

County Councillor Report



Parish Councils, February 2026

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County Elections and Local Government Reorganisation – The County Council has responded to a Ministerial invitation of 18th December to: *“set out your views on the postponement of your local election and if you consider this could release essential capacity to deliver local government reorganisation in your area and so allow reorganisation to progress effectively”*.

The Council debated its proposed response at a meeting of Full Council on 12th January followed by Cabinet endorsement and acknowledges that it is likely that there would be capacity pressures should local elections proceed in May alongside local government reorganization. A letter was submitted to the Minister’s question by the deadline of 15th January which acknowledges capacity pressures. Information about devolution and local government re-organisation can be found at Suffolk County Council’s web site: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/devolution>
Other proposals and dates include:

Mid. March – Government will announce unitary government areas in Norfolk and Suffolk

Structural Change Order Issued covering dissolution of the County Council – July ‘26

Unitary Boundaries determined with new unitary councillor elections – May 2027

New authority comes into force with Mayoral Elections - May 2028.

£26 million bus funding coming to Suffolk from DfT – Government funding for public transport in Suffolk is confirmed for three years. I have been discussing the route 320 (now terminated) and 460 (operates on Thursdays) with SCC and Transport Made Simple and hope that Gislingham can work with other parishes to obtain user numbers and make a case for reinstating regular service.

School Traffic – A meeting took place on 4th February between SCC Highways officer Sophie Farrington, the Head Teacher at Gislingham Primary School, the Junior Road Safety Officer lead (Mrs Clare Hall), the JRSO team, District Councillor Rowland Warboys and myself. Following the site visit our Highways Officer has made some suggestions around better signage but does not support a zebra crossing at this location.

National Grid Norwich to Tilbury Examination – Open Floor Hearings have been taking place to include comments and compulsory purchase across Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. SCC representatives gave evidence on Tuesday 10 February at Ipswich Town Football Club. Transcripts are available on the Planning Inspectorate’s website : [Norwich to Tilbury - Project information](#)
If anyone did not register to have a say you can still request to be an interested party. Contact the project team which will ask the Examining Authority if you can register as an interested party and comment - email NorwichToTilbury@planninginspectorate.gov.uk with your request to become an interested party.

EcoPower Solar – The approx. 600-ha proposal includes installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and co-located ‘Battery Energy Storage System’ (BESS) with an anticipated generating capacity of over 100 megawatts (MW), and grid connection infrastructure. The Proposed Developments are mainly on agricultural land in the parishes of Yaxley, Brome, Eye, Gislingham, Mellis and Occold. The Proposal is classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP).

Relevant information can be found on the [Planning Inspectorate \(PINS\)](#) and [Applicant's \(Econergy\)](#) websites. EIA Scoping Report Part 1. pages 1-32 provide an overview and figures. The purpose of scoping is to propose and agree key environmental issues to be covered in the Environmental Impact Assessment. The deadline for response is 23rd February.

Suffolk County Council’s scoping response is at: [EcoPower Suffolk - Suffolk County Council](#)

New Reservoir, Thrandeston or Eye Area– Essex & Suffolk Water’s proposal is ongoing to construct a new drinking water storage reservoir (large concrete storage tank) and other water supply facilities in the area of Thrandeston and/ or Eye. Potential locations are currently under consideration. A second reservoir is planned near Sipton as part of a wider project to bring treated wastewater water to the area and to Sizewell C from Lowestoft. Refer to <https://suffolkwaternet.co.uk/>

Budget Setting for ‘26/’27 - The Council’s budget is around £850,000,000. To support its obligations the council is proposing a 4.99% rise in Council Tax (2.99% general and 2% for adult care.) Alongside a forecast 1% rise in the taxbase, this would generate an additional £27.4 million. Key themes:

- **Savings and efficiencies:** £46.5 million of efficiencies, such as temporary reduction in employer pension contributions.
- **Rising financial pressures:** Increasing demand, in particular for adult and children’s social care, will add £32.2 million in costs, alongside continued pressures from the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit.
- **Reserves:** A one-off use of reserves will bridge a £5.9 million funding gap, while keeping reserves above the minimum level needed to manage financial risks.
- **Capital investment:** The capital programme has been shortened from four years to three ahead of anticipated local government reorganisation in 2028. It funds projects such as school expansion, infrastructure upgrades, improvements to bus services, public rights of way, and cycling and walking infrastructure.

The final budget comes to Full Council for agreement on Thursday 12th February.

Bird Flu – Sadly, outbreaks continue in Suffolk. DEFRA’s Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA) has imposed restrictions on the premises. Information on the locations of outbreaks can be found at: [APHA Interactive Avian Influenza Disease Map](#) SCC Trading Standards is managing controls.

Please get in touch with me if you have questions or comments: Jessica.fleming@suffolk.gov.uk
[The final budget will be agreed by all county councillors at a Full Council meeting on Thursday 12 February 2026](#) Tel: 07714-597980 Twitter: @jesstfleming