

February 2025 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Suffolk County Council confirms 2025/26 budget

SCC has confirmed how it will spend its money in the forthcoming financial year - an £803.7 million plan focused on protecting essential services and supporting the county's most vulnerable residents. The council's budget for 2025/26 was approved at a meeting of all councillors on Thursday 13 February, with an emphasis on meeting rising demand for children's and adult care services. For every £1 the council spends in the next financial year, 77 pence will go directly toward services that support the health and wellbeing of people in Suffolk. The remaining 23 pence will fund other critical areas such as fire and rescue, highway maintenance, climate initiatives, waste management and bus services, as well as the infrastructure, staff, and technology required to keep services running efficiently. This is another budget set in challenging times. Economic growth remains sluggish, public finances are under pressure from rising demand and global uncertainty continues to create financial instability. But it is precisely in times like these that we must stay focused on our responsibility to the people of Suffolk. We are committed to delivering high-quality public services that make a real and lasting difference in people's lives. We will continue to prioritise those who need our support the most, including vulnerable children and adults who require assistance to live independently. The council's budget will increase by 6.7%, from £752.9 million in 2024/25 to £803.7 million in 2025/26. Despite a slight uplift in Government funding for local authorities, rising costs and growing demand have required the council to set significant savings targets to balance the books. The council has approved £10.9 million in new savings, which will focus on restructuring and transforming how services are delivered. This follows £17.5 million in savings approved in the previous year, bringing total savings for the 2025/26 financial year to £28.4 million. Suffolk County Council's share of Council Tax will rise by 4.99% next year, which includes a 2.99% general increase and a further 2% dedicated wholly to helping meet the rising costs of social care. This means a household Band B property the most common in Suffolk: £24.67 per week, a £1.17 increase from 2024-25. We know that many of our residents are feeling the pressures of rising costs. That's why it's our duty to ensure that every pound of public money is spent wisely and delivers the best possible value for our residents. The meeting is available to watch back on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRC6oyo-G-E>

Unique landscape to be changed forever by pylons

A large area of landscape on the Norfolk/Suffolk border with particular uniqueness, rivalling those of other nationally protected landscapes, is set to be decimated by pylons as part of National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury project. In a letter to both Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council, and other local leaders, National Grid has outlined that it has decided to install overhead lines through the Waveney Valley, rather than running cables underground, as they had set out in their previous consultation. This is a significant blow to local communities and the natural environment, especially following last year's Valued Landscape Assessment, a report jointly commissioned by Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council. The report concluded that "the length of the Waveney Valley expresses many special qualities, and in the context of Suffolk and Norfolk, it is considered to be a valued landscape. Conserving and enhancing the special qualities articulated in this report is

a key aspiration of existing planning policy. This decision not to underground any of the proposed pylons through the Waveney Valley, is nothing short of contemptible. The study we commissioned saw the area recognised as a valued landscape and National Grid's plans will wreak untold damage on it. There was a clear alternative to this and they've chosen not to take it. What I find particularly flagrant - if this what National Grid will press ahead with - is a lack of any suggestion of mitigation or compensation package for the local area. This council has engaged fully with discussions and consultations on Norwich to Tilbury, providing additional evidence to help protect the affected communities and environment in the Waveney Valley. We have worked closely and in good faith with National Grid, and yet they have not delivered a fair deal for the local area. There is nothing on the table from them, or Ofgem, to soften this blow. Yet again, I see this as more evidence of the government's short-sighted and rushed mission to decarbonise the grid by 2030. Their influence is pushing through the cheapest and fastest options, with no consideration for local residents, businesses or the environment – we are still to see any progress from them on community benefit schemes, to support situations just like this. As a council, we still maintain that the opportunity to underground the whole pylon run between Norwich and Tilbury, using HVDC cables, has not been properly explored. Revisiting the 2030 decarbonisation target and pausing the project would allow that to happen. The councils will now look to take up their concerns with National Grid and discuss the issue further.

Suffolk prepares for another significant solar farm proposal

EcoPower Suffolk is putting forward plans to build a solar farm set to cover around 1,500 acres, and battery storage facility, which would impact Yaxley, Brome, Gislingham, Mellis, Eye and Occold, with connections made at the existing substation to the north of Yaxley. The project aims to deliver around 250 megawatts of renewable energy. At that size, it will be classed as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), requiring planning approval from the Secretary of State, rather than the local authority. SCC has previously been clear in setting out its views that solar farms in Suffolk should not take our best quality farmland out of food production and that, broadly speaking, solar installations should be rooftop before rural. I am expecting regular, productive engagement with EcoPower Suffolk – not just with the council, but with local residents and parishes. It does feel like a case of 'here we go again', but I am expecting regular, productive engagement with EcoPower Suffolk – not just with the council, but with local residents and parishes. I trust that their opening words on their website are sincere – they talk about collaboration, and a commitment to community engagement and understanding local challenges and aspirations. A number of consultations, beginning in March 2025, will be held by EcoPower Suffolk as it shapes its final planning application. The county council will be contributing to these, to support and represent residents, businesses, agriculture, our landscape and ecology. Ultimately, any decision to approve or refuse this scheme will be made by the government. The worst-case scenario is that we will suffer a similar farce to the Sunnica project: an incredibly poor proposal, seemingly rushed through on a whim by the Secretary of State, with no interest in the welfare of local communities or the environment. All because the government is hastily chasing an unrealistic target of decarbonising the Grid by 2030. EcoPower Suffolk hopes that the project will connect to the Grid in 2030. More information can be found at www.ecopowersuffolk.com

Matthew Hicks - County Councillor for the Thredling Division

Tel : 01728 628176 Mob : 07824 474741 E-mail : matthew.hicks@suffolk.gov.uk