

County Councillor Report



Parish Councils, April 2025

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Devolution / Unitary Governance– As requested by the Minister for Local Government, Mr. McMahon, SCC has prepared an Interim Plan for how it recommends going about organising services in Suffolk under a single unitary governance structure. Alternatives proposed by the Borough of Ipswich and District Councils include two or three unitaries, it will be up to the government to determine which form is preferred. SCC's proposal was submitted by the deadline of 21st March, refer to: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/asset-library/2025-03-21-suffolkcc-lgr-interim-plan-final.pdf> The postponement of County Council elections in 2025, and possibly also in 2026 elections is a result of the short timeframe for organising new boundaries and governance arrangements.

Public Engagement on Devolution - A public engagement is open until 13th April and is focussed on creating a Mayoral Combined County Authority across Norfolk and Suffolk. This public engagement is part of a statutory process to establish the legal framework for a Combined County Authority. The government will consider responses to this consultation as it prepares the necessary legislation. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/norfolk-and-suffolk-devolution>

Suffolk Libraries to be taken back In-House – Rather than contracting out the library service when the present 6-year contract ends in June 2025, Suffolk's 45 libraries would be taken back under the ownership and control of SCC. All would remain open with no change to opening hours, investment would be made in new mobile libraries and computers. Plans are subject to a formal Cabinet decision on 18th March 2025. The transition would commence in June.

Large Scale Solar Proposals - Update – Multiple solar proposals with Battery Electric Storage Sites (BESS) are proceeding in Mid Suffolk. SCC is supporting communities impacted by the Eco-Power 250-megawatt solar farm and battery energy storage system (BESS) which includes over 1,500 acres at multiple sites around Yaxley, Brome, Gislingham, Mellis, and Eye. SCC notes:

- Unprecedented pace of planning application
- Inappropriate proposal which would remove quality farmland
- Serious concerns for welfare of local communities

EcoPower is proposing the bare minimum of public engagement and is likely to submit its application to the Planning Inspectorate in around 12 months from now. A non-statutory consultation is open until 18th April. Suffolk County Council has created online resources to support communities who are facing planning proposals for these nationally significant infrastructure projects, refer to www.suffolk.gov.uk The EcoPower Suffolk consultation is available at www.ecopowersuffolk.com

Yaxley Field Battery Electric Storage Site, Yaxley - DC/24/05535 / Full Planning Application with Environmental Statement - Erection of a Battery Energy Storage System and associated infrastructure including access, drainage, landscaping and other incidental works. This proposal has been subject of a holding objection from National Gas Transmission PLT because NGT operates a high-pressure gas pipeline that runs through the land proposed for development. However it may possibly go ahead if certain health and safety criteria are met:

FEEDER PIPELINE 5 - DISS COMPRESSOR TEE to STOWMARKET.

The pipeline has a 12.2m easement in operation (6.1m either side of pipe). No development, construction or landscaping is permitted within the easement without formal written approval from National Gas Transmission. Refer to Field Yaxley - planning reference [DC/24/05535](#).

National Grid Pylon Scheme - Update – Public consultation has recently closed about adjustments to the route in areas close to Palgrave, Mellis and Gislingham.

National Grid has made some adjustments to the routes in Palgrave and Mellis and east of Gislingham; earlier proposals for undergrounding in the Waveney Valley have been rejected. Refer to [Norwich to Tilbury Frequently asked questions | National Grid ET](#)

The County Council's position is as follows: *"We are bitterly disappointed that pylons are still the go-to solution for this project, and particularly those cutting across the Waveney Valley's valued landscape, rather than going underground, or ideally offshore. We still firmly contend that less damaging alternatives to the project have not been properly considered.*

Information is available on – nationalgrid.com/norwich-to-tilbury

Major Planning – Eye Petrol Station DC/22/00416 - This application received outline approval in November 2024, full approval is pending subject to agreement by the applicant to fund a public a public walking and cycling route from Cunningham Drive into and through the Airfield area. This requires a commitment for £75,000 through Section 106 to cover most of the related costs. I am in process of confirming that above ground storage tanks will be installed to protect the underlying aquifer, as recommended by the EA.

Please get in touch with me if you have questions or comments: Jessica.fleming@suffolk.gov.uk
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