

County Council report – November 2022

£2.5m saved on energy costs as LED streetlight project nears completion

A project with the aim of replacing all 43,400 streetlights across Suffolk with sustainable, longer-lasting, and cost-saving LED bulbs nears completion. It has saved more than £2.5 million pounds so far.

The change to LED streetlights supports Suffolk County Council's aim to reduce carbon, light pollution, and bring down ongoing maintenance costs for the council, all whilst providing the best value to residents.

It was expected that the council would reduce costs by around 76%, however, the target was exceeded, with 77.64% savings made to date.

In June 2021, Bouygues Energies and Services were announced as the partner to deliver the project to upgrade 43,400 Suffolk streetlights with new, reduced energy LED lanterns. The total number of upgraded streetlights is currently at 40,692 excluding any of the Ipswich Borough Council, or Town/Parish council owned streetlights. There are approximately 1,700 upgrades outstanding, which includes any remaining heritage lantern upgrades. It is hoped that around 1200 of the remaining lanterns will be completed by the end of the year.

Prior to the commencement of the project, Suffolk Highways contacted towns and parishes to provide them with the opportunity to have their parish-council owned street-lighting upgraded at the same time. All heritage-style lanterns are also being upgraded as part of the project.

The upgrade of the lighting system will include a further rollout of SCC's central management system which will allow lights to be switched on or off and dim individual or groups of lights.

This smart technology will increase the control the council has over its power consumption which will further reduce costs. The system will also automatically flag any lights that are not working which reduces the need for night-time inspections.

Suffolk County Council launch All Age Carers' Strategy

Suffolk County Council has launched its All-Age Carers' Strategy at today's Health and Wellbeing Board.

The strategy which has been developed with young carers and adult carers across Suffolk aims to support carers across Suffolk in their roles and will lead to the development of an action plan in the coming months.

This will help SCC to provide carers with the right kind of quality support at the right time, in the right place, and in the right way.

Many carers do not identify themselves as carers for approaching two years - they are reluctant to do so - therefore a key goal within this strategy is to reduce this timeframe and help them access the support they need. The five key priorities are:

1. Early identification of carers
2. Improved information and advice
3. Young carers to have the same priority as adult carers
4. Systems and services that work for and support all carers
5. Improved health and well-being for carer

An action plan will be developed in the coming months which will provide more detail how the priorities will be delivered and raise the profile of carers in Suffolk.

Statement following chancellor announcing a devolution deal for Suffolk

By Leader of the Council, Matthew Hicks.

“We welcome the Chancellor’s announcement that the Government has committed to agreeing a truly historic deal for Suffolk – the first county deal of its kind in the country. This deal will be a significant step on our county’s journey towards devolution and more control over our future.

“If agreed, this provisional deal would deliver decades of significant additional investment into local priorities that will improve the lives and outcomes of Suffolk’s residents; secure greater decision-making powers around transport, infrastructure and skills; and give us the powers we need to achieve our net zero ambitions and create the Greenest County.

“The powers and funding on offer have changed since we made our initial bid in August 2021. The Government is actively progressing only the most ambitious devolution deals but, in return, is seeking greater changes to the way local government is led. Therefore, in exchange for the greatest freedoms and funding, we are now minded to pursue a model whereby the Leader of Suffolk County Council is directly elected by the people of Suffolk. This proposed change would not add any new levels of bureaucracy nor create any new offices.

“In keeping with Suffolk’s collaborative way of working, we have developed this deal in partnership with our district and borough colleagues, the Police and Crime Commissioner and our MPs. It will now be taken forward to public consultation with Suffolk’s communities and businesses.”

Thousands of more new trees for Suffolk

It was announced on November 23rd that 7,526 trees will be planted across the county this winter by Suffolk’s councils.

Suffolk County Council successfully submitted a joint bid on behalf of itself, Babergh District Council, East Suffolk Council, Ipswich Borough Council and West Suffolk Council.

£138,219 will come into the county as one of 100 grants under the government’s Local Authority Treescapes Fund, directly contributing to achieving the country’s ambitious tree planting targets. The funding is for the planting of the trees and three years’ maintenance.

The trees are to be planted in non-woodland areas, including those that have been neglected in the past, ecologically damaged or affected by tree diseases like ash dieback.

Winter Gritting

Column by Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for Ipswich, operational highways and flooding.

Despite experiencing what feels like the mildest winters we have had in very long time; our highways teams have been carefully planning our winter gritting operation for months to ensure we are prepared for whatever the weather throws our way.

On Sunday evening, 36 gritters including the public-named Father Gritmas, Gritty Gritty Bang Bang and Spread Sheeran went on their first run of the season, a county-wide treatment of priority 1 roads which took place as the road surface temperatures were forecast to drop below 0°C.

The gritting treatment of our roads in Suffolk is vital to ensure people can continue to travel and do so safely during the wintry weather. During the 2021/2022 winter season, Suffolk used around 9,388 tonnes of salt to treat a total distance of 129,367 miles – which equates to travelling the circumference of Earth over five times! Suffolk Highways currently has a stock of around 24,000 tonnes of salt across the county for the season ahead and is well prepared for any further drop in temperatures.

Our highway teams are responsible for gritting 36 Priority 1 (P1) routes, which amounts to around 1,259 miles, including all A and B roads, roads to fire stations, hospitals, main bus routes and rail stations. They also have 34 Priority 2 (P2) routes, which amounts to around 843 miles of the network, this includes other bus routes, roads leading to rural villages and access to schools. The P1 routes are completed when road surface temperatures are forecast to drop below 1°C and P2 routes are carried out when the forecast predicts there to be a longer period of hazardous conditions.

This entire operation is one which requires extremely careful pre-planning and running throughout, every single decision to grit or not is based upon forecasted road surface temperatures, whilst also considering the impact of other factors, such as wind and heavy rain.

But gritting the priority network isn't all that the teams do to prepare our county for wintry weather; Suffolk Highways has also refilled the 2,100 grit bins across the county at registered locations, such as the bottom of hills, or on junctions of minor roads. Grit bins are owned by parish and town councils and to ensure that the contents of grit bins are used to make roads safer, our communities are encouraged to monitor how and where the grit is used and if more is required to contact Suffolk Highways.

Suffolk's residents can also do their part to support us with our gritting efforts by parking considerately and leaving enough room so that our vehicles can grit the road – if we can't fit, we can't grit!

Anyone who would like to know when and where we are gritting over the coming months, all gritting activities will be posted to Suffolk Highways' Twitter and Facebook accounts – so I encourage you to give us a follow and keep abreast of all our teams movements this winter season.

To find out more about which roads are gritted, how we deal with the network in the event of snow, or grit bins, please visit: www.suffolk.gov.uk/gritting.