

Annual Report of Nowton Parish Council, May 2019

Since the last Annual Parish Meeting the Parish Council has undertaken a variety of work on behalf of parishioners. Some of this has been rewarding and some frustrating but we continue to do what we can within our remit.

Councillor Terry Clements was elected District Councillor earlier this month following the merger of Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury to form West Suffolk Council. We thank him for his continued support.

Reports from County Councillor Karen Soons have been received at council meetings and we appreciate her continued support and regular attendance.

Contact between the Parish Council and local Police is now co-ordinated by Andy Tucker, the Area B Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator. He works with PC Paul Fox to send alerts, produce and circulate monthly crime statistics, support local scheme co-ordinators and promote communication between villages. Both attended a PC meeting to introduce themselves and their work and a report will be given at the Annual Meeting.

It is reassuring to see how low the crime figures are in our area compared with overall figures for Bury. Our thanks to them for the work they undertake on our behalf.

The impact of budget reductions on Local Authority spending continued to make a significant difference to the speed with which work was carried out. We were notified that the cutting of vegetation to keep Rights of Way clear was being reduced from two per year to one. It was pointed out that Suffolk has 10,000 Rights of Way to maintain!

Planning – there have been several minor individual planning applications over the last year. Only one of these raised objections from the PC and neighbours. It has now gone to appeal with no decision made to date.

Highways – Potholes continue to be a problem but a significant amount of repairs have been carried out recently and it is expected some resurfacing will be carried out later in the year. Reports by individuals and/or the Parish Council is the only way Highways can be made aware of the potholes.

The problem of tree roots growing up through the road surface in Cooper Lane has now been rectified after concerns raised by the PC.

The Local Authority continued to refill the grit bins during the winter.

Parish Emergency Plan – This was reviewed during the year, as it is every two years. Details were sent out with the July Benefice Newsletter. Our thanks to all who have volunteered to help with this.

Councillor Training – a number of Councillors have attended training throughout the year organised by the Suffolk Association of Local Councils and St Edmundsbury. The sessions covered a range of issues relating to Parish Council work and rural communities, including Planning and Budget proposals regarding policing, the fire service, highways, etc. The biggest change requiring training this year was in the area of data protection. A new Privacy Policy was drawn up and relevant individuals were asked to sign an agreement regarding the storage and use of their personal details.

These meetings are of value in keeping us up to date with legislation, in providing information about funding sources and the direction of future policy. Meetings organised for Parish Councillors are also of value.

Involvement with Local Community

a) The Parish Council continues to contribute £125 towards the cost of printing the **Benefice Newsletter** and in providing information about Parish Council work. It continues to be our main means of communication with everyone in the parish. The Parish Council now has a website on which are published meeting dates, agendas and minutes, as well as contact details and financial information. The **website** can be accessed through **onesuffolk.gov.uk** and clicking on Parish Councils.

The Parish Council again contributed £100 toward the **upkeep of the churchyard**. **The Village Hall** received £250 towards general maintenance. Thanks were received from all who benefitted.

Money has been set aside from this year's precept for repairs to the **village sign and bus shelter**.

A poppy wreath was placed on the village sign to mark **Remembrance Sunday** in November. This was donated by the County Council and has been kept for use in future years.

On a less positive note it was disappointing to discover that **two of the recycling bins** had been set alight overnight and the bottle bank was completely destroyed. The Fire Service was on the scene very quickly and the bins have been replaced. No information regarding the incident has been received.

b) Money received from the Borough Council for the **recycling** bins has been passed from the Parish Council to the Village Hall Committee.

c) The **grass around the village sign and the village hall car park** continues to be cut regularly. Several parishioners pick up **litter** when they are out and about. Extra bark is laid on the permissive footpath.

Nowton Park Rangers and Volunteers have given some valuable time to the parish this year. This has included providing bark chippings for the permissive footpath, litter picking, trimming back overhanging trees, clearing the footpath from the village hall to the bus shelter, clearing ditches and removing dead trees. There are many such small instances of individual initiative which help keep the parish so attractive.

d) **A number of parishioners have contacted Councillors** over the year and we hope this will continue. The Council needs to know the concerns of parishioners and suggestions for improvements will always be considered. Requests this year have resulted in the repair of potholes in specific places, the trimming of overhanging trees, the replacement of a broken traffic sign and the removal of fly tipping in several places.

Fly tipping continues to be a problem but St Edmundsbury is very prompt in responding to requests for its removal.

Neighbourhood Watch – Councillor Michael May continues to co-ordinate this important work and Councillor Renee Farrow has responsibility for Low Green.

A number of incidents reported to the Police have been investigated and it is pleasing to know that crime in Nowton is very low. Andy Tucker, the Area Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator, sends out monthly figures and alerts when necessary. He also sends out advance notice regarding road works.

Library Van – this continues to park on the village hall car park once a month and dates are on the notice board there.

Mr Douglas Heaton – we were very sorry to hear of the death in April of Douglas Heaton. For many years Douglas volunteered as the Internal Auditor of the Parish Council accounts and we very much valued his work. We send our condolences to his family and especially to Judy, his wife.

Finally – thanks to:

- All Parish Councillors who have served this year and worked towards improving some aspects of the lives of the parishioners of Nowton.
- The Clerk and Finance Officer, Mrs Pauline Stoddart, for her continued hard work, efficiency and support.
- The Internal Auditor, Mrs Nicole Nicholls.
- Councillors Soons and Clements.
- PC Fox and Andy Tucker.

2018 Annual Report for Nowton Parish Council

Andrew Tucker, Area 8, Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator

The Bury St Edmunds Neighbourhood Watch Area B covering 10 local villages in 6 parishes continues to enjoy a very low reported crime rate. 2018 saw a reported crime rate averaging 6 per month for the whole of our Area B. The first quarter of this year has seen an average of 5 reported crimes per month. In 2018 Nowton saw a total of 11 reported crimes but it should be stressed that 5 of these were in the violence or sexual category. The remaining 6 crimes means that Nowton's monthly average remains very low.

Looking at the last 3 years, considering the 4 most common crimes we see, the Area B number of reported crimes for burglary and violence or sexual for 2018 were very similar to the 2016 figures while the 2018 figures for criminal damage or arson and vehicle crime were half those of 2016. This is good news for our area but it doesn't reflect what is happening across the whole of Suffolk where reported crime in 2018 was up by 9% on the previous year with a big increase in the number of burglaries (up by more than 30%).

Most will know that **cold caller** scams (by telephone, text, e-mail etc) are now prolific and the advice remains that we should never engage with a **cold caller**, no matter who they say they are representing, if they are asking for either a payment or for personal bank details. Contact from scammers should be reported to Action Fraud on-line or by telephone (0300 123 2040) and let your Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator know so others can be warned.

Our local Area B NHW network (sharing local crime, suspicious activity and missing persons detail as well as receiving monthly local crime statistics and much more) is incredibly healthy and pro-active. For example, nearly 1000 residents in our local villages are signed up to the highly recommended social site called [nextdoor.com](https://www.nextdoor.com) where the site is tailored to our very local area with neighbours looking after neighbours. Another 200 neighbours in Bradfield Combust and Stanningfield use their parish facebook page to report and stay abreast of local crime issues and another approximately 100 residents in local villages chose to receive updates via e-mail. Of course, there will be even more sharing of crime information within each village and parish as they see fit.

In sum, our local crime rate is very low compared to the rest of the Bury St Edmunds area, the County and Nationally. We should not get complacent of course and we should remain vigilant with regards all types of crime, including scams, and continue to communicate with each other within and between our villages.

St Edmundsbury Borough Council Report 2018-2019

This is the last report of St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

Some will say this is a very exciting time but I must admit I do find it sad as St Edmundsbury was a great Borough and a special place to live.

I know residents are proud of our traditions and love living in the area.

Decisions were made and they were mostly financial that to form a larger Council West Suffolk was the way forward and this both helped in financial planning and strength in size of Council.

As from the 1st of April St Edmundsbury no longer exists and we now have a Shadow West Suffolk District Council that is until May when elections for the new West Suffolk will take place. It was decided at Council that the new West Suffolk Council will make the decision whether to go for Borough status in future.

Personally I feel strongly that we should, this is a special area and this should be recognised. We should be aspiring to something more than mere District Council status.

I usually start with finances, this has been one of the most difficult changes, the harmonisation of Council Tax. Residents are aware that there is a limit on Council tax rises which could trigger a referendum this was set in December 2018. The limit set by Government at 3% or £5 whichever is the greater.

This has limited scope for the new Council and had an effect on full harmonisation of the two Councils budgets over the next 7 years. Therefore for the old St. Edmundsbury budget there is a freeze but there is an increase in Forest Heath part by 3.4% or £4.95 for Band D property.

I keep being told about how complicated Council tax is but I can assure you when I first became a Councillor 36 years ago the majority of the budget was housing and the Housing Revenue Account was a very difficult balance. I believe it was a case of Government having an overall figure and a group of poor civil servants had to work out a formula to make it work for the rest of the Country.

To the future, the main change is that West Suffolk Council has been given the ability to borrow at a low rate (Public Works Loan Board rate) and reinvest that in projects obviously at a higher rate, which can be set against council tax. I can see some benefit but only if the rate is good enough and has a real benefit to residents of West Suffolk. A good example in the past is Haverhill cinema which is giving 5+% on return on investment.

Another recent acquisition of old post office building Bury St Edmunds and proposed investment in a new enhanced link. We have also seen the refurbishment of Haverhill sports centre costing £1.5 million and Bury Leisure Centre is next on the list.

I see a different emphasis on what role the new Council will play and how Councillors will need to have a wider remit on what is taken account of in West Suffolk. We have moved away from being "the" housing and leisure provider to being a facilitator and having a more strategic role. Hopefully this means West Suffolk will have a stronger voice with health and the environment in which we live.

The West Suffolk Council with its new ward boundaries and larger wards has seen a reduction in Councillors of 7 in Forest Heath and 1 in St Edmundsbury. This will be an interesting mix with new Councillors as well, all with expectations that they will be able to change the world.

Development Control/Planning will be very influential in the future bearing in mind there are directives coming down from Governments to all districts but they all seem to have a slightly different take on emphasis of NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework).

Hope you will agree with me that this area is special and we need to aspire to a West Suffolk with Borough status and by doing that will set the bar higher and achieve higher standards.

Further to the above.

Just to report I had forwarded £1200 to Suffolk Mind from my Locality Budge this is to provide "Suffolk Needs Met" training one on Whelnetham and one in Horringer.

I have been on the training myself and believe this will be very useful for both communities. I believe this training will be available for up to 16 delegates and I will be arranging venue and sorting dates with Rev Jeremy Parsons.

Councillor Terry Clements



Cllr Karen Soons
Annual Parish Newsletter 2019
karen.soons@suffolk.gov.uk
07864 601 887

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/>

Highway News – grass cutting

Following a review of the 2018 grass cutting season there are several significant improvements to this year's programme. These include:

- The recruitment of new contractors to work with Suffolk Highways to undertake the works.
- Assigning the county into two areas covered by two separate contractors, rather than one, to give the grass cutting service greater resilience
- Publishing the grass cutting programme earlier to enable other stakeholders to plan any additional cuts if they wish.

The grass cutting programme for this season will be sent to towns, parishes and published online over the course of the next couple of days. It shows the target dates when the verges will be cut. Two cuts on the A & B network and the single cut to the C & U network. This programme has been devised to allow some movement should the growing season start later than anticipated.

If a community is interested in carrying out its own cuts, or additional cuts to those listed in our programme, with their own contractors, then the parish council should make contact with communityselfhelp@suffolkhighways.org for more information.

Suffolk launches innovative new fire engine

On 24 April 2018, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service celebrated the launch of the new Light Rescue Pump (LRP) at Wrentham Fire Station. The LRP is a new-look fire and rescue vehicle and was developed following feedback from local residents and staff through the Integrated Risk Management Plan 2015-2018 consultation.

The LRP is unique to Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service and the Wrentham on-call firefighters were an integral part of the working group who designed it. It includes the latest firefighting and rescue equipment and has been specifically designed to provide flexible crewing in rural areas of between two and five firefighters, different to a standard fire appliance that usually has four to six firefighters.

Council to deliver 51 new affordable homes for low income families in rural community

On 22 May, it was announced that Suffolk County Council is looking to develop a 4.5-acre site which is owned as part of its County Farms estate in Cockfield village near Lavenham.

The plan is for 51 affordable homes to be built to offer local people on low incomes the opportunity to get on the housing ladder.

To do this the county council will work closely with design and property partners to achieve a good financial return and delivery of homes for a range of people, with a particular focus on local needs. The development is expected to take around two years to complete.

By taking the lead on this project, the council can ensure the development delivers the proposed benefits for the local community in a timely fashion. This includes provision for community space, powers to adapt local speed limits as required and improvements to local footpaths.

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Richard Smith, said:

"We are a largely rural county and we want to see local rural communities thrive. We are treating this as a pilot project and as we move forward with this work, we may find other sites that offer similar potential opportunities to deliver the housing that's needed as our population continues to grow in the future."

For commercial reasons, it is not possible to disclose the exact value of the land or the financial benefit. However, the decision to develop this land will bring a significant financial boost to the authority upon completion that will go some way to meeting the ongoing financial challenges faced by the authority as it continues to support the most vulnerable members of society.

Councillor Matthew Hicks takes the helm at Suffolk County Council

On 24 May 2018, Councillor Mathew Hicks was elected as the new leader of Suffolk County Council. Councillor Hicks has promised a new era of working in partnership and listening.

In a speech following his election, he pledged to work with district and borough councils, other public sector partners, businesses and residents to find the best ways of delivering services to the people that need them most.

Councillor Hicks also confirmed Suffolk County Council's focus on major infrastructure projects. He stressed the need for a co-ordinated and strategic approach to bring these into the 30 plus year vision, so there is clarity on how major infrastructure projects can be delivered when funding is so tight.

Suffolk's Annual Public Health Report wins 3rd place in national competition

On 12 July, it was announced that Suffolk's 2017 Public Health Report won third place in the Association of Directors of Public Health Annual Report Competition, from 54 UK entries.

The most recently published report for 2017, 'Working for Wellbeing', focused on inclusive growth and the links between health and work. Prepared and published by Suffolk County Council's Public Health team, the report was commended for its ease of reading, accessibility and relevance.

The Suffolk Annual Public Health Report is a statutory duty for the Director of Public Health and Protection. It is an independent health status assessment report, that allows the Director of Public Health and Protection to explore a topic or area of strategic focus that is of importance to Suffolk.

Plan for £6million upgrades to Suffolk recycling centres

On 24 July 2018, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet approved a plan to invest £6million into upgrading Suffolk's recycling centres.

The plan has earmarked £3m for the Foxhall Recycling Centre – Suffolk's busiest with 20% of all recycling waste in the county – and £1m for Haverhill for "urgent improvements". The plans will see improvements to traffic access at Foxhall and measures to prevent people from having to climb steps to dispose of their waste in the containers. Existing planning permission for work expires in March 2021.

Currently at Haverhill the site has to be closed when containers are emptied because of space. The funding aims to double the size of the site and prevent such closures.

Elsewhere, £1m has been earmarked for a site to replace the Portman's Walk Recycling Centre in Ipswich town centre, and a further million for the same in Stowmarket.

The existing Ipswich and Stowmarket sites are considered to be severely constrained for space, with no expansion opportunities available and the surrounding roads not offering a safe area to queue onto the facility.

Construction for improvements is expected to get underway in 2019/20.

Suffolk's tourist trade booming

Suffolk's tourism trade has seen its biggest boom for a decade, with the visitor economy reaching the £2 billion mark for the first time.

Interim figures released on 8 August 2018 by Visit Suffolk showed that tourism grew by at least five per cent in 2017, more than double the year before.

Overnight visits and lengths of stay for tourists were also up by more than 4 per cent. Figures show visitors now spend more money on each trip to the county than ever before, with the value of the day market up more than seven per cent.

The number of jobs in the county's tourism sector rose by 6 per cent to 42,428. This means 13.6 per cent of all employment in Suffolk is in the tourism sector.

Amanda Bond, Visit Suffolk's brand manager, said these results would not have been achieved without the continued backing for the county-wide offer from all the district authorities, Suffolk County Council, New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership and the Local Destination Marketing/Management Organisations (DMOs).

Superfast broadband coverage continues to grow

On 24 August 2018, it was confirmed that 98% superfast broadband coverage will be achieved in 2020.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, Jo Churchill, MP for Bury St Edmunds and Clive Selley, CEO of Openreach, were joined by representatives from West Suffolk Council, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, Church of England, Country Land and Business Association (CLA), National Farmers Union (NFU) and the Better Broadband for Suffolk Team to confirm plans to reach 98% coverage in 2020.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Infrastructure, said:

"We have now confirmed that we will achieve 98% superfast broadband coverage by the end of 2020, which highlights our commitment to connecting Suffolk. We have already seen an increase in delivery, with 137 new structures built last quarter. This equates to approximately 3,000 additional premises receiving a new superfast broadband connection.

"With this agreement in place, Openreach will continue to ensure that we meet our ambitious goal. In the meantime, we will continue to look for further funding opportunities to work on delivery to the final 2%."

Carers celebrate top accolade with 'Outstanding' rating from the Care Quality Commission

On 19 October 2018, it was announced that the standard of care provided by Mid Suffolk Home First has been rated as Outstanding by the Care Quality Commission.

Mid Suffolk Home First, which is provided by Suffolk County Council, provides a short-term reablement service and a longer-term care service.

Inspectors, who visited in July 2018, said the quality of care was 'exceptional'. Under CQC's programme of inspections, the service was rated according to whether it is safe, effective, caring, responsive and well-led. Mid Suffolk Home First is rated Outstanding for being responsive and well-led, and Good for being safe, caring and effective.

The reablement and care services offered by Mid Suffolk Home First support people following a period of ill health or a significant loss in their ability to manage their day to day care needs. The service aims to help the person reach their optimum level of independence.

Suffolk wins praise at national Community Energy Awards 2018

On 5 November, it was announced that the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership had received a national award for supporting local communities to be more energy efficient.

An expert panel of judges awarded the Local Authority Award to the Partnership for its close working with local organisations. This includes exploring how organisations can be more energy efficient, helping to source funding, producing a community energy toolkit, providing technical support and investing in energy efficiency installations. In addition, over 120 community buildings have received in-depth advice and support to be more energy efficient.

The Suffolk Climate Change Partnership is a collaboration of Suffolk County Council, all Suffolk's borough and district councils and The Environment Agency. It supports the county's communities, businesses and residents to reduce carbon emissions, realise the economic benefits of reducing energy consumption and adapt to the future impacts of climate change. Its work has brought in significant amounts of external funding to Suffolk, running highly-successful projects for its customers.

The Hold construction is underway

By November 2018, the construction of The Hold building was well underway. The Hold will deliver a new home for the majority of Suffolk's unique archival collections, as well as state-of-the-art public facilities including seminar rooms and a 200-seat auditorium.

The new building, which will be situated near the junction of Fore Street and Grimwade Street in Ipswich, will be part of the University of Suffolk campus and will be run by the county and the university together.

Work began on the construction of The Hold building in August 2018, with the demolition of a derelict building at the northern end of the site. The construction will focus on the strongrooms first, where the archives will be kept. The building will formally open to the public in Spring 2020. Once finished, more than 100 direct and indirect full-time jobs will be created as well as training and apprenticeships. This will allow records that are currently being stored in inadequate and temporary facilities in Bury St Edmunds and other places to be accessed by the general public in a state of the art facility. Bury Records Office will remain open and will retain the vast majority of West Suffolk's Records.

Sport and Physical Activity worth £270m a year to the Suffolk economy

A report published on 18 December 2018 revealed the importance of the Sport and Physical Activity sector to the Suffolk economy.

Undertaken by specialist economic development and regeneration consultancy Hatch Regeneris, the report shows that the sector contributes £270m a year to the Suffolk economy. This accounts for over 10,000 jobs or 3% of all employment in Suffolk and is almost double the proportion seen at national levels.

The report shows that employment in the sector has grown at a faster rate than all other sectors in Suffolk - up 60% in the last 5 years. By contrast, employment in financial and professional services has grown by 10% over the same period.

The report highlights the importance of continuing the drive towards increasing participation in sport and physical activity as a way of both improving productivity and reducing the spend on health and social care. It estimates that a reduction of just 10% in Suffolk employee sickness rates would give the Suffolk economy a boost of £42m annually.

The report recognises both the importance of the sector in providing a stepping stone into employment as well as a gateway into higher skilled jobs. The report highlights the need for organisations in Suffolk work together to respond to the future skills needs of a growing sector.

Suffolk's roads warming to £300,000 thermal patching technology

January 2019 saw Suffolk Highways celebrating road repair success following a £300,000 investment in Nu-phalt Thermal Patching technology.

The investment, which has been funded from the extra £9.67 million received from central government in the autumn, has aided the county's Highways teams to carry out more effective, longer-lasting repairs to Suffolk's road surface.

Over the month of January, Suffolk Highways deployed three thermal road repair machines which repaired approximately 1,700 potholes county-wide.

The process includes an eight-minute heating cycle of the road surrounding the defect allowing for the existing road surface to be heated to 200 Celsius. The surface is then raked, topped up with bitumen binder and pre-heated material, then compacted. This all takes place within the service's much-favoured 15-minute temporary closure.

The process does not require excavation of the highway, meaning no dust or noise, and better still, no waste material. The result also means there are no surface joints, which can be prone to faster deterioration.

Following its success, Suffolk Highways is now looking to accommodate this technology by adapting some of its own fleet to self-deliver this repair technique from March 2019.

Department for Education recognises outstanding performance by Suffolk students

On 24 January 2019, the Department for Education published revised GCSE and A Level results.

GCSE

Suffolk has risen in national league tables for students in the county achieving the standard GCSE pass in English and Maths.

Department for Education figures confirm that 1% more students in Suffolk are achieving the expected standards in English and Maths at GCSE compared with last year.

Since 2015 there has been a change to the way that English and Maths GCSEs are graded. Results are now graded from 9 to 1, (previously A to G) with 9 being the highest and 1 being the lowest.

The expected standard for pupils to achieve is now a grade 4 (a standard pass) and above (previously a C grade and above), with grade 5 considered a 'strong pass'. These changes will be phased in to cover all subjects by 2020.

64% of students in Suffolk are now achieving the expected standard in English and Maths, putting Suffolk in the top half of authorities achieving this standard.

GCSE progress remains above average and Suffolk students have seen a steep increase this year with a Progress 8 score of +0.08, compared with -0.02 nationally. This figure puts Suffolk in the number 1 position in our statistical neighbour group.

Progress 8 measures how well pupils of all abilities have progressed by comparing them with students who achieved similar levels in Key Stage 2 across the country. Suffolk is in the top half of authorities for this figure, ranked 42nd out of 151.

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils in the county achieving the standard pass in English and Maths is in line with national figures. The Progress 8 figure for disadvantaged pupils is also above the national level and is in the top half of authorities, ranked 42nd out of 151 (up from 67th in 2016).

A Level

The validated A Level figures confirm that Suffolk pupils have once again performed well with the number of A*- E grades remaining above the national average figures.

The figures show that 98.1% of A Levels taken in the county have been awarded an A*-E grade, compared to 97.6% nationally. A Level attainment is measured by the Department for Education using a points system. Points are given based on the type of A Level and the grade achieved. For example, an A Level at grade A is worth 50 points, whereas an AS Level would be worth half of this.

Suffolk's A Level average points per entry this year has risen by 0.3 to 30.3 compared with this time last year.

Green light to develop more specialist education placements in Suffolk

On 29 January 2019, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet agreed recommendations to move forward with creating more specialist education places in Suffolk.

Suffolk will need between 300 to 400 places for children with additional needs between now and 2020, and this figure is likely to continue to increase. The demand for specialist education places in Suffolk is rising rapidly due to the county's population growth, advances in medicine, and the increasing complexity of specialist needs.

The recommendations include three new special schools and 36 specialist units attached to existing mainstream schools, which combined will create over 800 new specialist education places in the county. The Cabinet also agreed that a clarified education pathway for specialist provision is created to assist families in understanding what the local offer is.

Following the approval of the recommendations, the proposal to borrow up to £45.1 million to fund the new places will now go to the county council's Capital Strategy Group to be reviewed. If agreed, the decision will go back to Cabinet in the Spring for final sign-off so the recommendations can be rolled out.

Suffolk wins £4.4 million for “smart” streetlighting

A highlight of January was the announcement that Suffolk has won a grant of £4.4 million from the Government for a pioneering project to develop “smart” streetlighting. The project will see streetlights adapted in a range of innovative ways, including being equipped with wind vanes and solar panels to generate rather than consume energy. Highways' electricity bill is currently £2.3 million a year and set to rise, so anything that reduces the bill is very welcome.

The street lights will be equipped with sensors to undertake a range of tasks such as measuring traffic speed and volume; measuring road temperatures – so gritting runs can be better targeted; and indicating whether nearby grit bins need filling or gullies need emptying. The street lights can also be adapted to act as Wi-Fi and 5G transmitters.

Plug In Suffolk – the UK's First ‘Fully Open’ Electric Vehicle Charging Network

On 6 February, EO Charging, one of the UK's leading electric vehicle (EV) charging manufacturers, launched ‘Plug In Suffolk’ in partnership with Suffolk County Council and renewable energy provider Bulb.

This is the country's first ‘fully open’ public fast charging network for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles, meaning EV drivers simply pay by contactless payment with no need to register with networks or become members of organisations.

The first 'Plug in Suffolk' charging location was unveiled at Urban Jungle Plant Nursery and Cafe in Beccles. The company offer two 7kW EO chargers alongside the EO Pay kiosk, allowing members of the public and employees to charge their electric vehicles.

'Plug In Suffolk' will see the installation of electric vehicle charging stations (up to 400 individual sockets) across the county at 100 key locations and business addresses. Once completed the charging network will be available for all plug-in vehicle drivers with each charging location listed on www.pluginsuffolk.org or searchable via Zap Map and Google Maps.

The 'Plug In Suffolk' charging network forms part of Suffolk County Council's ambition of Creating the Greenest County in the UK.

Suffolk County Council 2019/20 budget approved

On 14 February 2019, Suffolk County Council concluded its budget setting process for this coming financial year (2019/2020).

From 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, Suffolk County Council will spend almost £10 million a week across all its services following approval of this budget of £519.3 million.

Over the period 2011-12 to 2018-19 the Council has made over £260 million of savings in response to reductions in funding from Central Government and increasing demand for services. For 2019/20 the Council has proposed a range of savings totalling around £13 million. These savings are required to help balance the budget - something that the Council must do by law.

Recognising the unrelenting rise in demand and the complexity of support required by vulnerable children and adults in Suffolk, the Council are significantly increasing spending in these two top priority areas.

The net budget for Adult and Community Services (ACS) will rise to £243m and the net budget for Health, Wellbeing and Children's Services (HWCS) will rise to £147m. This is an increase of just over £14 million for ACS and HWCS. ACS and HWCS will account for 75% of the total spend in 2019/2020 – three in every four pounds the Council spends.

General council tax will rise by 2.99% this year. The Council are also applying the final 1% of the six per cent Social Care precept allowed over the years 2017/18 to 2019/20. The overall increase in council tax is one per cent less than for 2018/19.

The four-year investment in surface-dressing our roads continues into its third year and the Council will treat 1,000 miles of Suffolk's roads by the end of 2020 as promised. The Council has also maintained Suffolk Fire and Rescue's budget and protected Suffolk's Library services.

The Council is looking to maximise the financial contribution from its medium-term programmes, which focus on transforming how the Council delivers its services and works

with other authorities and public sector partners. The Council's transformation programmes have saved over £12 million in 2018/19 and £12-£13 million of savings are planned for 2019/20.

Suffolk to host opening stage of 2019 OVO Energy Women's Tour

In February 2019, it was confirmed that Suffolk will host the opening stage of the 2019 OVO Energy Women's Tour on Monday 10 June 2019. This is the fifth time that the race has visited our county.

The county also becomes the first venue to be confirmed for the 2020 edition of the race, with the news that Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Council will partner with event organisers SweetSpot Group in a two-year deal to bring the UCI Women's WorldTour event to the county in both 2019 and 2020.

In its four previous visits to Suffolk, the OVO Energy Women's Tour is estimated to have attracted in excess of 250,000 spectators to the roadside and created a net economic impact for the county's economy of in excess of £3.5 million.

Almost 70% of spectators surveyed following last year's opening stage, between Framlingham and Southwold, said that the event inspired them to cycle more often.

This June will mark the fourth time that the OVO Energy Women's Tour has begun in Suffolk with Bury St Edmunds, Southwold and Framlingham having each hosted the Grand Depart of Britain's biggest women's procycling race.

Suffolk successful in winning £1.725 million in extra funding for business broadband roll out

On 1 March 2019, it was announced that Suffolk County Council, working in partnership with West Suffolk Council, East Suffolk Council of Suffolk Coastal and Waveney, and Babergh and Mid Suffolk district councils has been successful in securing £1.725 million from the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs.

The funding will contribute to providing Superfast Broadband access to many businesses, across Suffolk's most rural areas, who are not in plans to receive Superfast Broadband as part of the current fibre broadband rollout.

The funding will cover connection to over 550 businesses across the county where current internet speeds are limited to lower speed connection methods. On top of the business connections, this funding will also reach a further 600 non-business-related premises who will be able to upgrade to superfast speeds.

Suffolk has been at the forefront of fibre broadband rollout, via its Better Broadband for Suffolk Program, since 2010 and currently the county enjoys a superfast broadband coverage of 93%, with the current contract due to reach 98% by 2020. This additional

funding will contribute towards meeting some of the remaining 2% of the county that is not covered by the existing contracts.

Work on connecting these new areas will begin later in 2019.