

May 2025 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Suffolk Highways launches weeds and grass management programme for 2025

Spring has sprung and Suffolk Highways has commenced its summer maintenance works, which will see teams cut thousands of miles of grass verges and treat 2,300 miles of weeds. Grass cutting has started in May, with the grass verges alongside A and B roads across Suffolk being cut first and receiving two cuts each summer. Verges alongside smaller roads, such as the county's C and U class roads, will be cut once during the summer season. Cutting is typically undertaken by tractors with a flail as this is the most efficient and effective way to undertake the vegetation works and dry weather is required as, similarly to household mowers, wet grass can clog the machinery. These cuts are solely for safety purposes and district and borough councils will usually supplement these with amenity cuts throughout the year. Suffolk Highways does not cut village greens, parks and open spaces, or rural verges that are not adjacent to the road. Weed treatments have already commenced across the county. Two treatments are applied to weeds in urban areas across Suffolk annually if it is deemed that the weeds may pose a safety risk due to obscuring visibility for road users or causing damage to pavements, kerbs, or surrounding walls. Weeds in rural areas are not included in the annual weed treatment programme but will be treated on a site-specific basis if they are identified as being harmful or noxious. All weed treatments are weather dependent and cannot be applied in high winds or if rain is forecast due to this reducing the effectiveness of the treatment. Glyphosate is currently used for the treatment as this is not harmful to people or pets and has proved to be more effective than alternatives previously trialled in Suffolk. However, a substitute for this is still being sought to support Suffolk County Council's continued ambition to protect and enhance the environment. Summer maintenance, such as weed treatments and grass cutting, forms a significant part of Suffolk Highways' workload, with us spending £1.9m on these soft estate activities each year, which is around 12% of our annual revenue budget. As part of our ongoing commitment to providing value for money for Suffolk residents, careful consideration has been given to where we cut and treat. We would also ask that landowners play their part by ensuring that any vegetation on their property does not spread on to the highway or obstruct visibility. Last year, we cut more than 7,000 miles of grass, which is the equivalent distance of London to Singapore, and applied more than 34,000 weed treatments across the county, both of which are a testament to the hard work and dedication of our summer maintenance teams. Further information on the [grass cutting programme](#) and [weed treatment programme](#), including the planned dates for this to take place in local areas, can be viewed on the council's website.

Infrastructure reform could silence Suffolk's communities in 'energy onslaught'

Suffolk County Council has serious concerns about proposed reforms to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, as announced by government (Wednesday 23 April). It is part of plans to cut by a year, the delivery of clean energy projects, public transport links, and other Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). This has potential for a significant impact on Suffolk's communities who are at the forefront of many NSIPs including solar farms, offshore energy and nuclear. One of the proposals is to remove the duty on project promoters to consult and engage with communities before a project is presented to the Planning Inspectorate. Further, the duty to have regard to any comments on voluntary consultations undertaken by a promoter is also proposed to be removed. Instead, there will be statutory guidance for developers with an expectation that consultation and engagement will still take place, prior to submitting an application. These proposals to remove the duty on energy developers to consult with councils and local communities, are staggeringly tone deaf. Our communities need more and better consultation - not less. If the Secretary of State wants more opposition from local people to his decarbonisation targets, this is precisely the way to do it. For countless NSIPs past and present in Suffolk, local communities are rarely given the consideration and respect they deserve. These proposed changes claim to recognise community voices, but I fail to see how removing consultation can help make residents feel more involved. The minister may claim

that these reforms will stop communities 'feeling fatigued and confused' with technical documents. However, I suspect these feelings are likely to be replaced with ones of anger and being ignored. Project proposers for large scale solar farms and the like, will be rubbing their hands together knowing that they can bypass community engagement completely and go straight to submitting their application. Engagement and consultation takes time and costs money, and given the amateurish approach we are already seeing from solar developers in the county it is highly unlikely that they will be willing to do this. Staggeringly, even if a developer chooses to undertake a voluntary consultation, the government is also proposing removing the duty to listen to what has been said. To publish such a radical amendment to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill just 24 hours before oral evidence was to be heard, has given no time for proper public scrutiny. It is an act of cowardice and only serves to further undermine public faith in the planning process. Our county is facing an energy project onslaught. We have previously described Suffolk's NSIP landscape as the Wild West – these proposed reforms sadly just reinforce that view. Suffolk County Council will be submitting written evidence to the Bill Committee outlining its concerns and opposition to the proposed changes.

New water rescue equipment unveiled as public urged to 'Be Water Aware'

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) has invested in specialist, state-of-the-art equipment to enhance the speed, safety, and effectiveness of its water rescue response. The Service has acquired two Zodiac ERB 400 powered rescue boats and three Extreme Sleds from Ionic Rescue. The Zodiac ERB 400 boats are lightweight, high-performance vessels designed for swift deployment and excellent manoeuvrability in challenging water conditions. The Extreme Sleds are durable, versatile inflatable sleds built for rapid deployment in demanding environments, including fast-moving water and mud/soft ground rescue operations. In addition to the new equipment, SFRS maintains older Zodiac rescue boats and Ionic Extreme Sleds for training purposes, which can also be used in real-life emergency incidents. The Service has also introduced a dedicated water rescue vehicle, co-designed by its fleet technicians and users, to support the mobilisation of the new equipment. While these new assets enhance the Service's capability to respond effectively in water rescue emergencies, public protection extends beyond reactive measures - prevention is just as critical.

Key water safety tips include:

Never swim alone

Check weather conditions before entering the water

Avoid alcohol consumption before swimming

Always supervise children near water

Be aware of hidden dangers in open water, such as strong currents or submerged objects

Pay attention to safety signage near water, which can provide crucial warnings

Suffolk's waterways, while undoubtedly beautiful can also pose a significant risk to safety. This increases substantially during warm weather when people are more drawn to the idea of coastal and inland swimming. The new equipment will enhance the Service's water rescue capabilities, affording the public even greater protection when temperatures rise this year. Of course, SFRS would rather people didn't get themselves into difficulty in the first place, which is why it supports the Be Water Aware campaign, urging everyone to share water safety tips with their friends and families to keep them safe from harm. Following two recent rescues, SFRS is also urging members of the public who are planning to head out on boats during the warmer weather to check tidal times and weather patterns in advance. Whether kayaking, paddleboarding, or using a motorboat, it is vital to carry sufficient supplies, including drinking water, lifejackets, communication devices, and fuel if applicable. Conditions on the water can change rapidly, and being prepared can make the difference between an enjoyable day out and a potentially life-threatening emergency.

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