

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – MARCH 2020



Cllr Stephen Burroughes - Framlingham Division

- **IPSWICH NORTHERN ROUTE WILL NOT PROCEED TO THE NEXT STAGE**

In February, the Cabinet of Suffolk County Council voted to accept a recommendation that the Ipswich Northern Route should not proceed to the next stage of development. The Cabinet recommendation noted that the project had failed to attract the widespread political support needed to proceed with projects of this size and financial scale. The Cabinet paper also made it clear that local planning authorities were unable to agree to any of the additional housing growth, over the level already agreed in their local plans, which would be needed to help fund the local contribution before government funding could be requested.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said: "I am disappointed that even with a good Strategic Outline Business Case, we have been unable to proceed with this ambitious project for Ipswich. However, ambition must always be tempered with reality. Without widespread political support, this project will not attract the funding needed to proceed to the next stage, let alone the £500m necessary to complete it. "Housing growth is now a larger consideration for central government when considering funding requests for large road projects. Without clear support from local planning authorities to meet that additional growth, over and above what they have already agreed to within their local plans, being successful in bidding into central government becomes impossible."

The Cabinet also agreed to the recommendation to create a task force to build on existing work to increase modal shift within Ipswich (reducing trips by car and increasing use of buses, walking and cycling) and to improve capacity at key junctions. More information about this will be provided in the coming weeks.

- **LOWESTOFT ARCHIVES TO REOPEN WITH FAMILY EVENT**

Lowestoft Archives welcomed visitors on Saturday 29 February, run in conjunction with Lowestoft Library. Formerly known as Lowestoft Record Office, the searchroom at Lowestoft Archives has been refreshed and remodelled to offer a brighter, more visitor-friendly and flexible space enabling more people to engage with Suffolk's history. The drop-in event entitled 'Destination Lowestoft', celebrated tourism in Lowestoft throughout history. It offered residents and visitors the opportunity to experience the refurbished venue, which now includes an audio-visual and exhibition space, as well as new interpretation display areas.

Following the event in February, Lowestoft Archives reopens on Tuesday 3 March and will be open from 10am to 3pm each Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The space will be used to run events and activities with groups, such as visiting schools, on Mondays and Wednesdays when it is closed to the public. Lowestoft Archives will offer a wealth of material for people to discover, such as books, microform, maps and transcripts. These are items which have proven particularly popular for those carrying out research into local and family history.

- **NEW STREET LIGHTING PROPOSED TO REDUCE THE COUNTY'S CARBON FOOTPRINT**

Suffolk County Council is looking to reduce its carbon footprint by investing £9.8m in street lighting, after Cabinet approved an LED street lighting replacement project. Following a review of its street lighting policy in 2010, and with energy prices set to increase at between 8% and 12% a year, the Council has decided the high energy consumption of its existing lanterns could create further pressure on its resources in the near future.

The Council owns and maintains over 60,000 street lights. Back in 2010, the Council took numerous steps to help reduce both the energy costs and carbon footprint of its lighting stock. This included the introduction of part-night lighting arrangements and conversion to LED for those lighting units that were consuming the highest level of energy. The proposal to convert the remaining street lighting stock to LED will help to reduce both Suffolk's energy consumption and carbon footprint, whilst providing crisper illumination of the streets for residents. The project will also ensure that Suffolk remains resilient to any future energy price increases. The project will be completed in the autumn of 2022.

- **COUNTY COUNCIL APPROVES BUDGET TO SPEND MORE ON SERVICES FOR VULNERABLE RESIDENTS**

On 13 February 2020, Suffolk County Council approved its annual budget. The Council will increase its spending power again this coming financial year, particularly in Children's and Adults services, where demand continues to rise year on year. In 2020/2021, the Council's budget will rise to £556million which represents an increase of £37m (7.1%) from 2019/20. Children's and Adults Services represent around 70% of the Council's overall spend. This year's budget is based on a 12-month financial settlement from government, rather than the three or four-year agreement which is usually offered. As well as addressing the need to maintain funding for key services, the Council will invest an additional £3.5m into two one-year programmes, the Suffolk 2020 fund (£3m) and a highways investment fund (£500k).

The Suffolk 2020 fund will be used for projects that can deliver a real difference for local communities. The intention is to adopt good ideas covering more than one area of Suffolk, rather than having a number of small-scale projects. To qualify for the fund, projects must link to one of the following themes: carbon reduction; carbon offset, road safety, natural environment; built environment; innovation; and use of technology. Each project must offer a clear return on investment through positive economic, social, or environmental impact. County Councillors can put ideas forward on behalf of their community and must seek the sponsorship of a Cabinet Member for consideration. Further details of the fund will be made available in due course. The £500k highways investment fund will focus on improving the safety of pupils and parents travelling to and from school, by refreshing lines and cleaning and repairing signs in and around school zones.

The funding is allocated for use within the 2020/21 financial year and looks set to benefit areas around many Suffolk schools, complementing the road marking renewal programme, which is taking place as part of the move of civil parking powers. Suffolk Highways officers are developing a plan of how these extra works will be identified and delivered. Further information will be announced in due course.

- **NEW RAIL LINK TO OXFORD FOR SUFFOLK AND NORFOLK**

Local authorities in Suffolk and Norfolk are exploring how a new rail link to Oxford can benefit both counties. The Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps MP, announced at the end of January a preferred route for a new rail line between Cambridge and Bedford, which will form the missing rail link between Cambridge and Oxford. The East West Rail Consortium, alongside Suffolk and Norfolk county councils and its local authority partners, are now commissioning a new study to improve the rail frequency between Ipswich/Norwich and Cambridge, and to determine whether passenger and freight rail services can connect directly to Oxford. If successful, the rail link would avoid the need to use more congested routes on the Great Eastern Main Line and on cross-country routes via Ely.

The study will be used to develop a business case to submit to government to seek funding to design and deliver new rail track and infrastructure on the lines between Ipswich/Norwich and Cambridge.

The agreement to commission the study comes at a pivotal time for East West Rail. Alongside the announcement on the route between Bedford and Cambridge in January, earlier this month permission was also granted to start major construction work on the section between Oxford and Bedford.

The link from East Anglia to Oxford via Bedford and Milton Keynes is being developed to support housing and job growth expected over the next 20 years. The development of the business case will be led by the East West Rail Consortium's Eastern Section Group, which has representation from local authorities across Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire and is chaired by Cllr Alexander Nicoll, Deputy Cabinet Member for Transport at Suffolk County Council.

- **SUFFOLK HIGHWAYS WAIVES FEES FOR VE AND VJ DAY COMMEMORATION EVENTS**

In commemoration of the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe and Victory over Japan Days, Suffolk Highways has confirmed it will waive road closure application fees and help support communities with event traffic management. Communities in Suffolk will be organising commemorative events, some of which may require an application to Suffolk Highways for a road closure.

- **HOPE FOR BETTER NATIONAL COORDINATION OF OFFSHORE WIND FARM PROJECTS**

Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Council have been calling for improved national coordination of the offshore wind farm projects off the county's coast. This approach has now been recognised in an Ofgem report. The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) document, published on 3 February 2020, suggests that money could be saved, and the environment better protected, if there is more coordination around the infrastructure of these projects.

The councils continue to support the principle of offshore wind, as it will help reduce carbon emissions and provide significant economic benefits to the county and the UK. However, this should not be achieved at any cost to Suffolk, its residents and its natural environment. Concerns about the apparent lack of coordination in the connection of energy projects have been repeatedly raised by the councils with government ministers, National Grid and wind farm developers.

- **SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL ISSUE SCHOOL CROSSING PATROL STAFF WITH BODY CAMERAS**

Suffolk County Council is issuing body cameras to some of its crossing patrol officers after 'drive-through' incidents and verbal abuse at school crossings. In Suffolk we have 61 school crossing patrol officers. Increasingly, more officers have reported incidents and have said they feel abuse is becoming a regular occurrence with little respect for what they do.

In the past six months, 19 'drive-through' incidents have been recorded in Suffolk where drivers have ignored the crossing patrol officer and did not stop when the officer stood in the road to allow children to cross safely. The cameras have been purchased by Suffolk's Roadsafes partners Suffolk County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner and Suffolk Constabulary with money from the Driver Diversionary Fund, which comes from motorists who have taken part in speed awareness courses.

The ten body cameras will be rotated around the county, focusing on sites where officers have reported an incident. This includes sites in Lowestoft, Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds. The body cameras follow the work of the 'Stop Means Stop' campaign from the Eastern Region School Crossing Patrol Group, which aims to remind drivers of the potential seriousness of their actions. Drivers are legally obliged to obey the school crossing patrol sign under the Road Traffic Act 1988. Failure to stop can lead to a prosecution and a fine of up to £1,000 and three penalty points.

- **REFILLING YOUR WEEKLY SHOP WITHOUT UNNECESSARY PLASTIC IS GETTING EASIER IN SUFFOLK**

A number of shops in Suffolk are offering refills for a host of household items in a bid to cut down on the amount of plastic and packaging we use. The Suffolk Waste Partnership has launched a handy online directory which lists the shops, businesses or charities that host refill points for items such as cleaning products and toiletries, and dried foods such as rice or oats and even loose-leaf tea and chocolate. At the

moment there are 22 organisations that stock refills, but the partnership is encouraging other businesses to consider introducing similar schemes. Peter Stevens, Chairman of the Suffolk Waste Partnership, said: “These refill points allow people to make a decision about what plastic they use. Of course, we have a long way to go before these refill points replace our weekly shop, but it is absolutely fantastic that Suffolk is showing such initiative in beginning the process. This is exactly the kind of ‘green’ thinking we welcome and encourage. I would ask everyone to have a look at the directory and see what is offered in their neighbourhood.” Residents can search their local area on the directory to find where their nearest refill point is. The directory can be found here <https://suffolkrecycling.org.uk/reduce-your-waste/refill-directory>. If any retailers or businesses would like to offer refill services and get listed on the online directory please contact Waste.Management@suffolk.gov.uk.

For further information from my report or questions please contact me at:
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