

Annual Parish Newsletter

I stood for election in May 2017 and have the honour to represent Thingoe North for a fourth term.

Suffolk passes 90% fibre broadband milestone as commitment to connect entire county is reiterated

On 21 July 2017, new figures were published that show that nine out of every 10 homes and businesses in Suffolk now have superfast broadband available. Suffolk County Council and Openreach have signed a new contract to extend coverage to 98% during 2020. Plans are being developed for the remaining 2% to complete the Better Broadband for Suffolk programme.

Around 315,000 properties now have the option of using fibre broadband, an increase of more than 127,000 from when the Better Broadband for Suffolk programme started deployment in 2013. It comes as Suffolk County Council reiterates its commitment to provide high-speed internet access for all properties in the county – no-one will be left behind.

Energy Efficiency grants now available for local retail businesses in Suffolk

In August 2017, it was announced that recent changes to European funding rules mean that retail businesses across Suffolk can access grants for energy efficiency measures. Suffolk County Council is collaborating with Norfolk County Council to use EU funding to support businesses from a range of sectors. A number of shops have already benefitted from free and independent advice and a change in the funding regulations means that shops can now also access grants towards the capital costs of any energy saving measure.

The Carbon Trust calculate that taking 20 per cent off the energy spend of any business is equivalent to a 5 per cent increase in sales.

Suffolk County Council's Children's Services continue to improve following Ofsted pilot inspection

On 6 November 2017, it was announced that the council's Children's Services are now rated 'Good' in all areas. Ofsted have developed a new framework for their future inspections of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). Earlier this year, Suffolk County Council was asked to be a pilot site for this new inspection framework.

Suffolk County Council's Children's Services were previously judged 'Good' overall at the end of 2015, a grade that only a third of Local Authorities have achieved.

Whilst this was positive, the council recognised that there were still areas for improvement and Ofsted's latest report reflects the action taken to improve in all areas. All areas are now judged to be 'Good'. This puts Suffolk County Council in the top 25% of all Local Authorities.

Suffolk County Council's 2018/19 budget

On 14 November 2017, proposals to balance Suffolk County Council's budget in 2018/19 were published. These included an option to increase the basic rate of council tax for the first time in seven years and a range of savings plans.

All local authorities across the country continue to face significant challenges to meet frontline service requirements in a climate where there is less money and resource available. Once again, the council has carefully considered financial forecasts and projected demand to ensure the most vulnerable people in society continue to receive the highest level of support possible in the future.

The council also continues to develop new and innovative ways to deliver services and make further savings. This includes using digital technology to improve efficiency and ensuring health and social care services working better together to improve access for the people that need help. These programmes will support the authority as it seeks to make savings of £56 million by 2021.

Suffolk is chosen as one of only 10 pilot areas to retain 100% of business rates

On 20 December 2017, the amount of money allocated to each Local Authority in England for the next financial year was announced by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Sajid Javid.

As part of the announcement, Suffolk County Council was named as one of the pilot areas for a new Government scheme to retain 100% of business rates from Council Tax in 2018/19. In future, Business Rates will be an even greater income stream for all local authorities.

Additional £21 million to resurface and repair Suffolk's roads

On 15 January 2018, Suffolk County Council announced new plans to invest an additional £21 million in resurfacing and repairing the county's roads in the next three years.

The plans will see 1,000 miles of roads in Suffolk resurfaced by March 2021, a quarter of all the roads that Suffolk County Council is responsible for. This is a commitment made in the council's Our Priorities report published in 2017.

This investment will improve the quality of roads, reduce the number of potholes and enhance the experience of Suffolk's road users. It also makes sound financial sense as preventing deterioration will avoid the need to spend more money on reactive maintenance over the same period and in future years. Over 227 miles of Suffolk roads were surface dressed or machined surfaced during the summer of 2017.

The funding will boost Suffolk Highways' road maintenance and improvement spending in 2018/19 alone by 21% - £40 million in total. The extra money will be allocated to roads and infrastructure where there is the greatest need. These works will be planned carefully to make the most of the warmer summer weather when surface dressing needs to be done and conditions are the best for machine surfacing. This work will be fully coordinated to reduce the impact on road users.

A reminder: You can access up-to-date information about roadworks, road and street closures and how they affect you, as well as information about road improvements projects in Suffolk. The interactive map can be found at www.suffolk.roadworks.org

Revised GCSE and A Level results reflect progress of Suffolk students

The Department for Education published revised GCSE and A Level results on 25 January 2018.

The validated figures confirm that 3% more students in Suffolk are achieving the expected standards in English and Maths at GCSE compared with last year. 63.1% of students in the county are achieving the expected standard in English and Maths and Suffolk has closed the gap to national to less than 1%. Suffolk has also risen by 26 places in national league tables for this measure, to 83rd out of 151 authorities. The county has risen 5 places in national rankings for the percentage of students achieving the English Baccalaureate.

The Revised A Level figures confirm that Suffolk pupils have once again performed well with the General Applied entry and Tech Level entries remaining above the national average figures.

Since the launch of the council's Raising the Bar programme in 2012, Suffolk has risen 59 places in national rankings for GCSE attainment in English and Maths. 87% of schools in Suffolk are judged by Ofsted to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding'.

New Chief Executive for Suffolk County Council

In March 2018, Nicola Beach was appointed as Suffolk County Council's new Chief Executive.

Nicola, who is currently Executive Director of Infrastructure and Environment at Essex County Council, will take up her new role this summer. She was appointed due to the wealth of experience she has in local government, having been Chief Executive at Braintree District Council before joining Essex County Council, and having held various other roles in authorities across the East of England.

More than 94% of Suffolk children offered first choice of primary school

Suffolk's primary school admission figures released on 16 April show that 94.6% or 7,435 children have been offered a reception place for September 2018 at their parents' preferred school, with 98.8% offered one of their three preferences. 0.6% more children received their first preference this year than last year.

Suffolk County Council received a total of 7,544 applications for a place in the Reception year from parents outlining which school they would prefer their children to be educated at from September 2018.

98.4% of pupils moving to a junior school have secured their first preference place with 99.68% being offered one of their three choices.

The number of people choosing to submit an application online has increased from 93% to more than 94%.

Over 6,500 potholes repaired in Suffolk since January

Suffolk has seen over 6,500 potholes repaired since 1 January 2018; with a further 950 scheduled over coming weeks as the county council continues its war on potholes.

Since the start of 2018, Suffolk Highways has received approximately 9,500 pothole reports from members of the public, some of which are duplicates. This is double the number received during the same period last year; demonstrating the impact that the severe winter has had on the county's road surface.

Suffolk Highways has made some significant steps forward to deal with the high volume of reports. Additional gangs have been brought in to undertake pothole and road repairs across the county, different materials are being used and existing resources are being diverted to help deal with the backlog of reports. Also, a new approach is being trialled where areas with particularly high volumes of reports are 'blitzed'. This means that inspectors are visiting areas with high concentrations of potholes, many of which are at varying degrees of severity, and ordering repairs for all defects as long as they meet Suffolk Highways' repairs criteria. They're then dealt with all at the same time.

Most of the work is then picked up in a co-ordinated approach, with gangs working their way through streets, rather than works being scheduled based on size and required response time. The exception to this is where the location of the defect means complex traffic management is required, such as busy roads or junctions.

The first area addressed was Haverhill where there were over 70 reports of potholes, which resulted in approximately 50 works being ordered. Inspections have also been completed in Bury St Edmunds (60 reports), Withersfield (40), Hundon (30), Newmarket (30) and Pakenham (30). Gangs are currently focused on completing work in Bury St Edmunds and the other locations are currently being scheduled for coming days and weeks.

On 5 March, Suffolk Highways also begun trialling a new approach using a machine called a 'Roadmender'. The Roadmender is a highways vehicle with an asphalt mixer on the back. It works by keeping the material at a consistent and ideal temperature for compaction and only uses the quantities needed, limiting any waste material. This is an alternative treatment technique and the results are currently being analysed.

In addition to this, on 19 April 2018 Suffolk Highways' surface dressing programme began with the first of 360 sites. The first step of the programme is to undertake road repairs and preparation work which will include repairing potholes. Once the 2018/19 surface dressing programme is complete, approximately 250 miles of road will have been treated. Surface dressing involves laying stone onto a binding substance and is carried out between April and September.

Surface dressing is a treatment that minimises disruption to road users, local businesses and emergency services. It also improves skidding resistance, helps to make the road waterproof, protects against frost and water damage and is cost-effective normally lasting between 6 to 12 years.

Suffolk Highways will continue to routinely inspect the county's roads, from once a month for mains roads, through to once a year for more rural, less used roads.

These safety inspections will pick up every defect that meets the intervention level as set out by Suffolk Highways.

Funding for first time central heating systems available

A reminder that up to 100% funding is available to install first time central heating systems in Suffolk residents' homes. This funding from National Grid's Warm Homes Fund has been secured by Suffolk County Council and the district and borough councils to help more than 500 fuel poor households in Suffolk over the next three years.

In Suffolk there are still a large number of houses that do not have a central heating system with a boiler and radiators. Cold homes are not just uncomfortable to live in, they can also have a negative effect on health.

Residents must own their property or be privately renting (i.e. not a council house or housing association property) and must not have an existing central heating system (a boiler and radiators). Eligibility criteria apply and may be linked to income. For more information see www.greensuffolk.org/whf

To find out more about the scheme, people can:

- Complete the online enquiry form at www.greensuffolk.org/seaenquiry
- Call the Suffolk Warm Homes Healthy People service on 03456 037 686 (local rate) or
- Email sea@eastsoffolk.gov.uk quoting the 'Warm Homes Fund'

Police and Crime Commissioner Public Meetings and On-Tour Events

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) has now confirmed dates for his 2018 series of Public Meetings and on-tour events, to be held in each of the seven district/borough areas across the County.

The Chief Constable, Deputy Chief Constable or Assistant Chief Constable will join the PCC at each of the public meetings. The on-tour events will involve the PCC and the Chief Constable.

Dates, times and venues are listed below, starting with Ipswich on 10 May, and can also be viewed on the PCC's website: <http://www.suffolk-pcc.gov.uk/>

Public Meetings - 7pm – 8:30pm

- **Thursday 12 July, St Edmundsbury**
- Venue: The Newbury Community Centre, St Olaves Road, Howard Estate, Bury St Edmunds IP32 6RW

On Tour Events – 11:30am – 1:30pm

- **Friday 17th August, Haverhill**
Venue: Market Hill CB9 8AA

Highways

Highways continues to dominate the majority of the issues which I have to deal with. I am hoping that we have seen some movement on some of the longstanding highway issues recently, not least the patching of the potholes in Kent Road and the installation of a dropped curb, this is due to be resurfaced this Summer, and the replace t of the signs on the A1101.

Speeding concerns continue to be raised throughout the parish and I am pleased that I was able to assist in purchasing a mobile VAS for the parish which I am hoping will be in action soon.

The A1101 was used as a diversion route when the Highways Agency worked on the A14, this caused a lot of extra traffic along the already busy A1101 which meant that the highway issues were exacerbated. We managed to get the Highways Agency to agree to alternative diversion arrangements and therefore will not be using the A1101.

A safety review was commissioned for the A1101 and we managed to secure a small amount of funding for safety improvements.

There is no longer a central budget for local safety schemes and therefore my highways locality budget has to contribute towards this scheme along with any other funding which can be raised. I only receive £6,666 per annum which has to cover all 18 parishes in the division and the works are not cheap so it doesn't go very far. It is therefore important that parishes prioritise issues which they would like to deal with.

As a reminder if you come across a highway issue it is best to use the highway reporting tool which is on the Suffolk County Council website, if you have photographs this greatly assists with inspecting the issue. The website allows for a report to be tracked as it provides you with a report number. If at anytime you feel that you are not getting anywhere with an issue, please do contact me and I will try to expedite it.

I was pleased to be able to pay for the installation of marker post on the verge in Old Bury Road, which I am hoping will be installed soon.

Locality Budget

I was also pleased to support the church with some locality money to create their community room, which is an excellent facility.