

## April County Report

Apr 03, 2025

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### **97.5% of pupils receive a place at one of their preferred Secondary Schools on National Offer Day**

This year parents and carers of 97.5% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred schools and 91.9% were offered a place at their first preference school.

Suffolk County Council received 7831 applications from parents and carers indicating which secondary school they would prefer their child to transfer to in September 2025.

Families who applied online can log in to the online service from today to see the school their child has been offered. They will also receive an email to confirm this offer unless they have indicated that they do not wish to. Letters will be sent to parents who made a paper application by second class post on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2025.

### **Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, said:**

»It.is.really.positive.that.once.again.the.majority.of.families.have.been.offered.a.place.at.one.of. their.preferred.secondary.schools;We.do.appreciate.that.not.all.families.will.have.received.a. place.at.their.preferred.school;If.this.is.the.case.and.a.parent.or.carer's.preference.for.a. Suffolk.school.has.been.refused?their.child's.name.will.automatically.be.added.to.the.waiting. list.for.that.school;Parents.and.carers.will.also.be.advised.how.to.lodge.an.appeal.should.they. wish.to.do.so;

Published criteria were used to decide which children had priority for school places to ensure that the process was fair and clear.

Once school places have been confirmed, parents and carers need to consider how their child will get to and from school. If their child is eligible for Suffolk County Council funded school travel, they will receive an email by Thursday 3 April 2025 with details of how-to opt-in and when.

Further information on secondary school admissions can be found at [www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions).

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### **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 (3 March 2025), ahead of an expected Development Consent Order application later this year.

The county council 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.

**Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:**

»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;

»But should pylons ultimately be given the go-ahead across Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex despite our opposition we will continue to work with National Grid to make sure communities are fairly treated and compensated - something which has not yet been evident;

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.

Suffolk County Council's response to the latest, and previous, consultations can be found at [suffolk.gov.uk](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk)

According to [National Grid's website](https://www.nationalgrid.com), 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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### **Council fears pace of decision for large solar farm in north Suffolk**

Suffolk County Council is calling on communities impacted by the proposed EcoPower solar farm, to act with urgency, and join the council in opposing the scheme.

- Unprecedented pace of planning application

- Inappropriate proposal which could take out quality farmland
- Serious concerns for welfare of local communities

The 250-megawatt solar farm and battery energy storage system will be spread out over 1,500 acres at multiple sites around Yaxley, Brome, Gislingham, Mellis, Eye and Occold.

EcoPower is proposing the bare minimum of engagement and is likely to submit its application to the Planning Inspectorate in around 12 months from now.

This means, unusually, that residents will have just two opportunities in the coming months to have their say. The first of these two is a non-statutory consultation, launched on 10 March. A statutory consultation will follow.

The council fears that communities won't have enough time to familiarise themselves with the planning process, understand the potential impacts of the project, do their research, and make their points – unfortunately, it is not enough to simply state opposition to the project in a consultation response.

**Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:**

»The speed at which this proposal is moving is frightening for us as statutory consultees as well as for local communities; it could also set a worrying precedent for future NSIP projects;

»As an example the Sunnica solar farm which was opposed by Suffolk County Council took around six years from being launched to being approved; the EcoPower project could be wrapped in as little as two years;

»This hurried process adds pressure on the county council as well as communities as it will require significant additional resources and staff to manage on top of the other energy projects and NSIPs that we are already dealing with;

»This breakneck speed is no doubt influenced by the government's unrealistic obsession to decarbonise our electricity supply by 2035; they must slow down to allow for proper planning and coordination of energy projects and fair treatment of communities;

The county council is formally opposed solar farm proposals that remove the top grades of agricultural land.

Independently conducted assessments will be required to provide reassurance that Suffolk's best farmland will not be used, and put food security at risk.

The council also has a preference for rooftop-before-rural solar development and expects that solar developers should rule out any links to forced labour in their supply chains.

There are also serious concerns for the welfare of those in the communities affected by the proposed scheme. Such projects can change ways of life forever for those living near the proposed sites.

Councillors have seen first-hand, the stress and worry brought by the sudden announcement of a huge infrastructure projects. This is something that should not be underestimated, and should be recognised by a project promoter.

**Cllr Rout continues:**

»We.will.do.what.we.can.to.support.communities.through.the.planning.process?and.we.are currently.writing.to.parish.and.town.councils;

»However.from.my.early.meetings.with.EcoPower?I.am.concerned.that.they.are.not.taking seriously.the.very.real.mental.wellbeing.impacts.of.their.proposal;

»Local.residents.are.foremost.in.my.thoughts?and.I.have.already.met.with.some.who.have. seen.a.real.impact.on.house.prices.and.sales.in.the.area; This.takes.a.huge.toll.on.individuals. and.families?and.EcoPower.has.a.duty.of.care.to.our.communities.and.needs.to.step.up.in.this. regard;

»It.is.a.real.concern.that.the.Secretary.of.State.will.just.wave.through.this.project?as.he.did.with. Sunnica?despite.the.Planning.Inspectorate's.recommendation.not.to.proceed; But.local communities.must.engage.with.the.process.and.make.their.concerns.known;

»I.urge.people.to.act.quickly?and.contribute.fully.and.effectively.to.the.consultation?before.it closes.on.7<sup>th</sup>April;

Suffolk County Council has created a number of online resources to support communities who are facing planning proposals for these nationally significant infrastructure projects. These are available at [www.suffolk.gov.uk](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk)

The EcoPower Suffolk consultation is available at [www.ecopowersuffolk.com](http://www.ecopowersuffolk.com)

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## 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.

### [Local Government Reorganisation in Suffolk - Interim Plan](#)

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.

Speaking about Suffolk itself, **Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for devolution, local government reform and NSIPs, said:**

»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. Local analysis of data suggests that the national figures are reasonable.

Speaking about the one council proposal, **Cllr Rout said:**

»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 16 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;

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## **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) is set to be considered by Suffolk County Council'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 to be presented to cabinet next Tuesday <April 1> 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.

**Andrew Reid, cabinet member for education and SEND at Suffolk County Council, said:**

»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; We remain thankful for these offers;

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.

These plans will be discussed at the cabinet meeting on Tuesday April 1<sup>st</sup> at 2pm. [Read the Cabinet papers.](#)

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## **Extra £9 million will fund new places for pupils with SEND**

Hundreds of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Suffolk are set to benefit from new government funding.

It has been announced that Suffolk will receive £9,441,348 from the Department for Education to invest in new SEND school places.

Plans will now be drawn up by the Local Area SEND Partnership.

This funding is in addition to the 200 new SEND places that Suffolk County Council's cabinet will discuss on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> of April.

**Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Education and SEND at Suffolk County Council, said:**

»This investment is a welcome addition for Suffolk's children and young people and their families;

»In the last five years we have agreed 738 new specialist places. However our analysis tells us we must continue to invest in new places to keep up with demand. This new funding will support that growth;

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 this new money should be spent.

The additional funding, announced on Thursday by the Department for Education, is from the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation and awarded to all local authorities across England. In total, the East of England will receive £126.6 million which will fund around 1,000 places for children with SEND.

The Local Area Partnership, which delivers SEND services in the county, is made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum and education settings.