality of Suffolk County Council's Adult Social Care services as "Good" and highlighted areas of strength including, the quality of its leadership, the culture of learning and support for staff, the range of digital care options available, the good relationships between social care and health colleagues and locality team knowledge and understanding of community needs.*

## ➤ **SCC Trading Standards advise beware of five scams of Christmas and the New Year**

While shoppers look to snap up a bargain, Suffolk Trading Standards is urging them to take a few simple steps to avoid being ripped off. Fake websites, scam texts and bogus competitions are just some of the tactics fraudsters use. **Graham Crisp, Head of Suffolk Trading Standards, said:** "Be wary of offers that look too good to be true and try to stick with reputable websites that you recognise and trust" or "Be suspicious of requests to make a bank transfer and ensure you research any individual or businesses requesting financial or personal details."

The five scams to look out for:

1. **Scam delivery texts and emails** – You may get an email or text message saying your package has been delayed and it asks you to click on a link to track its status. This link could lead you to a phishing site that steals your personal information. Malicious texts are where someone clicks on a link and provides information, they may then get a phone call from someone claiming to be from their bank who offers to help safeguard funds by trying to convince someone to transfer money into a bogus 'safe account'. Forward suspicious text messages to 7726 and send scam emails to [report@phishing.gov.uk](mailto:report@phishing.gov.uk)
2. **Fake and copy-cat websites** - The holiday season brings endless emails offering deals, sales, and bargains. Some lead to look-alike websites that trick people into downloading malware, making non-existent purchases, and sharing private information. Authenticate a website by checking the address is spelt correctly. Ideally, type it in rather than clicking on a link, or go to [getsafeonline.org/checkawebsite](https://getsafeonline.org/checkawebsite)
3. **Bogus charities** - Only donate to trusted, well-known charities. Before giving, check the charity's name and registration number. You can verify this at the Charity Commission's website at [charitycommission.gov.uk](https://charitycommission.gov.uk)
4. **Gift Card scams** - Fraudsters impersonate one of your email contacts to ask you to buy a gift card for them as a favour. They will typically say they need help buying it as a present as they are too ill, too busy or have an issue with their payment card. The scammer then asks you to share the serial numbers of gift cards to steal the value purchased. If you receive an email asking for personal information or any form of financial help, call that friend or family member on a trusted number and let them know their account may have been hacked
5. **Fake social media contests, giveaways, and bogus sellers** - Social media platforms are full of bargains but are also where scammers lie in wait with too-good-to-be-true offers. Fraudsters set up fake pages with offers to catch your eye and encourage you to share. These are designed to "farm" any personal information that you have publicly available on your profile. Search for the official page to see if an offer or giveaway is legitimate.

Anyone losing money to fraud should contact their bank immediately and report it to Action Fraud on 0300 123 20 40 or at [www.actionfraud.police.uk](https://www.actionfraud.police.uk)

Suffolk Trading Standards can be contacted via the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 0808 223 1133. For a weekly email from Suffolk Trading Standards go to [www.suffolk.gov.uk/JoinTheFight](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/JoinTheFight).

## ➤ **1,400-year-old temple discovered at Suffolk royal settlement at Rendlesham**

A rare, possible pre-Christian temple from the time of the East Anglian Kings, has been found at Rendlesham, near Sutton Hoo in Suffolk. The discovery was made this summer by Suffolk County Council's Rendlesham Revealed community archaeology project, which is funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, made possible by National Lottery players.

Last year the project uncovered the remains of a large timber Royal Hall, confirming the location as a royal settlement of the East Anglian Kings. This year's excavations also uncovered evidence of fine metalworking associated with royal occupation, including a mould used for casting decorative horse harness similar to that known from the nearby princely burial ground at Sutton Hoo.

The royal compound was found to have been more than twice the size than was previously thought, bounded by a 1.5 kilometre-long perimeter ditch that enclosed an area of 15 hectares (the equivalent to

about 20 football pitches). The royal residence was part of a wider settlement complex covering 50 hectares which is unique in the archaeology of 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century England in its scale and complexity.

This year's breakthrough caps a three-year campaign of excavation that transforms expectations and understanding of the period. The site at Rendlesham is identified as an East Anglian royal centre by The Venerable Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Bede records that King Redwald, who died c AD 625 and whose grave is thought to be the Sutton Hoo ship burial, maintained a temple in which there were altars to pre-Christian Gods alongside an altar to Christ – although he does not specifically say this this was at Rendlesham.

Excavations are now complete and the trenches at the site backfilled, with work already underway to analyse the finds with provisional results in 2024. To find out more about the Rendlesham Revealed project visit: [heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/rendlesham](https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/rendlesham)

### ➤ **County Councils remain united against Norwich to Tilbury onshore option**

Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk County Council leaders are urging National Grid to reconsider their preferred onshore option following findings of a recent review.

The councils jointly commissioned and have now published an independent report into the Norwich to Tilbury project, which proposes the construction of a new high voltage electricity transmission line between Norwich in Norfolk, Bramford in Suffolk and Tilbury in Essex.

Leaders of the three county councils are now asking National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) and the electricity system planner, National Grid Electricity System Operator (NGESO) to consider the findings.

The report, by Hiorns Smart Energy Networks, reviews the options considered by National Grid, including the preferred option of a pylon line between Norwich and Tilbury.

The total length of the line would be 183 kilometres. This would consist of around 158 kilometres of new overhead line supported by 520 pylons. There would be also four sections of underground cabling. These underground sections would run through, and in the vicinity of, the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. National Grid's proposals also include a new substation on the Tendring Peninsula, to allow the connection of offshore wind farms.

Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk County Councils, accept that the transmission network in East Anglia needs reinforcing to support the transition to net zero, and provide energy security. However, they remain concerned that the need for, and timing of, the current proposals is uncertain and not robust.

This uncertainty brings into question the need case for National Grid's preferred option, of a land-based pylon line. All three county councils have expressed their concerns that this option will harm the local economy, environment and the health and wellbeing of their communities.

The review focused on a re-appraisal of the need case for the project; that need case was developed by National Grid Electricity System Operator.

### ➤ **Virtual Fostering and Adoption Sessions for the Stour Valley**

A Foster Carer Recruitment Event is held the 1st Wednesday of every month, and an Adoption Event is on the 1st Thursday all 7:00pm in your home. To book a place please email [Claire.Gwatkin@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:Claire.Gwatkin@suffolk.gov.uk).

### **My Priorities**

*Education - Supporting Vulnerable People - Jobs and Growth - Localism and the Stour Valley - Building on Suffolk's Strength all underpinned by strong financial management and fair council tax.*

***Thank you for your hard work during the year and wishing you a peaceful and happy Christmas .***