

Parish Report – June 2023

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Revision of Suffolk County Council's Energy Infrastructure Policy

The decision to adopt the Energy Infrastructure Policy by the Cabinet in February 2021 required that a review of the Policy was undertaken after two years, and this was discussed at Cabinet on 16 May. The following changes were proposed: to expand the scope of the policy to cover water resource infrastructure, including, but not limited to reservoirs, pipelines, and desalination plants, and to make modifications to the policy wording to ensure that it is up to date and robust. The policy was also renamed the Energy and Climate Adaptive Infrastructure Policy.

Water Resources East stated, with the launch of their regional plan consultation in November 2022, that, "Unless action is taken, increasing water scarcity will constrain agricultural production and curtail economic and housing development, impacting the region's future prosperity and endangering the east's iconic chalk rivers, peatlands and wetlands".

The emerging issues of water stress are illustrated by the proposal, in Essex & Suffolk Water's Water Resource Management Plan (WRMP) 2024 consultation, for a moratorium on mains connections for new non-domestic supply until 2032, in the Hartismere Water Resource Zone (WRZ).

The Council has supported innovation and adaptation, having worked closely with the Environment Agency, the University of East Anglia, and Felixstowe Hydrocycle, to construct and run demonstration sites for the use of alternative water resources. Demonstration sites include a system for the storage and distribution of storm water, and a pilot installation for managed aquifer recharge near Felixstowe.

Procurement of Street Lighting Services

The current Highways Services Contract with Kier Integrated Services Limited, which includes provision for Street Lighting Services, comes to an end on 30 September 2023, having been extended to its full 10-year term.

The Cabinet report for 16 May set out the process and timeline for the new procurement, with reference to the Scrutiny Committee report 'The Procurement of a new Highways Services Contract' from 15 February 2022, which set out lessons learned from the last procurement and how these would be incorporated in the procurement process and new contract to ensure a more rigorous procurement and selection process, and delivery of high quality and sustainable street lighting services for the county.

Final tender submissions are due to be received on 19 May 2023 and will be evaluated and scored during the following two weeks with a view to awarding the new contract in June 2023.

Supporting Suffolk Residents to Access Benefits

Feedback from VCSE organisations shows that many people are not benefiting from the support they are eligible for. Whilst recognising the good work done by council officers and the voluntary sector to support those in need as cost-of-living pressures continue, my group proposed a motion to put in place an additional programme of communication, to improve the take up of benefits and support available.

According to a recent Financial Times article, an estimated seven million people nationally are not accessing benefits they are entitled to claim, with around £15bn of unclaimed support. Many Suffolk residents may be unaware that they are eligible for a carers allowance, or attendance allowance, and may need signposting or support with the application forms for these benefits.

This motion was passed by the Council at the Annual General Meeting on 25 May.

Suffolk County Council receives £7.8m for Active Travel Schemes

The government's scheme Active Travel England aims to boost local economies and transform the school run for thousands of children, generating up to 16 million extra walking and cycling trips a year across the country.

The council received £7.8m from the government which it will spend on seven projects around the county, encouraging cycling and walking via cycle lanes, shared use paths and improved road crossings.

There will be a period of consultation with Suffolk residents during 2023, with work starting on all schemes in 2024.

Investment of £10m announced for potholes on minor roads

The Council confirmed that £10m would be set aside to be spent over the next 20 months on the surfaces of smaller, local roads where people live, in partnership with Milestone, the new highways contractor.