

April 2025 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

One new council is the best option for Suffolk

Suffolk County Council's cabinet has approved an interim plan for local government reorganisation in Suffolk which will be submitted to ministers. A full business case will be submitted in September 2025, following extensive engagement with residents, town and parish councils, businesses and local organisations. The key benefits of one council are:

- Simpler for residents – one council would make it easier to understand and contact local government
- Clearer accountability – there would be less confusion over who is responsible for what
- Better use of funding – a more coherent, strategic, financially sustainable, county-wide approach to budgeting
- Safer services - less risk of breaking up critical services like social care and better alignment with other agencies like health and the police
- Better alignment of services – since everything is under one roof, services can be more easily coordinated, creating opportunities to improve services for residents
- More efficient decision-making – with just one council, decisions can be made more quickly
- Connected to and empowering residents - providing both the most straightforward and accountable democratic leadership with enhanced neighbourhood and community engagement
- Stronger leadership – a single, visible and accountable body providing a clear strategic voice for Suffolk.

When people visit Suffolk, it's hard not to fall in love with it. Indeed, if you're lucky enough to live and work here, that love grows strong, anchoring people, families and businesses for generations. Whether you're looking for a place for your children to go to school, a forever home or a location from which to do business, Suffolk gives you options. Sea views, rolling fields, big skies, quiet villages, market towns and bustling urban centres. Although different from each other, our areas exist as part of a coherent and historic geographical area. We are proud of Ipswich, our county town. But so are we of the many other places, large and small, that make Suffolk the cohesive place it is. There is, without doubt, a spirit or force that's hard to describe that connects and unites our great and special county. Analysis carried out nationally by the County Council Network has demonstrated that a single unitary council for Suffolk would have a recurring financial benefit of almost £26 million a year – with the net benefit after 5 years being over £103 million. All the evidence shows that one council for Suffolk is the only viable option to deliver significant savings that can be reinvested into frontline services, financial sustainability and maximum clarity and accountability. This is clearly demonstrated in our interim plan and will be expanded upon in the final business case in September. The latest independent analysis makes it clear that having a single council for Suffolk will save the most money which can be reinvested into frontline public services that benefit residents, while having three councils would cost the taxpayer more than the current 50-year-old system. The funding could be reinvested in services like pothole repairs, waste collection and disposal, housing, social care, planning, leisure, school placements and travel and street cleaning. There's been talk of creating three unitary councils for Suffolk, including a Greater Ipswich. But that model is without credibility and is financially ruinous. We want to deliver the best possible opportunity to Ipswich and all our market towns and rural communities. The only way to do that is as one Suffolk. A Greater Ipswich would be in financial peril from day one, threatening the very services we want to protect. But this isn't just about money, it's about people too. A single council will absolutely be able to reflect and serve the whole of Suffolk, and our plans will clearly show how local priorities and residents' voices can and will be central to decision making. If we're going to create a truly sustainable and effective council structure for Suffolk, then one new council is not just the only viable option, but also the best one.

200 new specialist SEND places for Suffolk

The creation of 200 new specialist places across the county for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) was approved by SCC's cabinet. An extra 100 places could open this year, and another 100 new places by September 2026, with future plans being drawn up. These places will be spread across Suffolk and tailored to meet need and demand. The plan presented to cabinet outlines how £18.6million could best be spent to support the growing population of SEND children and young people who need specialist education. Over the last five years, Suffolk pupils accessing special schools and units attached to mainstream schools has increased by over 40%. The proposal includes £3million to be spent on small groups and units in mainstream schools from September 2025 and £12million to be spent on developing satellite units linked to existing special schools across Suffolk from September 2026. The remaining £3.6million is earmarked for further SEND provision. In the past five years, 1,025 new specialist SEND places across Suffolk have been agreed. We know the importance of making sure that children are in the right provision for their needs at the right time. We haven't always got this right and keeping up with the ask for new places is challenging, and costly, but we continue to revisit our plans and redirect resources when needed. It's reassuring to see the level of support we get from headteachers who are willing to open specialist units linked to their mainstream schools. On top of these new 200 places, future plans will continue to be drawn up. Using the recently published Joint SEND Needs Assessment report, work is underway to create a Joint SEND Sufficiency Plan, written in conjunction with health, social care, inclusion and transport. This will establish how future Department for Education SEND capital money should be spent.

Council continues to oppose pylons in final round of consultations

Suffolk County Council maintains that more can, and should, be done to improve National Grid's plans for their Norwich to Tilbury pylon project. A final round of consultation for the project in Suffolk has now been completed ahead of an expected Development Consent Order application later this year. SCC has welcomed a series of changes to the latest set of plans, evidence that National Grid has listened to some of the council's concerns and those of local communities. However fundamental differences remain, with the council clear that offshore and undergrounding solutions should be priorities for the scheme. One particular blow came at the beginning of this latest consultation, with National Grid writing to local leaders in Norfolk and Suffolk saying that there would be no undergrounding in the Waveney Valley. We are bitterly disappointed that pylons are still the go-to solution for this project, and particularly those destined to cut 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. Despite making clear our overall opposition to the scheme, we have influenced some alterations proposed by National Grid, such as the undergrounding of smaller pylons, owned by UK Power Networks in some places, such as the Burgate area, which will reduce the visual and landscape impact and protect the operations of local airfields. At the next stage of the process, when the Planning Inspectorate is presented with the plans, we will continue to pursue our preferences for no pylons at all, to make the scheme better and safer for our communities. One of the considerable changes that the county council believes is possible in the current set of plans, is the option to remove some existing powerlines between Bramford and Lawford. The county council believes that National Grid, UK Power Networks and the regulator, Ofgem, should work together to investigate removing this line, which goes through two National Landscapes and passes close by the iconic Willy Lott's cottage at Flatford. SCC's response to the latest, and previous, consultations can be found on our website. According to [National Grid's website](#), they intend to submit a Development Consent Order application to the Planning Inspectorate for the Norwich to Tilbury project some time in 2025.

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