

## County Council report – December 2023

### Cabinet approved £10 million new funding to resurface residential roads

At Suffolk County Council's Cabinet meeting (7 November), Cabinet approved an extra £10 million to repair and resurface local roads in villages and residential areas across Suffolk.

The funding will nearly double Suffolk Highways £11 million annual road maintenance budget but be targeted at smaller residential streets which are typically maintained less frequently than busier A and B roads.

Over recent years, the county council has recognised the importance of improving roads for residents, this new proposal follows the successful £21 million contribution towards the resurfacing of 1,000 miles of road between 2017 and 2021, and more recently the committed £21 million between 2021 – 2025 to increase pavement maintenance, deliver drainage improvement schemes and repair road signs.

It is hoped that the extra £10 million boost to resurface some local roads, minor rural roads and urban cul-de-sacs would result in a reduction of new potholes, which in turn will reduce the overall financial burden on the council's emergency and reactive repair budgets. Between 2020 and 2023, 2 out of 3 pothole repairs were carried out on local roads, minor rural roads, and urban cul-de-sacs. During that period, more than half of all defects reported by the public were on these types of roads.

The extra investment will make use of more sustainable materials such as warm mix asphalts that have a lower CO2 footprint than traditional hot mix asphalts and which include recycled materials to reduce raw material use, resulting in a more positive impact on Suffolk's environment.

## County Councils remain united against Norwich to Tilbury onshore option

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Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk County Council leaders are urging National Grid to reconsider their preferred onshore option following findings of a recent review.

The councils jointly commissioned and have now published an independent report into the Norwich to Tilbury project, which proposes the construction of a new high voltage electricity transmission line between Norwich in Norfolk, Bramford in Suffolk and Tilbury in Essex.

Leaders of the three county councils are now asking National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) and the electricity system planner, National Grid Electricity System Operator (NGESO) to consider the findings.

The report, by Hiorns Smart Energy Networks, reviews the options considered by National Grid, including the preferred option of a pylon line between Norwich and Tilbury.

The total length of the line would be 183 kilometres. This would consist of around 158 kilometres of new overhead line supported by 520 pylons. There would be also four sections of underground cabling. These underground sections would run through, and in the vicinity of, the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. National Grid's proposals also include a new substation on the Tendring Peninsula, to allow the connection of offshore wind farms.

Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk County Councils, accept that the transmission network in East Anglia needs reinforcing to support the transition to net zero, and provide energy security. However, they remain concerned that the need for, and timing of, the current proposals is uncertain and not robust.

This uncertainty brings into question the need case for National Grid's preferred option, of a land-based pylon line. All three county councils have expressed their concerns that this option will harm the local economy, environment and the health and wellbeing of their communities.

The review focused on a re-appraisal of the need case for the project; that need case was developed by National Grid Electricity System Operator.

The review investigated the need and timing of the proposals. It also investigated National Grid's decision that a terrestrial route, comprised mostly of overhead lines and pylons, would be preferable to an integrated offshore option.

The review supported National Grid's position that there is a need for additional electricity transmission capacity to connect renewable and low carbon energy generation in the East Anglia region.

However, it challenged the delivery date of 2030, and suggested that the need for additional transmission capacity would be closer to 2035, or beyond. This supports the concerns raised by the three councils.

While this potential delay to the need for Norwich to Tilbury is likely to reduce the cost of National Grid developing an integrated offshore alternative, the report concludes that the most economical option for meeting the need for future transmission capacity remains onshore overhead lines, and pylons.

The Hiorns Smart Energy Networks final report is available to read in full [here](#).

Given the uncertainties around the need for, and timing of, the Norwich to Tilbury Project, all three councils strongly recommend that National Grid carefully consider the Hiorns report, and its potential implications for the project.

**Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:**

“The effects of pylons and all the associated infrastructure cutting across all three counties cannot be underestimated. The impact on local communities and businesses will be significant, along with consequences for wildlife, our visitor economy, and protected landscapes.

“This will come in the short-term through building works, disruption, and disturbance of habitats - but most notably in the long-term for future generations who will suffer from construction that they cannot reverse, all for a project that could have less impact if it went by sea.

“To ensure the UK's energy security, our clear preference is for a coordinated, offshore centred approach, delivered at pace to minimise onshore works in Suffolk.”

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### Extra £108 million for Suffolk's roads welcomed

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Suffolk County Council has welcomed the Government announcement - which is part of a Department for Transport plan to pump £609 million into highway maintenance in the East of England. £107,590,000 has been ringfenced for Suffolk over the next decade, including £3.4 million in this financial year.

**Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, said:**

“Today's news is extremely welcome and will certainly help us to make Suffolk's roads better for everyone. We still need to understand the detail in full. But so far, what we know is very positive and will make a significant difference to our road network.”

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### 4.7 million litres of water and 8,412 drains cleared since Storm Babet battered Suffolk one month ago

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4.7 million litres of water has been pumped away and 8,412 highways drains cleared of post-storm debris since Storm Babet hit Suffolk one month ago.

The scale of work undertaken since the storm includes:

- Clearing and jetting of 8,412 drains

- Removing 121 trees blocking roads
- Cleared flood water from 198 locations
- Repairing 1,200 road and pavement potholes
- Contacting landowners about blocked private watercourses and roadside ditches, which are generally their responsibility to maintain.

The areas worst hit by the storm, including Debenham, Framlingham, Needham Market and Cavendish have all had their drains blitzed to clear tonnes of silt, leaves and other debris that has been washing into them as flood waters have subsided.

After drains are cleared, water from large tankers is run through them to check they are operating and if they are not, high pressure jets can be brought in to clear any blockages. In extreme cases, cameras are used to locate hidden blockages and then work is scheduled to dig up the pipes and fix the issues.

Suffolk County Council is also pumping an extra £10 million into drain and gully clearing projects.

135 drainage sites were addressed during 2022/23 and 89 new projects are currently in the design phase with the county council's new highways partner Milestone. This is in addition to Suffolk's annual drain clearing programme which saw 111,000 drains cleared last year.

The county council has also gathered over 800 reports of flooding to homes and businesses, to enable owners to access funding from the Government. Suffolk councils are working together, with Suffolk County Council collecting information and assessing the reports, and the district and borough councils distributing the funding to eligible property owners.

Eligible residents who experienced exceptional property flooding during Storm Babet and have reported this to the county council, will start receiving financial support during November.

## **Almost £1 million extra committed to investigating significant flooding following Babet**

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Suffolk County Council has committed almost £1 million of funds to bring in additional flood investigation specialists as the response to Storm Babet continues.

Since the storm, targeted recovery work has been carried out across the county to ensure damaged highway infrastructure is repaired, those whose properties were flooded get help and that investigations can start which will identify how to reduce flood risk.

As lead local flood authority, the county council has a duty to investigate significant flooding under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act. These investigations help to establish the source of flooding, factors which may have caused or exacerbated the flooding, the impacts on people, services and infrastructure and any actions which could be taken to increase resilience to future storm events.

In any usual year, Suffolk County Council carries out around three or four of these investigations. Following Babet, up to 100 look to be needed.

**Councillor Matthew Hicks, Suffolk County Council's leader, said:**

“The impact of this truly unprecedented event is still being felt across the county and will continue to do so for months to come, so it is important that we recognise that and increase our resources appropriately.

“These investigations help us to work with communities to establish the cause of flooding in the worst hit areas and identify ways to manage the risk better in future.”

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### Suffolk Highways prepared for the County's cold snap

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With 39 gritting lorries, around 17,000 tonnes of salt and a winter team of over 80 people, our depots are ready to spread salt and treat over 2,000 miles of roads across the county.

Suffolk Highways has been carefully planning for the arrival of the colder weather, including training and hiring drivers, checking the routes and preparing the gritting lorries for action. The service is responsible for gritting 36 Priority 1 (P1) routes, which amounts to around 1,259 miles, including all A and B roads (except trunk 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 cold weather.

But gritting the priority network isn't all that the teams do to prepare our county for wintry weather; Suffolk Highways has also refilled 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 report it via the reporting tool.

Suffolk Highways is encouraging residents to make sure their cars are winter ready and ensure they drive to the condition of the road, as a treated road may still have some ice forming particularly in areas where there is water runoff from adjacent land.