

# February 2025 Parish Newsletter

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## Primary school application deadline approaches

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Parents and carers have until Wednesday 15 January 2025 to submit an application to secure their child's place at a primary, infant or junior school for September 2025. Applications should be made for children born between 1 September 2020 and 31 August 2021 who are due to start primary school from September 2025.

An application for a full-time school place must be made even if a child is already attending a nursery class in an infant or primary school, a pre-school or a family hub next to a school site.

If you are planning to move house, or you think your circumstances may change before September, it is still essential to make an application on time using the child's current address. Further information to help parents and carers with this process is available at [www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions).

Applications should be made online as this will mean parents and carers will receive a confirmation of their application. They can then log onto the online service on the National Offer Day (Wednesday 16 April 2025) to see their school place offer and they will also be sent an email to confirm this offer on the same day.

If a parent or carer is unable to apply online then they should complete a paper application (CAF1), however these cannot be acknowledged, so it is suggested parents and carers obtain proof of postage. For those who completed paper applications, offer letters will be sent out by second class post on the National Offer Day.

School Travel eligibility is based on a child attending their nearest suitable school that would have had a place available. This might not be the catchment area school. To find out more about SCC's school travel policy please visit [www.suffolkonboard.com/schooltravel](http://www.suffolkonboard.com/schooltravel).

Applications can be made at [www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions), where further advice and guidance is also available. Alternatively, parents and carers can call 0345 600 0981 for a paper application (CAF1).

Last year, Suffolk County Council offered 96.5% of children a place at the primary school their parent or carer listed as their first preference when they applied on time. If parents and carers do not apply by the closing date, their application may not be dealt with until after places have been offered to those who applied on time.

## Council's budget prioritises vulnerable residents and essential services

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Suffolk County Council has unveiled its proposed budget for 2025/26, with a strong focus on supporting vulnerable residents across the county.

Under the proposals, the council's net budget would rise by 6.7%, from £752.9 million in 2024/25 to £803.7 million in 2025/26. Key allocations include:

- £18.1 million extra for children's services, ensuring continued support for young people and families in need
- £35.2 million extra for adult care, aimed at addressing the growing demand for social care services.

To help fund these essential services, the council is proposing a 4.99% rise in Council Tax. This would consist of a 2.99% increase in general Council Tax and an additional 2% specifically for adult care services.

This means the costs for a household would be:

- **Band B property:** £24.67 per week, a £1.17 increase from 2024-25 (Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
- **Band D property:** £31.72 per week, a £1.51 increase from 2024-25.

The council will also receive £12.1 million of the additional £880 million allocated by the government for adult and children's social care. It also expects to receive £2.2 million of the £263 million earmarked for a new Children's Services Prevention Grant.

To balance the books, the council has also identified £10.9 million in additional savings, building on the £17.5 million approved last year. This brings the total savings to £28.4 million for the 2025/26 financial year.

**Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills, said:**

"We remain committed to supporting vulnerable children and adults in Suffolk. Despite the financial challenges posed by increasing demand and broader economic pressures, we are proposing a balanced budget without drawing on unallocated reserves.

"It is deeply disappointing that, despite our significant deprivation levels, Suffolk will receive nothing from the government's new £600 million Recovery Grant. Further, the scrapping of the Services Grant and Rural Services Delivery Grant will see £3.7 million struck from our budget.

"Nevertheless, we understand the pressures facing families and businesses in Suffolk, and that is why we will continue to ensure every pound we spend delivers the best value for our residents."

The budget proposals will be presented at a Scrutiny Meeting on Tuesday, 14 January 2025. The meeting will be live-streamed on [Suffolk County Council's YouTube channel](#), and relevant papers can be viewed on [the committee minutes page](#).

The final budget will be debated and voted on at a Full Council meeting on Thursday, 13 February 2025.

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### Unique landscape to be changed forever by pylons

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A large area of landscape on the Norfolk/Suffolk border with particular uniqueness, rivalling those of other nationally protected landscapes, is set to be decimated by pylons as part of National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury project.

In a letter to both Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council, and other local leaders, National Grid has outlined that it has decided to install overhead lines through the Waveney Valley, rather than running cables underground, as they had set out in their previous consultation.

This is a significant blow to local communities and the natural environment, especially following last year's [Valued Landscape Assessment](#), a report jointly commissioned by Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council.

The report concluded that "the length of the Waveney Valley expresses many special qualities, and in the context of Suffolk and Norfolk, it is considered to be a valued landscape. Conserving and enhancing the special qualities articulated in this report is a key aspiration of existing planning policy."

**Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:**

"This decision not to underground any of the proposed pylons through the Waveney Valley, is nothing short of contemptible. The study we commissioned saw the area recognised as a valued landscape and National Grid's plans will wreak untold damage on it. There was a clear alternative to this and they've chosen not to take it.

"What I find particularly flagrant - if this what National Grid will press ahead with - is a lack of any suggestion of mitigation or compensation package for the local area.

"This council has engaged fully with discussions and consultations on Norwich to Tilbury, providing additional evidence to help protect the affected communities and environment in the Waveney Valley. We have worked closely and in good faith with National Grid, and yet they have not delivered a fair deal for the local area. There is nothing on the table from them, or Ofgem, to soften this blow.

"Yet again, I see this as more evidence of the government's short-sighted and rushed mission to decarbonise the grid by 2030. Their influence is pushing through the cheapest and fastest

options, with no consideration for local residents, businesses or the environment – we are still to see any progress from them on community benefit schemes, to support situations just like this.

“As a council, we still maintain that the opportunity to underground the whole pylon run between Norwich and Tilbury, using HVDC cables, has not been properly explored. Revisiting the 2030 decarbonisation target and pausing the project would allow that to happen.”

**Councillor Kay Mason Billig, Leader of Norfolk County Council, said:**

“The decision by National Grid to plough on with the destruction of our countryside is disgraceful. There seems to be a determination to create an energy wasteland across Norfolk and Suffolk, with no regard for the local impact.

“The Waveney Valley is well known for its unspoilt rural tranquillity, historic buildings and rich natural habitats. National Grid have clearly disregarded local views and seem determined to cover the landscape with miles of pylons.

“We recognise the need to create a secure and clean energy system, but this can’t come at the unmitigated expense our communities and natural environment.

“National Grid have not provided any benefits for local communities or businesses associated with their current plans to upgrade the transmission network. There is no clear plan to upgrade the existing energy infrastructure in Norfolk needed to deliver new homes and jobs. National Grid’s current plans will simply see electricity generated from offshore wind passing through the county with no tangible benefits for Norfolk as a whole.”

The councils will now look to take up their concerns with National Grid and discuss the issue further.

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## Suffolk commits to devolution fast track

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Following an invitation from ministers, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet today agreed to recommend Suffolk for inclusion in the government’s Devolution Priority Programme (DPP), which would see the creation of a directly elected Mayor (likely covering Suffolk and Norfolk) and the replacement of existing council structures with a streamlined unitary council being set up.

The decision followed a debate and vote at a meeting of all county councillors.

**Speaking following the debate, Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:**

“Today marks the start of arguably one of the biggest decisions this council will take in its 50 plus-year history.

“We need to think what is best for the people and businesses of Suffolk to whom we have a duty to make the difficult decisions – even if that decision means the end of the council or councils on which we sit.”

The government’s English Devolution White Paper outlines plans for broader and deeper devolution, coupled with a programme of coordinated local government reorganisation.

Key to these proposals is the restructuring of councils in two-tier areas like Suffolk, shifting from district, borough, and county councils to unitary councils. The government argues that unitary councils can deliver better outcomes for residents and save money that can be reinvested in public services.

Alongside reorganisation, the government is also proposing to create new Mayoral Authorities – with a single directly elected Mayor covering larger geographies (such as Norfolk and Suffolk) and with powers over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, health improvement and blue light services.

**CLlr Hicks continued:**

“Changes of this scale create an opportunity to streamline local government, empower joined-up decision making, save taxpayers money and ensure councils are resistant to economic challenges.

“These are not ‘nice to haves’ or ‘aspirations, they are fundamental pillars of the system delivering the best possible public services, with clarity, accountability and delivered in a financially sustainable way.

“These are the goals on which we must focus if we are to do the right thing for Suffolk.”

Suffolk County Council has now written to the government expressing its desire to be at the front of the queue for devolution and local government reorganisation. A decision is expected by the end of the month.

If Suffolk is approved as part of the DPP, more detailed proposals, engagement and Government-led consultation would follow.

**CLlr Hicks continued:**

“To achieve remarkable things and seize significant opportunities, you must be willing to take on potential uncertainties. I want Suffolk to be at the front of the queue, setting the agenda on devolution – not following everyone else when identikit solutions are imposed.

“The proposal to join the DPP is not just a step forward; it is a leap towards a brighter, more prosperous future for Suffolk.”

Papers for the meetings can be viewed at <https://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk>.

They are also available to watch back on the council’s YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/SuffolkCC>

## Latest changes to Sea Link plans are not enough

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Suffolk County Council continues to object to proposed plans for National Grid's Sea Link project, despite recent changes to the scheme.

The council still has concerns regarding significant issues, including:

- Permanent access to the converter station site, resulting in the potential for construction traffic seven days a week
- Core working hours at the site of 7am to 5pm on Sundays and Bank Holidays, giving no respite to local residents and businesses
- The unsuitability of Benhall Railway Bridge as an access route, including the potential for dangerous queuing of traffic on the A12 during construction
- A survey of the Benhall Railway Bridge, commissioned by Suffolk Highways has highlighted significant concerns regarding its capacity to accommodate abnormal loads
- Plans to relocate of the Fromus Crossing bridge further north, with a still-expected height of up to 6 metres, are likely to result in notable impacts to heritage assets

The council believes that a coordinated and integrated access solution between the major energy infrastructure projects affecting the county, including Sizewell C and National Grid, would considerably reduce many of these specific issues and community impacts.

### **Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:**

"We have no option but to continue to object to National Grid's plans which would not only have stark environmental impact but remain wholly unacceptable to local residents and businesses.

"The lack of any movement from National Grid is frustrating as we continue to press the case for a coordinated access solution between the major energy infrastructure projects in the area, should they go ahead.

"As an example on the Sea Link project, we have repeatedly engaged with National Grid to propose alternatives to the Fromus Crossing – the plans to move the crossing, 40m to the north, will result in a greater visual impact on the key views from the south of the conservation area, the Grade II Church of St John the Baptist, and the Grade II listed Hurts Hall.

"The council also has significant concerns regarding the capacity of Benhall Bridge to accommodate the huge abnormal loads that National Grid propose. Taking this route not only risks huge delays to other traffic but the required improvements, if indeed they are possible to deliver, risk disruption on a key rail route that, as well as serving local residents, will play an important role in the construction of Sizewell C.

"We have always acknowledged the need to increase domestic energy generation and deliver energy security to the UK. But this must not happen without due consideration for our local communities."

[Suffolk County Council formally objected to National Grid's Sea Link project in August 2024](#), citing the concerns above, among others.

None of National Grid's recent changes will affect this position, and the council has outlined many more technical concerns in its [latest response to the plans](#).

The council has also noted significant public interest in the design process of the converter station site. It urges National Grid to publish the findings of the Design Review Panel to help all concerned to understand the design approach to the converter station site.

National Grid expects to submit its application for development consent in early 2025.

### [Detailed report provides blueprint for changes to Suffolk's SEND services](#)

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A report has been published that provides the most detailed assessment of need for SEND services in Suffolk and will be used as a blueprint for immediate change.

The forensic 177-page document delves into current arrangements, future anticipated need and looks at gaps and challenges in SEND provision. This assessment highlights the increasing demand for SEND services, the challenges faced by families and professionals, and the importance of improving service provision to ensure equitable outcomes for all.

As a result of this analysis, a series of recommendations have been made to further shape improvements to SEND services. Known as the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Needs Assessment, the report will be discussed at the Health and Wellbeing Board on Thursday 16 January.

Some of the key findings and recommendations in the report include:

- A significant rise in demand for SEND services, with projections suggesting further increases in the coming years
- The importance of early intervention, timely diagnoses, and accessible services to address complex and multiple needs
- Strategic priorities emphasising communication, transition support, and whole system improvements to meet evolving demands.

The report also captures the voices of children and young people, parents, and practitioners to ensure lived experiences inform future strategies. The Suffolk Parent Carer Forum was involved in collating the report.

**Claire Smith, Chair of the Forum, said:**

["Families' perspectives are essential for predicting the future of SEND in Suffolk and play a crucial role in recognising current and future gaps.](#)

["It is vital we prioritise the outcomes for the children and young people of Suffolk."](#)

The report and the recommendations made, will become part of the Local Area Priority Action Plan for widescale SEND reform and improvement. This plan was a requirement following the Ofsted and CQC inspection in November 2023.

The local area partnership which delivers SEND services is made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB.

**Sarah-Jane Smedmor, Executive Director of Children & Young People's Services at Suffolk County Council said:**

“This is a timely report furnishing us with data-rich analysis which will help us make big decisions about the future of SEND provision in Suffolk.

“It allows us to see the bigger picture by pulling together all the details around the children and young people who use our services, what support they need and where there may be gaps. It means we can identify priorities and plan our resources better to fulfil those needs.”

Ten recommendations have been made as a result of this needs assessment. One of those includes addressing delays in assessment, diagnosis and treatment for a wide range of SEND needs. Another recommendation looks at the future planning for the provision of SEND services in Suffolk, noting that the needs and numbers of children and young people with SEND are likely to increase further in the coming years.

Helpful comparisons are also drawn between Suffolk figures, other councils and England averages throughout the report. One of those includes the average spend on each SEND child or young person in Suffolk, which was £155 in 2022/23 (East of England £95 and England £100). Figures also look at the percentage of children and young people assessed and issued with an education, health and care plan for the first time. In Suffolk in 2023 this percentage was 99% of children, compared with 94% across England and 93% with comparable councils.

The report can be found here: [Suffolk SEND Needs Assessment](#).

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## Council making net zero gains, but still work to do

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Suffolk County Council continues to bring down its carbon emissions, with significant reductions from council-owned street lighting, vehicles and buildings, but there is still work to do to reach its ambitious target of net zero by 2030.

[A report going to the council's Cabinet](#) (28 January 2025) reviews progress since the declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019. The report finds that emissions across the areas within the council's direct control, such as energy consumption in council buildings and vehicles (categorised as Scope 1 & 2 emissions), have fallen by a further 8% over the past year, contributing to a 43% drop since 2019. When taking account of the council's switch to a renewable electricity tariff, this becomes a 75% reduction.

However, when calculating its overall net zero progress, the council also reports on many emissions where it has influence but less direct control. These are known as Scope 3 emissions. These include things like home to school transport, home-working, and staff commuting and travel for work in their own vehicles.

These make up 65% of the council's reported emissions, which the council is currently projecting will reduce by 48% by 2030 showing the scale of the remaining challenge.

Since 2019, when it declared a climate emergency, the council's carbon reduction successes include:

- Street and traffic lights down by 57%
- Diesel and petrol vehicles down by 50%
- Gas and oil use in buildings down by 37%
- Staff commuting down by 30%
- Electricity use in buildings down by 25%

Nationally, the council is making impressive strides with its own estate, standing out as one of the three leading county councils in England for reductions on Scope 1 & 2 emissions, according to analysis of published reports.

**Councillor Philip Faircloth-Mutton, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Environment, Communities and Equality, said:**

"Overall, our carbon emissions have decreased by 7,740 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e since 2019, which is encouraging.

"We're making great progress in areas where we have most control, such as our buildings, vehicles and energy use. We are also seeing a long-term reduction in our costs - saving more than £500,000 on energy bills for our buildings alone as a result of this work.

"With the successes we're having with reducing emissions and energy bills in our own buildings and operations, I hope we can be an example to other Suffolk businesses that, no matter what their size, can succeed on their net zero journeys too."

"Although our latest report suggests that we are not on currently course to meet our net zero target across all scopes, as new products, services and opportunities become increasingly available, I think greater reductions will be achievable.

"It's no secret that there's still much work to do. Specifically, the Scope 3 emissions that we report on, which is our biggest challenge to achieving net zero.

"While most of these emissions are beyond our direct control, we still include the data in our overall progress as they are still driven by council activity.

"Despite these challenges, we remain firmly committed to carbon reduction and continue to embed climate action in everything that we do."

## Make Your Health a Priority with an NHS Health Check

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**A column by Councillor Steve Wiles, Cabinet Member for Public Health.**

It's always a great time to think about your health and well-being. One of the best decisions you can make is to prioritise your health by taking advantage of a simple, free, and potentially life-saving service: the NHS Health Check. This quick check-up could make a huge difference in your life by detecting early signs of serious health conditions before they become more severe.

The NHS Health Check is available to all adults aged 40 to 74 that aims to identify those at risk of developing serious, but potentially avoidable, conditions like heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and kidney disease. Many of these health issues can go unnoticed for years, silently building up risk factors such as high blood pressure, or high cholesterol. These conditions can lead to serious consequences if left untreated, but the good news is that they can be detected early through a simple, painless check-up.

I recently had my own NHS Health Check, and it was an easy and reassuring process. It gave me peace of mind and helped me take proactive steps to stay healthy. I highly encourage everyone who is eligible to take advantage of this free service.

When you book your appointment, you'll be asked about your family medical history, lifestyle, and habits such as your diet, exercise, and smoking. A healthcare professional will take a few basic tests, including checking your blood pressure, cholesterol levels, weight, and BMI. You'll also be assessed for your risk of certain conditions. If any concerns arise, you'll be guided on the next steps, whether that involves further tests, lifestyle changes, or referrals to specialists. You'll also receive advice on how to make healthier choices that can improve your health.

Many health conditions don't show symptoms in the early stages. For example, high blood pressure often doesn't present any signs until it's too late. The beauty of the NHS Health Check is that it gives you the chance to take control of your health, make changes, and prevent serious issues down the road. Even if the check-up shows no concerns, it serves as a great reminder to stay on top of your health and make better choices for your well-being.

In addition to empowering you to manage your health, the NHS Health Check helps the NHS prevent future, more expensive treatments by identifying issues early. This means better overall healthcare for everyone.

So, as you set your resolutions this New Year, make sure one of them is to take charge of your health by booking your NHS Health Check. It's simple, quick, and free. Just contact your GP surgery or visit [www.suffolkfed.org.uk/healthcare-services/nhs-health-checks](http://www.suffolkfed.org.uk/healthcare-services/nhs-health-checks) to arrange an appointment. Some areas even offer health checks at pharmacies or other community venues.

**Dr Ruth Bushaway, Medical Director at Suffolk GP Federation also said the following;**

"The NHS Health Check is an excellent preventative measure. By detecting risks early, we can help patients make informed decisions about their lifestyle and well-being. This check could be life-saving, and we encourage everyone who is eligible to book one."

The NHS Health Check is an invaluable tool that could have a major impact on your health. Take the first step to a healthier future – book your check today for a longer, healthier life!

## Suffolk County Council Collaborates with Ipswich Town Football Club to Launch Stop Smoking Campaign: 'Never Stop Trying'

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Suffolk County Council, in association with Ipswich Town Football Club, is excited to launch a powerful new stop smoking campaign encouraging people to never stop trying on their journey to quit smoking.

The campaign highlights real-life stories of struggle, perseverance, and success, reminding people that while quitting smoking is difficult, the benefits of stopping are well worth it, no matter how many attempts it takes.

The campaign's theme of persistence is echoed through a compelling new video that features Eddy and James, two Suffolk residents who have faced the challenges of quitting smoking and are now sharing their personal experiences. Their stories emphasise that quitting may involve setbacks, but it's important to *keep trying*.

This message mirrors the journey of Ipswich Town Football Club, who spent 22 years fighting to return to the Premier League—a long and challenging journey, but one that proves that with perseverance, you *can* achieve your goal.

The campaign directs people who are thinking about quitting to Feel Good Suffolk – the county's stop smoking service – who are ready to help, whatever stage someone is at. NHS figures show that smokers are up to three times more likely to quit with support from their local service.

### **Cllr Steve Wiles, Cabinet Member for Public Health, said:**

"I am proud to support this campaign, which is not just about quitting smoking, but about changing lives,"

"By sharing the stories of real people like Eddy and James we want to inspire others to take that crucial first step. This campaign is all about supporting people in their quitting journey and showing them that they can succeed in the end with the right support. It's also a great opportunity to promote the support that Feel Good Suffolk can provide, helping hundreds of Suffolk people with their journey to quit smoking.

### **Dan Palfrey, Director of Foundation at Ipswich Town said:**

"We are proud to be part of this important campaign and to support our local community in

making healthier choices. As a football club, we are committed to promoting well-being both on and off the pitch, and we encourage everyone who wants to quit smoking to seek the support they need.”

The Never Stop trying campaign is part of the national goal to create a smoke-free generation, as outlined in the national strategy “Stopping the Start: Our New Plan to Create a Smokefree Generation”. The aim is to reduce smoking rates in England to below 5% by 2030, ultimately building a healthier future for all.

Smoking is a key public health issue in Suffolk, contributing to nearly 1,000 deaths a year. Tobacco presents the single greatest risk for early deaths in Suffolk, which means that using smoked tobacco products poses a greater risk than other issues such as high blood pressure, obesity, alcohol, and air pollution. In 2024 alone, smoking cost Suffolk an estimated £703m in health and social care costs, lost productivity and smoking related fires.

Those seeking support on their quitting journey should visit [Feel Good Suffolk Stop Smoking](#). The service offers various methods designed to assist people at every stage, whether it’s one-on-one coaching, phone support, or digital tools.

Watch the campaign film at [www.feelgoodsuffolk.co.uk/NeverStopTrying/](http://www.feelgoodsuffolk.co.uk/NeverStopTrying/) and follow Feel Good Suffolk on Facebook or Instagram.

## Ageing well: Building Stronger, Healthier Communities for our Older Residents

### **A column by Councillor Steve Wiles, Cabinet Member for Public Health.**

I’m proud to share the key findings and recommendations from this year’s Annual Public Health Report, led by the Director of Public Health Stuart Keeble, which focuses on the vital theme of “Ageing Well.” provides a timely opportunity to reflect on how we can better support people as they age in Suffolk and create communities where everyone can live healthier, happier, and more fulfilling lives in later years.

Ageing is something that touches all our lives, whether we’re growing older ourselves, caring for a loved one, or thinking ahead to what kind of life we want to lead in the future. In Suffolk, we are fortunate to have a growing population of older adults who bring tremendous value to our communities. Whether it’s through volunteering, caregiving, or simply sharing their life experience, older adults are a cornerstone of our social fabric.

However, the way we think about ageing needs to evolve. Too often, older adults are seen through a narrow lens of decline and dependency. The reality is far more diverse. People experience ageing in profoundly different ways, influenced by their health, economic circumstances, and the opportunities available to them throughout their lives. Suffolk’s 2024 Annual Public Health Report makes it clear that we need to challenge outdated stereotypes and work together to create environments that enable all older people to thrive.

The report highlights the importance of age-friendly communities—places that actively support older adults to live healthy, independent, and fulfilling lives. This means ensuring older people have access to good housing, transport, health services, and opportunities to connect socially. It also means addressing the barriers that older adults may face, such as digital exclusion, loneliness, or limited access to public spaces.

One of the key findings of the report is the impact of loneliness and isolation on health. We know that being socially connected is just as important for our wellbeing as being physically healthy, yet many older adults report feeling cut off from their communities. This is where local action can make a real difference. From befriending schemes to community centres and intergenerational activities, there are many ways we can build stronger connections and reduce loneliness.

To shape this year's report, Suffolk County Council worked closely with Healthwatch Suffolk, gathering insights directly from older residents about their experiences and aspirations. Their feedback paints a clear picture of what matters most to our older population: maintaining independence, staying active, and feeling valued by their communities.

The Integrated Care Academy also conducted three Ageing Well Challenge Labs, bringing together experts, stakeholders, and community leaders to explore innovative ways of supporting healthy ageing. These collaborative sessions highlighted practical solutions, such as improving access to physical activity programs, tackling ageism in the workplace, and ensuring people can navigate health and social care systems with ease.

As a council, we are committed to turning the recommendations from this report into meaningful action. This includes working with our partners in health, housing, transport, and the voluntary sector to ensure older people can access the support they need. For example, initiatives like the Warm Homes Suffolk scheme are helping older adults stay safe and healthy during the winter months, while our focus on active travel is ensuring that people of all ages can move around their communities safely and confidently.

But this isn't just about services—it's about attitudes, too. We all have a role to play in making Suffolk a place where ageing is celebrated and supported. That means challenging ageist attitudes, valuing the contributions of older people, and creating opportunities for all generations to connect and learn from one another.

As we look to the future, the challenge of supporting an ageing population is one we must embrace together. I encourage everyone to read the full 2024 Annual Public Health Report and think about how you can play a part in making Suffolk an age-friendly county. Whether you're a local business, a community group, or simply a neighbour, there's so much we can do to support the wellbeing of our older residents.

Ageing is a journey we all share, and by working together, we can ensure that Suffolk is a place where everyone, regardless of age, can live their best life.

For more information, or to access the full report, visit the Healthy Suffolk website at [www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/jsna](http://www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/jsna)

## Celebrating the past, present and future of the Brecks

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The Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership Scheme, which was due come to an end in March 2025, has been given the green light to extend its activities until October 2025.

This news was announced at a conference to recognise the success of the scheme in the Brecks, which took place on Thursday 30 January 2025 at The Carnegie and Guildhall in Thetford.

Over 100 attendees at the event celebrated the accomplishments of the project which began in 2020, following a five-year grant of £1.97 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Using the money raised by the National Lottery players, the scheme has been creating positive and lasting change for people and communities in and around the Brecks.

The project has over-delivered on many of its outcomes and due to underspend in the original funding, the National Lottery Heritage Fund has approved an application to extend the work into new outcomes.

At the conference, talks, exhibitions and film screenings highlighted the achievements of the Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership Scheme so far, including projects such as:

- **Healing Waters** - introduced over 700 people to outdoor swimming, including those with additional needs and their carers. Also trained 13 open water lifeguards and introduced 94 swimmers to basic lifesaving skills
- **Lost Ponds** - restored 15 ice age pingo ponds. A first-of-a-kind project attracting a lot of interest from researchers, ecologists and geologists
- **Testing the Water** - more than 100 volunteers tested water from 75 ponds, streams, rivers, lakes and ditches, measuring for pollutants and water quality, and detecting which species of fish, amphibians and aquatic mammals were living in, or visiting the water.

Some of the data to show the impact of the scheme, includes:

- 1,484 volunteers involved
- 4,522 students involved
- 2,750 people trained
- 83 kilometres of new/improved access
- 8 kilometres of river corridor unlocked

The event also looked ahead to what legacy the scheme may deliver across the Brecks.

**Councillor Philip Faircloth-Mutton, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Environment, Communities and Equality, said:**

“This conference was to celebrate the people, projects and achievements of the last five years in the Brecks.

“It’s great news that the scheme will be able continue throughout the summer, and deliver even more for the area, the wildlife and the local community.

“Throughout the scheme, so many organisations, volunteers and experts have come together to run outdoor activity opportunities and conservation projects, protecting and enhancing the local environment in and around the Brecks.

“We continue to work closely with Norfolk County Council on plans to protect the future of the Brecks, following the end of the project later this year.”

**Emma Fernandes-Lopes, Committee Member for England, Midlands & East at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said:**

“It’s been fantastic to see this project making a lasting difference in the Brecks over the past five years. Thanks to National Lottery players, our £2million in funding has made possible innovative partnerships to preserve rare natural heritage, and helped communities to connect with the landscapes and wildlife around them.”

The Brecks is an invaluable part of the UK’s landscape, covering nearly 400 square miles:

- Over 40% of the landscape is covered by conservation areas
- Nearly 13,000 species have been recorded in the area
- 28% of the UK’s rarest species are found there
- It contains Thetford Forest and Kings Forest, making the largest lowland forest in the UK
- It is home to eight registered parks and gardens, 157 scheduled monuments and over 1,000 listed buildings

A small partnership delivery team hosted by Suffolk County Council has facilitated successful management of the project, bringing together more than 60 local, regional and national groups, as well as many volunteers - all with a central vision and plan.