

A Report for Bures St Mary Parish Council Meeting on 22nd May 2025

From James Finch – County Councillor for the Stour Valley Tel: 01206 262993 (change)
Mobile 07545 423796

Email: james.finch@suffolk.gov.uk

New cabinet role to lead on devolution and local government reform in Suffolk.

A new Suffolk County Council cabinet role responsible for devolution and local government reform has been created. Cllr Richard Rout has been appointed to the role – which comes as Suffolk is one of only six areas in the country chosen by the government to be fast-tracked for devolution and local government reform. The reforms will see all six of Suffolk's district, borough and county councils disbanded, to be replaced by one or more unitary (singular) authorities responsible for delivering all local services that are currently delivered by the different tiers of local government. It will also see the election of a mayor (covering Suffolk and Norfolk) in May 2026, who will take control over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, economic development, health improvement and blue light services – along with devolved government funding to deliver positive change. The mayor would not run the unitary councils or have oversight of them.

Suffolk's 45 libraries see new investment as Suffolk County Council plans to take service back in house

All Suffolk's 45 libraries would remain open, see no change to opening hours and have new mobile libraries and computers as part of a plan to bring the service back into Suffolk County Council. Staff running Suffolk's library service – along with their years of experience and love for libraries - will transition to the direct employment of the County Council on 1st June 2025. The county council would invest £200,000 in replacing Suffolk's aging mobile libraries with a further £157,000 for new books and to replace public computers in libraries across Suffolk. This is in addition to the £6.6 million a year budget available for Suffolk's libraries. It follows an attempt to secure an external provider for a new year contract (with the option to extend for up to a further six years) which had to be abandoned due to difficulties in aligning submissions with the service requirements and budgets. Following the end of the procurement process, Suffolk County Council entered negotiations with Suffolk Libraries (the current provider) to reach agreement on a shorter-term contract. The intention was to secure the immediate future of the library service from 1 June 2025, while the longer-term future was considered. However, Suffolk Libraries were unwilling to accept those terms and proposed different terms which were not acceptable to Suffolk County Council and would have breached procurement law. In addition, serious concerns about the viability of Suffolk Libraries also surfaced. The concerns included their proposal to reduce opening hours by 30% and issues with the financial stability of the organisation. There is also concern about the cost of their head office, including senior managers, which equates to 33% of their

annual staffing costs. Suffolk County Council believes that more of the library budget should be invested in frontline services.

£4 million skills funding boost for Norfolk and Suffolk

Up to £4 million will be spent delivering free skills training to an extra 1,345 adults across Norfolk and Suffolk in 2025/26. The funding has been allocated to Suffolk County Council by the Department for Education to support the continued success of the region's Skills Bootcamps, which help people gain the skills they need to land well-paid jobs in high-demand industries. The industry-led courses are key to driving economic growth in the region, supporting both the Local Growth Plan for Norfolk and the Suffolk Economic Strategy. They are designed to address skills shortages in sectors like digital technology, construction, engineering, net zero and childcare. The flexible and accessible nature of the Skills Bootcamps makes them ideal for adults looking to upskill, change careers or return to work. Courses last up to 16 weeks and offer a combination of online and in person learning to suit a variety of schedules. Each course is tailored to meet the specific needs of local employers, ensuring that learners are trained in areas where there are real job opportunities. The funding also offers a boost to businesses, enabling them to train new staff or upskill existing employees. Many of the training costs are covered, and employers can work directly with training providers to create courses that align with their needs

Suffolk Highways launches weeds and grass management programme for 2025

Spring has sprung and Suffolk Highways has commenced its summer maintenance works, which will see teams cut thousands of miles of grass verges and treat 2,300 miles of weeds. Grass cutting is scheduled to start in May, with the grass verges alongside A and B roads across Suffolk being cut first and receiving two cuts each summer. Verges alongside smaller roads, such as the county's C and U class roads, will be cut once during the summer season. Cutting is typically undertaken by tractors with a flail as this is the most efficient and effective way to undertake the vegetation works and dry weather is required as, similarly to household mowers, wet grass can clog the machinery. These cuts are solely for safety purposes and district and borough councils will usually supplement these with amenity cuts throughout the year. Weed treatments have already commenced across the county. All weed treatments are weather dependent and cannot be applied in high winds or if rain is forecast due to this reducing the effectiveness of the treatment. Glyphosate is currently used for the treatment as this is not harmful to people or pets and has proved to be more effective than alternatives previously trialled in Suffolk.

99% of pupils receive a preferred primary school place on National Offer Day

99% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred primary schools and 96% were offered a place at their first preference school. Suffolk County Council received 6,695 applications from parents and carers indicating which primary school they would prefer their child to join in September 2025. Families who applied online can log

in to the online service from today to see the school their child has been offered. They will also receive an email to confirm this offer unless they have indicated that they do not wish to. Letters will be sent to parents who made a paper application by second class post today (16 April 2025).

Infrastructure reform could silence Suffolk's communities in 'energy onslaught'

Suffolk County Council has serious concerns about proposed reforms to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, as announced by government (Wednesday 23 April). It is part of plans to cut by a year, the delivery of clean energy projects, public transport links, and other Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). This has potential for a significant impact on Suffolk's communities who are at the forefront of many NSIPs including solar farms, offshore energy and nuclear. One of the proposals is to remove the duty on project promoters to consult and engage with communities before a project is presented to the Planning Inspectorate. Further, the duty to have regard to any comments on voluntary consultations undertaken by a promoter is also proposed to be removed. Suffolk County Council will be submitting written evidence to the Bill Committee outlining its concerns and opposition to the proposed changes.

Virtual Fostering and Adoption Sessions for the Stour Valley

Fostering is a flexible role with options for short term care from a weekend a month to longer term opportunities, all providing life-changing support for local children. If you want to find out more about what it's like to foster or adopt with us, please call a member of the team on 01473 264800

My Priorities Education –

Supporting Vulnerable People - Jobs and Growth - Localism and the Stour Valley - Building on Suffolk's Strength all underpinned by strong financial management and fair council tax.