

County Councillor Report



Parish Councils, March 2025

Councillor Jessica Fleming, Hartismere Division. Tel. 07714-597980 Jessica.fleming@suffolk.gov.uk

Devolution – SCC is working to deadlines of 21st March for outline plans and 26th September for a full business case for reorganisation of councils in Suffolk. A key part of this is the number of unitary authorities to support. The business case for a single unitary appears stronger than that for two or more. Unitary councils would be responsible for local highways, adult social care and education and schools which lend themselves more to a county wide approach.

Public Engagement on Devolution - A public engagement is open until 13th April and is focussed on questions around creating a Mayoral Combined County Authority across Norfolk and Suffolk. The Government White Paper suggests that Mayors would be primarily responsible for fire, police, and public health through Integrated Care Partnerships across County boundaries. Mayors would also take charge of strategic transport (bus and rail), strategic planning, employment and skills and economic growth through Local Growth Plans, the Council of Nations and Regions, and a Mayoral Council. Regards planning Mayors would develop a Spatial Development Strategy for their relevant areas, working closely with (local) authority members. 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 to lay 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.

Post-16 School Transport – The post-16 travel policy was approved by cabinet on 25th February, this applies to full time learners and some post 19 learners, and those aged 19-25 with education and health care plans. There will be no changes in fees charged.

Large Scale Solar Proposals – Two large (NSIP) solar proposals with Battery Electric Storage Sites (BESS) are proceeding at pre-application state and have held local public meetings. These are: Elmya north of Mendlesham (675 acres) and Eco-Power near Yaxley. For Elmya reference: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/major-infrastructure-projects-including-nsips/nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects-nsips/white-elm-solar-farm> and EcoPower around Yaxley/ Mellis/Eye around 1500 acres) <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/suffolk-prepares-for-another-significant-solar-farm-proposal>

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.

There are specific criteria that must be adhered to for developing battery energy storage systems in close proximity to National Gas Transmission's gas pipelines, they can be built adjacent to pipelines but never within the easement.

The developer is to engage with National Gas Transmission for further guidance in the early stages of design to ensure that electrical interference, security, future access, and construction methods can be mutually agreed prior to undertaking any works on site.

Refer to Field Yaxley - planning reference [DC/24/05535](#).

National Grid Pylon Scheme Public Consultation – Public consultation has recently closed about adjustments to the route in the following areas:

Suffolk 1 – between Palgrave and Mellis

Suffolk 2 – east of Gislingham

There are also some changes affecting plans for undergrounding in the Waveney Valley in Suffolk and Norfolk which may make this unviable but we will be briefed about them shortly.

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

New Bus Timetable – the new timetable for 2025 has been issued with improved services affecting the Nos 70 and 73/ 73A routes between Diss and Bury. A full list of bus timetable changes in Suffolk is on [Suffolkonboard](#).

West Suffolk Hospital Replacement - In January, following a review of the National New Hospital Programme, the Government reaffirmed its commitment to prioritising the replacement of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) hospitals, including West Suffolk Hospital. This statement was accompanied by a broad budget for each scheme and a start date for when construction was expected to start (2027/ 2028 for WEH). Further public engagement will take place as this project moves forward.

Please get in touch with me if you have questions or comments: Jessica.fleming@suffolk.gov.uk
Tel: 07714-597980 Twitter: @jesstfleming