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Suffolk County Council
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Parish Newsletter

Suffolk County Council sues the Government over process, but is silent on its own: Suffolk Conservatives give council until Friday to publish key report

The Suffolk Conservative Group has demanded that Suffolk County Council publishes its detailed response to formal challenges tabled by councillors over how its decisions to pursue a judicial review (JR) of the Government's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) decision, a case which on the council's own figures could cost up to £500,000, were made.

Between 27 June and 1 July, councillors from across opposition groups lodged four formal challenges under the council's constitution. These questioned how the decisions of 18 and 29 June to issue and then continue JR proceedings against the Government were taken. On 1 July, the council promised members, in writing, a clear response by 10 July. That promise was broken and a reminder went unanswered. On 27 July, the Conservative Group Leader wrote formally demanding an answer, or a timetable for answers, by the close of the working week.

A detailed response from the council's Monitoring Officer was received on Monday 3 August, but the council has determined that it is sensitive, meaning Suffolk Conservatives are not allowed to share it with the public and press. The group has now called for that response to be published, with anything genuinely privileged removed, by close on Friday 7 August.

Councillor Richard Rout, Leader of the Suffolk Conservative Group, said:

"We have waited over a month for these answers to our challenges over how the decision to launch a court case against the Government, which on the council's own figures could carry costs of up to £500,000, was made. The answers now exist but the council has determined we're not allowed to share them with the public.

"These answers are all contained in a detailed response from the council's own Monitoring Officer, and we are firmly of the view that residents should be allowed to read them. Our ask of the council is clear and simple – publish it by the end of the day on Friday, with anything genuinely privileged taken out.

"The irony is pretty staggering. This council is in court arguing that the Government wasn't open about how it reached its decision. Now, after answering our challenges, the same council is keeping those answers from the public.

"The response we've received is serious and detailed, and I want to recognise that. Which is exactly why residents should see it. A piece of work as thorough as this belongs in the open, not locked away from view in a filing cabinet.

"These questions aren't going away. As a Group, we will be pursuing them through the council's Scrutiny Committee this autumn, in public, and we'll be seeking changes to the council's rules so that no councillor is ever again left waiting a month to learn what has been decided. A month ago, we asked for answers. We chased and we chased but now the answers have arrived, we're not allowed to share them publicly."

River Gipping path improvements complete as full 17-mile route reopens

Suffolk County Council has completed improvement works by the River Gipping at Creeting St Peter and Sproughton, making the route safer, more accessible and more resilient to flooding while reopening the full 17-mile Gipping Valley River Path.

Works at Creeting St Peter included upgrading wooden footbridges and boardwalks with new recycled plastic versions, while works at Sproughton included riverbank repairs, path widening, accessible ramps and a new footbridge.

The 17-mile route connects Stowmarket and Ipswich railway stations and passes Needham Market station, while linking to a wider network of walking routes across Suffolk.

The River Gipping has a long history of navigation. In 1793, the river was canalised with the construction of 15 locks, helping barges travel between Stowmarket and Ipswich and supporting the area's industrial development.

The project was delivered through a partnership involving local authorities, contractors, parish councils, landowners and volunteers.

The completed works ensure residents and visitors can continue to enjoy one of Suffolk's most popular riverside walking routes, connecting communities, wildlife habitats and local heritage along the River Gipping.

For more information about the Gipping Valley River Path, and other walks, visit the Discover Suffolk website.

Suffolk Conservatives voice concerns in LionLink Consultation Response

Continuing its strong track record in standing up for rural residents, the Conservative Group at Suffolk County Council has submitted its response to National Grid Ventures' targeted consultation on proposed changes to the LionLink project, welcoming a number of improvements while maintaining its fundamental objection to a landfall at Walberswick.

The Group recognises that several changes represent genuine improvements, including the removal of construction works from Manor Field, the reduction in the number of listed buildings close to the proposed landfall and a significant reduction in predicted night-time noise levels. It also welcomes the proposed changes to the Lymballs Lane access arrangements and the inclusion of Benhall Railway Bridge within the project's Order Limits.

However, Suffolk Conservatives argue that these changes are refinements to a scheme whose fundamental problem remains unresolved: the choice of Walberswick as the landfall location. The Group says LionLink has flexibility over where it makes landfall and that the full comparative assessment of alternative locations, including sites outside nationally designated landscapes, should be published before any application is submitted. It also reiterated the importance of coordinating LionLink with the neighbouring Sea Link project to minimise disruption and cumulative impacts on local communities.

The response raises particular concerns about the remaining impacts on Walberswick, including night-time construction noise, the village's reliance on the B1387 as its main access route, archaeological risks and the proximity of the works to homes and heritage assets. The Conservative Group is calling for stronger, binding commitments on construction traffic, emergency access, working hours and independent monitoring.

On Benhall Railway Bridge, Suffolk Conservatives support finding a permanent solution but oppose relying on repeated temporary structures. The Group argues that the alternative northern access route via the Sizewell Link Road should be developed as a primary option, potentially avoiding bridge closures altogether. If bridge works are required, the Group says they should be permanent, coordinated with Sea Link and properly assessed for their impact on residents, traffic and local communities.

The Conservative Group has also called for outstanding archaeological and engineering assessments to be completed and published, further scrutiny of the proposed western cable corridor, and stronger coordination between LionLink and Sea Link where infrastructure can be shared.

Suffolk Conservatives recall that the latest proposals contain improvements, they do not resolve the fundamental concerns about locating the LionLink landfall at Walberswick. The Group therefore maintains its objection and is calling for a less harmful alternative to be properly assessed before the project moves forward.

Suffolk Conservatives Submit Response to EcoPower Solar Consultation

Suffolk Conservatives continue to raise concerns over loss of farmland, battery safety, traffic, environmental impacts and the cumulative effect of energy projects

Suffolk Conservatives have submitted their response to the Section 42 statutory consultation on the proposed EcoPower Suffolk Solar Project, setting out concerns about the scale and impact of the development.

The Conservative Group at Suffolk County Council maintains its objection to the scheme, arguing that the proposals would have significant impacts on Suffolk's agricultural land, local communities, roads, heritage and the environment. The response builds on Suffolk County Council's unanimous decision to object to the development at Cabinet in July.

A central concern is the amount of high-quality agricultural land that would be taken out of food production. According to the applicant's own assessment, around 996 hectares, approximately 87% of the site, is classified as Best and Most Versatile agricultural land. The Conservatives argue that this represents a significant loss of productive farmland for an operational period of more than 40 years and that the applicant has not demonstrated why poorer-quality land could not have been used instead.

Suffolk Conservatives have also raised concerns about the proposed battery storage facilities, particularly the proposed compound in Occold which would be located within drinking-water source protection zones. The Group is calling for this battery compound to be relocated and for the battery safety arrangements, fire-water containment and Suffolk Fire and Rescue requirements to be secured before consent is granted.

Traffic and access are another major concern. The Group objects to the proposed use of Mellis Road for construction traffic, highlighting the road's rural character and the potential impact on Mellis Common. It has called for alternative access routes to be properly assessed, including a potential temporary construction route from the A140 at Yaxley, and has raised concerns about HGV movements through local villages, around schools and across roads and bridges with existing restrictions.

The response also highlights potential impacts on heritage and the local landscape, including Mellis Conservation Area and the scheduled monument near Cranley Hall. The Conservatives are calling for further assessment and changes to the proposals to reduce these impacts, alongside stronger planting and more accurate visual assessments of the development.

Environmental concerns include impacts on protected species, the lack of a published biodiversity net gain figure, and the absence of a full Flood Risk Assessment. The Group is calling for the project to commit to at least the mandatory 10% biodiversity net gain and for

outstanding ecological and flood-risk assessments to be completed and published before the application is submitted.

Finally, concerns were raised about the cumulative impact of multiple energy projects already planned or operating along the A140 corridor, with calls for a comprehensive assessment covering traffic, fire safety, landscape and community health and wellbeing, rather than considering each project in isolation.

The Conservative Group has set out a series of requirements it believes should be addressed before the EcoPower project can proceed, including protecting agricultural land, resolving access and safety concerns, publishing outstanding assessments, strengthening environmental protections and ensuring greater transparency around the scale and design of the development.

Suffolk residents can get a free proposal to replace ageing heating systems with heat pumps, and access a government grant for installation

All of Suffolk's public sector organisations (including all of Suffolk's local councils) have come together to help residents in Suffolk replace ageing gas, oil or LPG boilers with a heat pump, combining a £7,500 or £9,000 government grant, depending on current heating fuel, with group-buying savings on installation.

Over the past few years, energy bills have been unpredictable, serving as a reminder of just how exposed household budgets can be to forces entirely outside our control. But now, Suffolk's public sector organisations are partnering with Switch Together, a community group-buying scheme, to help residents in Suffolk move away from ageing and inefficient heating systems.

Through the government's Boiler Upgrade Scheme, eligible homeowners in England can receive a grant of £7,500 toward an air source heat pump, or £9,000 for households currently heating with oil or LPG. The grant is applied for upfront by the installer, so residents do not need to claim it back or repay it.

The Boiler Upgrade Scheme is open to homeowners and small business owners in England who are replacing a fossil fuel heating system and hold a valid Energy Performance Certificate with no outstanding major insulation recommendations. It is not means-tested, so there is no income threshold to qualify. The scheme is currently scheduled to run until 31 December 2027.

Switch Together works by bringing residents together so that installers compete to win their business, securing better installation prices than most homeowners could negotiate alone. Once registered, residents receive a free, no-obligation personal offer, and their installer handles the grant application on their behalf. Switch Together's group-buying savings apply on top of the government grant.

Every installation is carried out by a Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) accredited installer. Switch Together works only with MCS-accredited professionals, so residents are covered from the first quote to the finished installation.

This is a fantastic opportunity for Suffolk residents to explore a cleaner, more efficient and cheaper way of heating their homes. Through our partnership with Switch Together, homeowners can access trusted installers, exclusive group-buying savings and government grants worth up to £9,000, making heat pumps more affordable than ever. Registration is free and comes with no obligation, so the scheme marks a fantastic opportunity to anyone thinking about replacing an ageing heating system.

The grant amount: £7,500 for households currently heating with gas or electricity, or £9,000 for households currently heating with oil or LPG. Switch Together's scheme covers air-to-water air source heat pumps, which provide both central heating and hot water.

Why an air source heat pump: they typically use three to four times less energy than a traditional boiler to heat a home, which can help lower bills over time. They spread heat evenly through the property, keeping every room at a steady, comfortable temperature even when it's cold outside. And because they don't burn fuel on site, they produce fewer emissions than a gas, oil or LPG boiler, for a cleaner, more sustainable home.

How Switch Together works: residents register free, with no obligation; Switch Together matches them with a trusted, MCS-accredited installer and a personal offer; and, if the resident chooses to go ahead, carry out the installation.

Residents of Suffolk can check their eligibility and register their interest at: Switch Together Suffolk.

This scheme is brought to you by Suffolk's public sector organisations as part of their work to create a more sustainable Suffolk. Find out more about Sustainable Suffolk and their projects at **www.sustainablesuffolk.org.uk**

Suffolk Conservatives react to climate emergency withdrawal

At a recent meeting of Suffolk County Council's Full Council, the council formally withdrew its climate emergency declaration, which had been adopted under the previous Conservative administration in 2019.

Conservative councillors secured significant changes to the motion, which, in its revised form, was seconded by Conservative Councillor Harry Richardson, to ensure it fully recognised the facts of climate change and the need for Suffolk to adapt to and mitigate its effects.

Councillor Harry Richardson, Shadow Spokesperson for Public Health & Environment, said:

"We are proud of the previous Conservative administration's record on climate change and energy efficiency. Our approach to decarbonisation was always on a spend-to-save basis, and it yielded strong results, reducing the council's annual energy bills by £4.8 million.

"However, today we were presented with a choice: vote against a motion knowing we would lose or seek to improve it. We chose to try to improve Reform's proposals and, as a direct result, the amended motion ensures the council will recognise the facts of climate change and the threat it poses to lives and livelihoods in Suffolk. In my own division, we've seen the A143 melt in the heat. We are now experiencing our third heatwave of the year, a hosepipe ban has been imposed, field fires are once again becoming commonplace, and farmers are rightly concerned about the impact on this year's harvest.

"The effects of climate change are real, and we must rise to the challenge. I'm pleased we got the majority of Reform UK members today to at least recognise the reality of climate change, and while many will regard the impacts we're currently seeing as an emergency, this motion and council policy would have been far worse without our intervention."

The Conservative Group will continue to support practical measures that protect Suffolk's environment and will closely scrutinise the Reform administration's decisions on climate and environmental policy.

Efforts of Adult Learners in Suffolk recognised at Award Ceremony

The achievements of Adult Learners in Suffolk were recognised at an awards ceremony held at Portman Road.

The Suffolk Adult Learning Awards, organised by Suffolk County Council and sponsored by a number of local organisations, celebrated Suffolk Learners who have overcome barriers such as fleeing war, adapting to a new culture and battling personal health issues.

The awards also celebrate the educators who play a vital role in the learning and development of adult learners in Suffolk. This includes local educators who have overcome their own barriers to reach a position to help others, those who have experienced over 20 years in adult education and tutors who have supported their learners to achieve great things.

Cllr Vicky Armstrong, Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Efficiency said: “These awards shine a spotlight on adult learners who’ve pushed through challenges to build new skills - opening doors to work, improving life skills, and boosting confidence along the way.

“In Suffolk we champion lifelong learning, because it helps people live fuller lives, take a bigger role in their communities and develop the skills they need to secure sustainable and productive employment with real career progression.

“I’d like to also praise our local educators whose dedication makes this vital learning and development possible.”

The award categories and sponsors are listed below:

- Learning for Better Health and Wellbeing Award (Sponsored by: Realise Futures)
- Workplace Adult Learning Award (Sponsored by: Connect to Work)
- Higher Education / Access to Higher Education Award (Sponsored by: University of Suffolk)
- Work Skills Award (Sponsored by: Suffolk Chamber)
- Achievement in Essential Skills Award (Sponsored by: Eastern Education Group/West Suffolk College)
- Lifelong Learning Impact Award (Sponsored by: Suffolk New College)
- Shared Futures Award in Adult Learning (Sponsored by: East Coast College
- Community Project in Adult Learning Award (Sponsored by: Skills Bootcamps)
- Adult Educator of the Year Award (Sponsored by: Suffolk County Council Adult Learning Service)
- Adult Learner of the Year Award (Sponsored by: Suffolk Business Board)

Energy efficiency loans available for Suffolk residents

Homeowners across Suffolk can now apply for a loan to help fund energy efficiency improvements to their homes, thanks to a partnership between Suffolk County Council and Lendology.

The Warm Homes Suffolk Loan scheme offers eligible homeowners access to loans from £2,000 to £15,000 at a fixed interest rate of 2.2% Annual Percentage Rate (APR) loan, with repayment terms of up to seven years.

Borrowers may also repay their loan early without penalty, subject to eligibility and loan terms.

The funding is designed to support residents who want to improve the energy performance of their homes while spreading the cost of installation over a manageable period.

The loan can be used for a range of energy efficiency measures, including:

- Solar photovoltaic (PV) systems
- Solar battery storage
- Solar thermal systems
- Ground source heat pumps
- Air source heat pumps
- Double and triple glazed windows and doors
- Loft, wall and floor insulation
- Ventilation systems when installed alongside insulation measures

Installing energy efficiency improvements can help homeowners reduce their energy bills and create warmer, more comfortable homes.

A well-insulated and energy-efficient property can also have positive benefits for residents' health and wellbeing, particularly during colder winter months.

Emma Lower, Lendology CIC's CEO, said:

"We're delighted to be working with Suffolk County Council to open the Suffolk Warm Homes Loan scheme, creating another route for homeowners to access new funding for essential home improvements.

"Strong local partnerships like this help more people improve their homes, while supporting the long-term resilience of communities across Suffolk."

For further information about the Warm Homes Suffolk Loan scheme and how to apply, visit the **Lendology website**.