

March 2026 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Norwich to Tilbury pylon scheme is 'un-coordinated decimation of our county'

The first Open Floor Hearing took place Tuesday 10 February in Ipswich, as an opportunity for interested parties to present their views in person to the Examination panel. Councillor Richard Rout spoke on behalf of Suffolk County Council, citing a number of long-standing and unresolved objections as to why the council believes the current project proposal should not go ahead. These include:

- The lack of alternative proposals provided by National Grid
- Insufficient clarity on the need for a connection date of 2031
- Concern over working hours to include weekends and bank holidays
- Extensive tree loss and environmental impacts
- The need to protect and enhance the Dedham Vale national landscape
- The need for compensation measures in the Waveney Valley
- Higher quality and more robust outline management plans

The county council fully supports the need to resolve the country's energy security. But not like this. The ill-considered, un-coordinated decimation of our county by nationally significant infrastructure projects like Norwich to Tilbury, simply cannot continue. My primary concern is for our many local communities who would be affected by this huge project cutting its way through Suffolk. Their trust - and the council's - has been shattered by National Grid Group which has taken an inconsistent, disorganised and uncoordinated approach to engage the public, and other consultees, regarding alternatives to their proposed scheme. Furthermore, we question the apparent urgency of requiring a connection date of 2031. Together with county councils in Norfolk and Essex, we commissioned a study, which indicated that the project could be deferred by five years and on that basis, an offshore scheme using high voltage direct current would be compatible in cost. As the current proposal stands, we have many concerns. From weekend working hours and construction traffic which will significantly impact the wellbeing of residents, to the extensive environmental damage and impact on national landscapes. The county council fully supports the need to resolve the country's energy security. But not like this. The ill-considered, un-coordinated decimation of our county by nationally significant infrastructure projects like Norwich to Tilbury, simply cannot continue.

Trial scheme to remove vehicles blocking road resurfacing work to begin

Suffolk County Council is to launch a trial scheme to remove vehicles that are blocking highways resurfacing work. The move comes following repeated issues with vehicles across Suffolk that have been left in roads where works are scheduled, despite advance warnings they were due to take place. This has led to the cancellation of entire resurfacing works or small areas being left where vehicle parking has prevented access for equipment. Offending vehicles will be either moved to a safe place in line of sight from where they were parked, or to a secure compound in Bury St Edmunds. Any vehicle which is moved to enable works to go ahead will be subject to a £70 Fixed Penalty Charge Notice, reduced to £35 if paid within 14 days. Vehicles taken to the secure compound, due to there not being a suitable location near the works area to move the vehicle to, will also be subject to additional fees to recover their vehicle. The trial scheme will be introduced in March and will cover the Suffolk Highways resurfacing programme up to May 2026. Removal of vehicles will be a last resort but unfortunately there are occasions when it is necessary. Each time a resurfacing scheme has to be cancelled costs the Council Tax payer money, as well as the frustration of having to reschedule and notify residents again. Suffolk Highways is committed to maintaining the county's roads and this scheme will help our workforce get on with the job. Each abortive visit where works are unable to take place costs in the region of £15,000. This is only being introduced for planned work that is notified in advance. It is not being used when potholes are filled on reactive call outs.

Suffolk County Council's chief executive to step down

Nicola Beach will leave at the end of March 2026 and the process to appoint a new chief executive will begin shortly. Reflecting on her decision, Nicola said: "Serving the people of Suffolk has been a great privilege and I am immensely proud of what has been achieved together over the last eight years. Leaving this job has not been an easy decision, and I have thought long and hard about it. However, I believe this is the right time to hand over leadership to those who can steer and support colleagues through local government reorganisation over the next two years, whatever option the Government decides to implement. I would like to thank all of my colleagues, Matthew and his Cabinet and all councillors for their support and I wish them the very best for the future. I do not have another role lined up – I am simply looking forward to a new change of pace and lifestyle, enjoying this wonderful county and taking time to travel and see family and friends.

Joint Chief Executives recommended for appointment

Mark Ash, the council's executive director of organisational change and local government reorganisation, and Andrew Cook, executive director of growth highways and infrastructure, would become Suffolk County Council's first joint chief executives. They will be charged with leading the council through the challenges of delivering local government reorganisation, devolution, maintaining essential public services and financial sustainability in the next two years. Specifically, Mark would be responsible for local government reorganisation, devolution, transformation and change programmes. Andrew will be responsible for delivering safe, high-quality and reliable services to residents, robust financial controls and ensuring the council meets all its statutory duties and requirements following independent inspections. The joint chief executives would each lead on their own areas of responsibility but work together to ensure focus is maintained across the council's duties and priorities. The decision, which will be taken formally by all county councillors when they meet on 19 March, follows a recommendation from the council's Staff Appointments Committee. Tens of thousands of pounds would be saved because Mark and Andrew's existing posts would not be recruited into. The number of the most senior staff would therefore reduce by one and save up to £92,000 a year. Recruiting internally will therefore save time, money on salaries and recruitment, and make use of existing, well-developed relationships with partner organisations and knowledge of Suffolk.

£500,000 Culture Project Fund backs 37 creative and community projects across Suffolk

The fund was created to boost cultural activity, widen participation and support creativity across the county. This year's successful projects span festivals, youth arts programmes, heritage initiatives, wellbeing-focused activities and community-led creative work, with grants ranging from £2,000 to £20,000. I'm delighted that we are able to support such a vibrant mix of cultural projects through this year's Culture Project Fund. These initiatives show the imagination, talent and community spirit that make Suffolk such a special place. What stands out is how many of these projects are rooted in local people, supporting wellbeing, nurturing young talent and bringing creativity into our towns, villages and rural communities. The benefits of these art projects cannot be underestimated. They can change the lives of our communities across the county. The Culture Project Fund continues to support both established organisations and grassroots groups, strengthening Suffolk's cultural landscape. Last year's programme delivered meaningful outcomes, from improving wellbeing and confidence to widening access to heritage and cultural experiences. This year's funded projects build on that growing legacy, ensuring culture continues to inspire, connect and enrich communities across Suffolk for years to come. The full list of organisations receiving funding can be found here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/cultureprojectfund>

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