

A Report for Groton Parish Council Meeting on 6th March 2024 From James Finch – County Councillor for the Stour Valley

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➤ **£4.4 million to be spent on additional staff to strengthen SEND reform**

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet has confirmed that 60 new members of staff will be recruited to drive forward important reform to the way special educational needs and disability (SEND) services are delivered in Suffolk. This includes an increase in permanent SEND staff of nearly 15%. These new posts will support the improvement of the quality and timeliness of assessments, plans, reviews, and communications with families.

In order to support this improvement programme, an additional £4.4million was signed off during the budget discussions at Full Council on February 15. Of this, £3.4million will provide 46 new full-time posts – a increase of 14.76% in current staffing levels. An additional £1million will be spent in 2024/25 to fund 14 temporary posts.

➤ **Public consultation on Suffolk County Council's proposed devolution deal starts on 18th March 2024.**

A 10-week public consultation on our proposed devolution deal with the Government will start on 18th March and run through until 26th May. The consultation will be in two main parts – an open survey, hosted by Suffolk County Council, that any residents can complete and a sample survey of 1000 Suffolk residents conducted independently by Ipsos Mori. The consultation will be available through our website www.suffolk.gov.uk/devolution and social media. There will also be media coverage highlighting the consultation.

➤ **Dragon Patcher lands in Suffolk to bolster response to rural potholes**

Suffolk Highways has welcomed the new pothole-repairing machine to help fix the growing number of potholes experienced nationally during the winter season, with a trial set to initially target defects in rural Suffolk.

The Dragon Patcher is a machine that releases compressed air which cleans the surface of the road, before heating the surface to a temperature that enables repair material to bond effectively with the road surface, allowing the pothole to be repaired with an aggregate and hot bitumen material.

Compared with the traditional approach of repairing potholes, the Dragon Patcher can work five times faster. This trial is in addition to the potholes being repaired around the clock as part of our routine repair programme, during the past two months Suffolk Highways has repaired 2,851 potholes across Suffolk.

Fuelled by the biodiesel, HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil), the patcher reduces raw material use and creates zero waste and has shown to provide significant carbon savings when compared to traditional patching techniques.

Once the trial ends in Suffolk, a decision will be taken on whether to roll out the technology across the county.

➤ **Have your say on Suffolk's local transport plan**

Residents are invited to share their views on how they travel to help inform Suffolk's Local Transport Plan. The plan sets out a long-term vision for transport in Suffolk and covers key themes such as decarbonisation of transport, strengthening the local economy, promoting health, wellbeing and social inclusion, and creating better-connected places that encourage a range of transport choices.

Suffolk County Council is asking for feedback on the key themes proposed for the fourth version of the plan, which will cover the period until 2040 and respond to long-term transport opportunities and challenges facing Suffolk and the UK as a whole.

A link to the survey can be found at <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/ltp4>. The consultation will run for eight weeks until 8 April 2024.

Feedback from the consultation will be collated and inform the production of the draft local transport plan. The full draft document will then be subject to further consultation later in the year.

➤ **Suffolk County Council to review weed control for roads and pavements.**

In February 2022, the council agreed to stop using glyphosate in its routine weed treatment programmes, to find more natural alternatives to help protect the local environment.

However, the alternative products proved unable to meet requirements, which was further exacerbated by exceptional growing conditions. Multiple applications were sometimes needed which could introduce other negative environmental impacts.

Teams will continue to monitor and research the different approaches being used to remove weeds on our roads and pavements. *However where needed, glyphosate would be used responsibly as it is one of the most cost-effective and long-lasting solutions.*

➤ **Final Position Statement - Bramford to Twinstead (EN020002) - Deadline 9**

Notwithstanding that Suffolk County Council (SCC) have always accepted the principle of the project, and has been able to support important aspects of it, including undergrounding in the Stour Valley and the removal of redundant 132kV transmission lines. SCC is so concerned about the shortcomings in the Applicant's proposals for the implementation and control of the construction of the project, that it must advise the Examining Authority and the Secretary of State that it formally **OBJECTS** to the making of a Development Consent Order (DCO) in the terms put forward by the Applicant in the draft DCO and supported by the current suite of control documents.

The Council considers that the following management plans require substantial revision, due to insufficient detail, these issues are exacerbated by the lack of a commitment to a two-stage, (outline and final) process, in accordance with the comments submitted to the examination

For more information refer to this link; - <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/EN020002/EN020002-001641-Suffolk%20County%20Council%20-%20Comments%20on%20submissions%20received%20at%20Deadline%208.pdf>

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

This year parents and carers of 98% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred schools and 93% were offered a place at their first preference school. Suffolk County Council received 7,867 applications from parents and carers indicating which secondary school they would prefer their child to transfer to in September 2024.

Families who applied online can log in to the online service from today to see the school their child has been offered. They will also receive an email to confirm this offer, unless they have indicated that they do not wish to. Letters will be sent to parents who made a paper application by second class post today (1 March 2024).

➤ **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.

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.