

## SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – MARCH 2021



### *Cllr Stephen Burroughes - Framlingham Division*

- **AUTOMATIC NUMBER PLATE RECOGNITION TO IMPROVE VISITS TO RECYCLING CENTRES**

On the 29 January Suffolk County Council announced it will install Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras at its recycling centres. Alongside the installation of an automatic entry system at its recycling centres, these measures are intended to improve customer experience and plan for future demand. Suffolk has long held ambitions to Create the Greenest County and the Suffolk 2020 fund, which is a programme of work all about investing in community projects, aims to support the council's climate emergency declaration and improve Suffolk for all residents in years to come.

A booking system was introduced at Suffolk's recycling centres in May 2020 when sites reopened following closure at the start of the first Covid-19 lockdown and saw 14,000 visits per week during the summer. This can rise up to 27,000 per week in normal times, without current social distancing rules.

The project is part of the Suffolk 2020 programme and aims to improve the efficiency at the recycling centres by linking the online booking system with automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) technology and automated entry barriers. Each of Suffolk County Council's 11 recycling centres had the ANPR technology installed as part of its contract with FCC, who manage and run the sites in Suffolk. The council is now looking to use the technology to further improve the current booking system for residents wishing to visit the centres and make the most of the technological opportunities.

The cameras give an accurate count of vehicle numbers and also record how much time each vehicle is on site. This will allow Suffolk County Council to maximise site availability and to develop new and existing sites to better meet the needs of the increasing population of Suffolk.

Data from the system could also assist in identifying rogue traders fraudulently using the free household waste service to dispose of trade waste. The system also has the facility to link to the DVLA database and identify the type of vehicle and registered keeper details if necessary.

The council will also be working on upgrades to the booking system software to improve the customer experience by making it quicker and easier to make and amend bookings.

- **UNIQUE SUFFOLK PROJECT TO SAVE UP TO 600,000 TONNES OF WATER EACH YEAR**

On February 2, a new project was announced that would see water normally pumped into Suffolk's River Deben, now being used in a new scheme near Felixstowe. Each year, hundreds of thousands of tonnes of drainage water which fills land near the river's estuary is pumped away. This pumping process can also damage precious saltmarsh and mudflats, which are important habitats and part of the local ecosystem.

But now, the majority of this water is being carefully pumped inland thanks to an innovative project being led locally by Suffolk County Council, Felixstowe Hydrocycle Ltd, the Environment Agency and University of East Anglia.

The water is being reused by local farmers to irrigate food growing on their land and, in the future, can potentially be used in the public water supply.

In the East of England, new ways to source water are necessary because there is a growing demand for more and more water. This is due to future pressures from climate change, the need to supply demand from housing growth, industrial use and agriculture. But with this growing demand, our natural habitats must remain respected and protected.

- **PLANNING PERMISSION APPROVED TO REDEVELOP FOXHALL RECYCLING CENTRE.**

It was announced on February 3 that plans to expand and improve Foxhall recycling centre had been approved. This will also involve highway improvements to the site entrance. The benefits of this scheme will:

- Reduce the risk of queueing on the highway at peak times.
- Provide an improved space and layout for easier access.
- Improve accessibility and increase capacity by eliminating the need for site users to climb steps to access containers.
- Improve the Re-use Centre space.
- Introduce greater separation between public vehicles and larger vehicles.

The new design will provide queuing capacity within the site and improved access from the public highway. The raised level construction will improve access to the containers for site users by removing the need for stairs. It means containers can continue to be emptied without the need to close the site. Construction will commence this summer (2021) and will be fully operational in autumn 2022. Foxhall is a popular Recycling Centre and the Council's intention is to keep a service running at the site as much as possible whilst construction takes place. A pre planning public consultation took place last summer, comments and responses were considered as part of the planning application.

- **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. 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.

- **SALE COMPLETED FOR CHILTON WOODS LAND TO TAYLOR WIMPEY FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

On 9 February it was announced that the £35m sale of a significant part of the development site at Chilton Woods is now complete. Situated within the parishes of Chilton, Acton, Sudbury and Long Melford, the Chilton Woods site had been allocated for development in Babergh District Council's Core Strategy and was granted outline planning permission by Babergh District Council in 2018.

Taylor Wimpey has purchased a portion of the site and will deliver 1,150 new homes, a quarter of which will be affordable for rent or shared ownership. The housebuilder will also provide a village centre with shops, a pub and a community hall, large areas of new community woodland, land for a new primary school and pre-school, sports pitches, allotments and play areas for young people.

The outline planning permission also includes an employment development, county wildlife site, hotel and household waste recycling centre which Taylor Wimpey will not be delivering. Other landowners have the opportunity to bring forward developments which would be considered by Babergh District in the context of the outline planning permission.

There has been a long-term ambition shared by both the County Council and Babergh District Council to develop this site. The sale completion comes as the result of a great deal of diligent and detailed work led by the County Council and carried out by a number of technical experts and teams, despite the clear and present challenges of working throughout the pandemic over the last 12 months and the national

lockdown periods. The completion of the project demonstrates the County Council's ability to act commercially to help deliver Babergh District Council's objectives and much needed local houses.

The site is some 210 acres, consisting mostly of agricultural land, including part of a former local airfield. Acton Lane runs through the centre of the site, connecting Sudbury to Newman's Green and Acton to the north.

- **BUDGET INCREASED TO SUPPORT MOST VULNERABLE & SUFFOLK'S RECOVERY FROM COVID-19**

On February 11, Suffolk County Council agreed its budget for 2021/22. Following approval of its annual budget, Suffolk County Council is increasing its planned spending once again in 2021/22 to £597.9million, some £41million (7.4%) more than 2020/21. As part of this, the council will be spending £15.3million to address its ongoing Covid-19 costs, arising from the continuing local response to the pandemic. There are no proposed reductions in council services or personnel in 2021/22.

This year's budget is based on a 12-month financial settlement from government, rather than the 3 or 4 year agreement which is usually offered. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic over the last 11 months or so, the Government has continued to support local authorities as they adapt to serve communities, redeploy staff into alternative specialist roles and see income streams such as business rates and council tax reduce significantly. Suffolk County Council has received around £82.2 million in financial support during 2020 to meet Covid-19 related costs and whilst the challenges of continuing to respond, and in time recover, from Covid-19 remain, significant financial pressures will continue.

The council's income from council tax is going to be £7.9 million less than expected in 2021/22 and this shortfall will be met by using council reserves. Reserves can only be spent once and do not represent a viable long term financial solution. This effective use of reserves is made possible because Suffolk County Council has maintained a consistent approach to managing its finances effectively for a number of years, holding a proportionate level of reserves for this exact situation.

In 2021/22, general Council Tax will rise by 1.99 per cent, which represents an increase of £26.68 for a Band D property, from £1,224.70 in 2020, to £1,251.38. There is also a two per cent rise in the Social Care Precept for the forthcoming year as the council recognises the ongoing challenges with meeting the rising costs and rising demand for adult care services. This means a Band D property will see an overall rise of £53.55 this year for Suffolk County Council's element of their Council Tax bill, from £1,343.61 in 2020-21 to £1,397.16 in 2021-22.

It is fair to say that the pandemic this year has also significantly impacted the expected progress of the council's recognised transformation programmes, as it has been absolutely necessary to focus on community resilience. This has included redeploying staff into bespoke roles such as procuring personal

protective equipment (PPE) to support Suffolk's care sector and adapting working practices for frontline staff to maintain effective social distancing measures. As a result, the council is expecting a shortfall of around £7.8 million in projected savings for 2021. Whilst this means that further work is needed to identify potential future programmes of work, many of the new ways of working adopted by the council during 2020 because of the pandemic may actually offer potential alternative transformation savings as the organisation continues to adapt and tailor the way it works to deliver services for Suffolk's communities.

As part of the meeting, the council's Business Plan for 2021/22 was approved which draws attention to the ambitions for the authority over the next 12 months and its commitment to four key priorities:

- Living with Covid-19 and Suffolk's recovery
- Inclusive Growth
- Health, Care and Wellbeing
- Efficient and Effective Public Services

Throughout the business plan the Council presents its environmental thread demonstrating the range of projects and commitments in place as part of addressing the climate emergency that was declared in 2019. This includes details of the Council setting its Carbon Budget and the related work involved in achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030.

- **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.

- **DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY SENSOR "GATEWAY" ROLL-OUT LAUNCHED.**

Suffolk County Council is launching 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.

- **16 NEW COVID-19 RAPID TESTING CENTRES TO OPEN IN SUFFOLK**

On the 19 January 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 sites are planned to open over the next two weeks in Beccles, Bungay, Halesworth, Southwold, Aldeburgh, Saxmundham, Debenham, Framlingham, Woodbridge, Eye, Holbrook, Needham Market, Elmswell, Hadleigh, Nayland and Brandon - serving more rural communities across the county. 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.

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.

- **NEW HEDGEROW PLANTED IN GREAT BARTON AS PART OF SUFFOLK 2020 TREE PLANTING PROGRAMME**

On February 22, a new mixed-species hedgerow was planted in Great Barton as part of Suffolk County Council's Suffolk 2020 project. This project seeks to plant 100,000 trees and 15 kilometres of hedgerow over the next 12 months. This will create new habitats and wildlife corridors in multiple areas of Suffolk to support local biodiversity. It is the first of six farms on the Council's County Farm estate to benefit from the planting of new hedgerows this winter. Suffolk County Council is working closely with the Woodland Trust, the Suffolk Tree Warden Network, local landowners and contractors, and its County Farm tenants, to deliver this ambitious project. Giles Landscapes are undertaking the hedge planting during February and March, which will total around 10 Kilometres (just over six miles) of new hedgerow, consisting of around 50,000 plants of mixed native species such as hawthorn, field maple, hazel and dogwood.

Hedgerows are important features of Suffolk's agricultural landscape, providing a habitat for many species and 'corridors' for wildlife to move through them. All the the planting stock being used is UK sourced and grown to reduce plant health risks and improve biosecurity, with much of the stock being supplied by The Woodland Trust. Local straw mulch is being used to reduce competition from weeds and to help retain moisture as the hedges become established. The tenant farmers will continue to maintain the hedgerows located on their land. As part of the preparation for this project, 40 miles of existing hedges were surveyed with a drone and on foot by a local specialist company based in Suffolk, Hardy Woodlands and Forestry, utilising a range of mapping technology to provide data to the project team.

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

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