

County Councillor Report



Report for Parish Councils, June 2026

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1. Council challenges legality of Government's Suffolk reorganisation

The County Council has formally challenged the proposals and has issued a pre-action letter to the Secretary of State. The Council's position is that the decision may be unlawful, with concerns that Ministers have exceeded their legal powers, not followed the required statutory process, and departed from their own published criteria. The Government has been asked to respond by 12 June 2026. If these concerns are not addressed, the Council is considering further legal action through judicial review. The purpose of this challenge is to seek clarity and ensure that any changes to local government structures are lawful, transparent, and in the best interests of Suffolk residents and communities. Further updates to follow as the situation develops.

2. Council moves to review 'climate emergency'

Suffolk County Council's new administration is proposing to review its 2019 climate emergency declaration, with a decision expected in July. The aim is to ensure that all environmental work delivers clear benefits, practical outcomes, and good value for residents, with funding directed to where it can have the greatest impact. Early changes have already identified potential savings of up to £175,000 a year by moving to a more cost-effective electricity tariff. The Council remains committed to protecting and enhancing Suffolk's environment, but with a stronger focus on delivering measurable, real-world outcomes. Locally, this includes monitoring major proposals such as the EcoPower solar project to ensure impacts on agricultural land and wildlife are carefully considered, alongside tracking the Suffolk Water Recycling and Storage project to help secure long-term water supply. Parish councils can also benefit from direct local funding to support smaller-scale environmental improvements, including tree planting, biodiversity initiatives and enhancements to village green spaces, helping communities take practical steps to improve their local environment.

3. Healty Start Scheme – June 2026

Suffolk County Council is encouraging greater uptake of the Healthy Start Scheme, with eligibility still unclaimed by over 1,000 families despite improved participation of 77% (up from 50% in 2022); this equates to around £1 million in unclaimed support over four years. Payments increased in April 2026 to £9.30/week for children under one and £4.65/week for pregnant women and children aged 1–4, with families able to receive approximately £1,000 per child over the first four years, alongside free vitamins and support for essential food costs. The Council is working with partners to raise awareness and improve uptake.

4. Suffolk businesses to benefit from expanded apprenticeship support scheme

Suffolk County Council is expanding its Apprenticeship Levy Support Scheme to help local businesses and residents. The scheme allows larger organisations to transfer unused training funds to smaller

businesses, reducing or removing the cost of taking on apprentices. This approach has already been successful in Norfolk and is now being rolled out more widely in Suffolk. It is particularly beneficial for small and rural businesses that want to invest in skills but face financial barriers. For residents, this means more opportunities to gain qualifications and access good local jobs, while also helping strengthen the local economy. If any local businesses are interested, they can contact the council's apprenticeship team for further advice and support.

6. Local Infrastructure & Energy Projects (NSIPs)

The Hartismere division continues to experience significant pressure from Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) and localized energy storage applications.

Ipswich Northern Bypass: Following a motion during the Suffolk County Council meeting on May 21, 2026, the council passed an amendment to explore all potential solutions to the congestion caused by Orwell Bridge closures. This includes reconsidering a second bridge, a tunnel underneath the River Orwell, or rail improvements. The council agreed that an officer report evaluating these various infrastructure solutions must be presented to the new cabinet no later than September 2026.

National Grid Pylon Scheme (East Anglia GREEN): Following extensive local feedback and representations from parish councils, National Grid has been assessing minor routing modifications to the proposed 400 kV overhead pylon line.

- Targeted Impacts: Specific focus remains on the sections passing between Palgrave and Mellis.
- Council Position: SCC continues to mandate that project promoters adhere strictly to the newly established Community Engagement and Wellbeing Supplementary Guidance to minimize landscape disruption and support affected communities.

EcoPower Suffolk Solar Project: I am fully behind Parish Council's robust feedback regarding the Environmental Statement scoping consultation. I share your serious concerns regarding the loss of Grade 3 agricultural land, the disruption to vital wildlife corridors (such as the red deer and brown hare transit routes), and the threat of heavy construction traffic damaging rural farm tracks and drainage ditches. Residents should also be aware that they are not legally obligated to sign any licence agreements proposed by EcoPower.

Suffolk Water Recycling, Transfer and Storage (SWRTS): We are tracking the proposed reservoir site located just north of the Four Oaks Caravan Park, intended to relieve long-term water supply issues across Hartismere. I am pushing to ensure that any future construction phase includes strictly defined HGV traffic routing to prevent community disruption and safeguard local cycling routes.

7. Highways and Community Safety

Flexible Criteria for 20mph Speed Limits: The County Council is updating its criteria for implementing 20mph speed limits. Rather than enforcing a blanket approach, this change gives parish councils and local communities a much stronger mechanism to introduce lower limits in specific residential areas and high-pedestrian zones where they are actively wanted and needed.

Routine Maintenance: I am monitoring ongoing local matters, ensuring highways reporting tools are used effectively. Highways currently report of a staffing issue which is currently causing delays, and I am meeting with Highways on the 16th to discuss this issue as part of the wider meeting.

Highways Community Self Help Scheme: Parishes can use this scheme to tackle small highways issues—such as cutting back vegetation or cleaning signs—more quickly, with guidance from Suffolk Highways. It offers a simple way to take local action, although it's limited to low-risk work and not major repairs. More details can be found on this link:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/highway-maintenance/community-self-help-scheme>

8. Locality Budgets

Each Suffolk County Councillor is given £6,000 per annum to spend on local initiatives and projects for their division. I am now accepting applications for ideas that meet the funding criteria.

Division Contact and Support

If you have specific issues regarding local county services, school transport allocations, or unresolved highways defects, please contact me with your relevant case reference numbers.

Please get in touch with me if you have questions or comments: Paul.Bains@suffolk.gov.uk Tel: 07889066305